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ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CODES OF GOOD JOURNALISTIC PRACTICE

1 WHAT IS GOOD JOURNALISM

When we are reflecting seriously on journalism, we have to be aware, that journalism is a challenging work on communication and mediation of public relationships within a network of interactions, of discourses, of opinions, of interests, alliances and contradictions. Journalism is not an easily done everyday-conversation on politics. It is not language-work by coincidence.

Journalism is a system of political and public actions and interactions, a network of communicating relations in order to represent an understanding of what is going on in societies, in the world and what is relevant to know, to be aware of and to construct opinions about. That means: it is a structure of Know-How and of Know-What, following goals and differentiating between most different public interests and lots of private intermixtures.

The point of view from where journalism draws a line between public sphere and privacy is quite different from the point of view of personal and individual views. Journalism tends to have a public view even of private things, while personal communication has a tendency to have a private view of public topics. Journalism is always a network of discourse in media, through media and for media. Journalism is the cultural language of an open and free society, in which people mediate each other their mutual confidence, respect and attention as well as their problems of convenience inside and outside of social, cultural or national borders.

The media are not just a means of widening and broadening the public discourse but they also represent the principle of public communication, which is done by language of media.

2 THE LANGUAGE OF MEDIA

The language of media, written, spoken or pictured, in letters, figures, words, sounds or pictures, is more or less the journalist's professional tool for their work of symbolization and signification. The journalists are thought to be experts in active and creative use of media language. They are supposed to hold

a special competency in media language, which is something different than the media-literacy of the audience.

Media language is the system of symbols by which public reality is constructed, Therefore media language makes things happen and publicly true – even if the same thing might not be real in ones personal or single perspective .

The rules of constructing reality and touching the truth within the framework of media language or public speech are other ones than the rules within personal or private language use. As soon as something is brought to the public attention, it becomes part of a system of representation of what is possible. As such it is assumed to be possibly true – which is as strong as it is weak to think: it is possibly wrong or hardly possible to come true. At least from that point on it is somehow true by relevance..

Truth is, what is communicable and mediable. So, what is NOT brought to the media level or into media discourse, that has not public relevance for the construction of public truth. In that way journalistic silence also is a part of the symbolic system, which creates relevance. That is the mechanism of confidence, by which the audience and the journalists are co-players in reduction of complexity.

Following the interest of reduction of complexity the public language system – used by media producers and by media consumers – has an inclination to refrain from differentiation and to reduce itself to patterns of stereotypes, prejudices or clichés. By that way the social work of understanding is much more reasonable - and comfortable.

There is a public expectation in professional obligation of journalists to have enough experience, knowledge and overall view , in order to be able to decide, what are the pieces of information the people need to get the right impression of what is going on. On the other hand there is also a social obligation for journalists – out of professional knowledge and out of a privileged position of gaining information- to expect from the audience to take things as complicated and multileveled as they are. The complication of reality is tolerable, the complexity of truth is reasonable.

Here is one of the most crucial points of journalistic practice: to bring into public attention, what is by any possibility relevant to the public life – even or especially, when it is a privatized moment of public issue. In that moment the ethical perspective and the hierarchy of values are the ever-deciding factors. Because media language in the framework of mass media is the a system of public confidence, a system of symbolic interaction between content producers and content users, between mediaworkers and media consumers. What is brought in public language gets part of possible interaction.

The hierarchy of values within the framework of journalistic use of media and media language is determined by what media- language is, namely: expression and mediation of expressions of meaning, in order to share meanings and to give orientation in construction of public opinion. The public opinion is, what decision-makers are responsible for. This is the emancipative impetus of public language and communications. In other words: emancipation is, what communication is for. If communication is the way, how human beings construct their meanings and their reality, this communication is the best one, which gives freedom in construction of what is supposed to be relevant reality .

And further:

Journalism is at its best, when it enables people as consumer's of media to come or to remain in communication with the society and to become or to remain a part of the conditions of emancipation, freedom, interdependency and responsibility. These issues are the qualities, how societies become or remain communities.

3 THE QUALITY OF JOURNALISM

Communication qualities in journalism are not only personal qualities or qualifications of journalists. They also have to be developed as organizational qualities of the system – concrete of the media institutions or companies. There has to be a correspondence between the organizational quality of media work and the personal journalistic work. The journalist's personal interest of freedom of expression can be organized and cultured in the same manner as it is also possible to set working conditions, whereby the disinterest and negligence of free speech may be taken as a strategy of avoiding conflicts.

Companies with an hygienic sphere of freedom policy, motivation for active freedom-work stimulates and encourages the journalist's personal investment and investigation for freedom of speech and opinion. In the same way may companies destroy the personal interest of self-realization in freedom-work of journalists, when they are not given the conditions of management culture. The personal moral of journalists needs a corresponding ethical culture at the level of the organisation as the organisation's ethical orientation needs workers with a corresponding view of societal values. The enemy of freedom of expression often is outside of the and symbolized by powerful institutions or personalized by political representants of the media system, but sometimes he is inside - masked with practicability, comfort or or economic maximization.

The competencies of media companies are to to develop company structures which give the best conditions to the journalists to make their profession a

project of professional life long learning in using and developing their professional competencies, which are:

1. content- competency
2. media handling competency
3. mediating (communication) competency
4. all carried by social intelligence (competency).

The social intelligence of journalists is on the one hand a quality of personality, but on the other hand it is an attitude, which may be cultivated and developed within a working system, where the management takes care for positive group dynamics, for healthy internal competitiveness and for a culture of learning out of mistakes or failing.

The other competencies (for content and knowledge-contexts, for media handling and for literacy) can be and have to be professionalized, trained and educated. I know, here I stress a point, which touches the journalist's self-understanding. Journalism is and has to be a free profession - but not free of education, formation and training, while it is done in a world which lives not any longer out of its personal resources or spontaneous talents. The public world we live in, is a complicated system of information, action, strategy and technology. That needs an organizational correspondence in education and professionalization.

In some countries there exists a system of academic formation in preparation of journalistic practice, in some other countries you find schools of journalistic education or training, and further in others the media companies have somehow a system of development of personnel - but there are still too many, where you may become a journalist just by hiring and overtaking a job and somehow you learn it - or not. Needless to say that journalistic work is more than just creative writing, that there is a tremendous need of information and knowledge on ever-changing contexts, that there is more responsibility in reporting on reality than tailoring dresses. At least in Europe every tailor has attended a professional school, but not so every journalist.

NEW CHALLENGE: THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY AND MEDIA

At the moment and in context with the new media and net-media there is another discourse, which might earn some attention within the context of our conference - asking about codes of good journalism. It is not so far, when a book was published in Switzerland with the title: "The End of Journalism". One of the editors is the president of the Swiss Press Council. He argues, that there is a change of journalism, caused by globalization of communication, caused by a global despair on what is media performance and caused by the change of the professional role of journalism. The interactive and net-media offer a new level

and a new space for opinion-building apart from traditional institutions and relational forms sharing meanings.

New forms of presentation, radically altered forms of reporting, increasing mixture of entertainment, conversation and information and - last not least the fact, that the internet gives the opportunity of producing news on what ever by your own power and individual relevance - all that together is a challenge for the traditional journalism (also for traditional audience-behaviour) and a chance for new structures of reporting reality. For some it is - almost euphorically - the "birth of an entirely new journalism", a "great talk show on net". On the other side some of the analysts see the "disease of Americanisation, commercialisation and market standardisation.

In Europe and in the US - and facing the globalization-effect - it might be the same all over the world - we may consider a growing tendency towards new structures of news-making and new forms of journalism. Journalistic work is under the conditions of information society not any longer a profession with a mission or a desired career for selfrealization , it is not any longer measured or valued at how difficult it was to search and to find the truth - and the truth was regarded as a major tool in the struggle for power and influence - but journalism turns to become a strategy of well selling informations.

Even if this is a general judgement on nowadays' journalism we have to consider, that the market principle get more and more the factor of determination of quality and effectiveness. The standards for journalistic media handling are redefined, the borders between journalism, marketing, public relations or even advertisement break down under the condition of the interest of news selling . Leo Bogart, a critical media-analyst calls this market-driven journalism the "American disease". By that definition he points out, that news production develops towards news conversation, which is not so far from fictional entertainment. True is, what is relevant. Relevant is, what sells. The analysis from Bogart means: The "American disease" has a symptom, which is, that the US American media no longer serve any informational or communicative demand, but that they take targeted measures to arouse these demand.

The audience is reduced to the consumer-role, while the journalist is just a mere entertainer. The commercialization of contents and programs the boundaries between facts and fiction become blurred. What is really suffering from that conditions, is the credibility of journalism - a fact , which is expressed best in a book-title (McChesney 1999) "Rich Media, Poor Democracy".

Besides the market-orientation there is an other factor which influences the transformation of the system and the transformation of the concepts of

journalistic work, already mentioned - that is technology. Digitalisation is the technological condition of standardising market mechanisms in the media systems. Digitalisation, on-line-news production and web-research create somehow an instant-journalism, which makes falling over board classic journalistic principles, such as independence, thoroughness, fairness and other journalistic principles laid down in the press codex.

In that situation it is a need to decide for new perspectives and for new models of communication. My own position in this question is rather pragmatic : Life is a biotop of creation, social life as a biotop of changing relations, communication is a biotop of liberation - so media are an agency of liberation from all kinds of dependences by any means - why not by means of economic development or economic principles. If communication is a construction of reality, any construction creates a relevant reality, which has to be controlled by recommunication and recommitment. Who then is able to say, which construction or which reality is truer than the other one ? If journalism is somehow an agency of consideration what are the social discourses about and what are the hopes and fears, then there is an obligation for the journalists to pay attention to what societies are tending to.

Within this economic orientation of life values and in context of the economy of attention journalism increasingly is challenged by the seek for fascination rather than for orientation (Weischenberg). This of course has to do with speed of life and speed of development. There is a future of journalism, if the systems and the journalists will manage it to take advantage of the new technology and to shape out new models of responsibility, credibility and confidence. It is not a catastrophe, that things are changing, it is not a catastrophe, that principles and paradigms are changing, but it would be a disaster and darkness, if falling stars would not be renewed or replaced by new orientation lights. As far as the social communication is concerned, they have to be shaped out by a permanent self-reflexion of what is journalism about in a changing world.

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