

The Latvian Journalism Education Landscape

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Journalism studies in Latvia today are not valued and accepted in a unified way. Students, lecturers and industry representatives differ regarding the value of practical skills and fundamental, theoretical knowledge in journalism education. Some value the development of basic skills: some emphasize the need for competence, wide scope and the ability to analyse and work in the short term.

This article will review journalism education in Latvia and its development since Soviet times. Current journalism opportunities in Latvian higher education will be analysed. Professional organizations and associations, private media companies and their contribution to journalism education will also be evaluated.

Looking back – a history of journalism education

Latvia was dominated by other countries from the late twelfth century; newspapers circulated in Latvia from the seventeenth century, predominantly in German and Russian, as a direct result of the political and social issues in the territory. It was not until 1919, after WWI, that the opportunity arose to establish an independent Republic of Latvia and to subsequently develop a considerable Latvian media market.

The first notable precursor to traditional journalism education in Latvia came in 1917 when Latvian authors and journalists established a labour union. Later this was transformed into the Latvian Press Association and dealt with the professional aspects of media work.

In the nineteenth century, according to studies of Vita Zelče, press workers came from a variety of professions. Most newspaper editors in the first half of the century had received a theological education. By the second half of the century, many lawyers had become editors of newspapers and magazines. Press workers and journalists mostly came from the circles of authors, poets, teachers and low-level civil servants. A similar situation existed during the period between the two world wars. The largest and most influential newspaper of the era, *Jaunākās Ziņas* (published since 1911 with a circulation of 90,000), was published by Antons Benjamiņš, an elementary school teacher. He felt that teachers were the very best journalists, because they were disciplined, had a sense of responsibility, and had good and calligraphic penmanship. There were a few journalists who had received professional training abroad, but they did not play any major role in the business. The dominant view in the 1920s was that a journalist is born, not made, and could not be trained at an educational institution.

In the latter half of the 1930s, the Latvian Press Association began to discuss problems related to the professional capacities of journalists, focusing also on experience that had been gained abroad. These debates were reflected in the association's monthly journal, *Vārds*. One of the theorists of the Latvian media world, Arturs Kroders, supported the establishment of a school of journalism. Starting in 1938 Kroders examined the prevailing situation and took into account the experience of journalism schools and institutes in Germany, France, Belgium, Poland and the United States. The Institute of Journalism was ready to begin its work in the autumn of 1940. The plans were discarded, however, as a result of the Soviet occupation of Latvia, which took place in June of that year (Zelče 2005).

The onslaught of WWII and the establishment resulting from Soviet occupation meant that Latvian journalism culture was destroyed – journalism became official and controlled; media owners and most intellectuals were arrested, executed or deported to Siberia, and many journalists had been replaced.

Journalism education in Soviet times

After WWII Latvia remained occupied as part of the Soviet Union. During the Soviet regime, journalism was a tool of governance and propaganda. Therefore, even journalism education was strictly governed and controlled, with the primary journalism task of that time to train and organize the working people in ideological and political terms, according to Communist philosophy.

In the Soviet Union, journalism studies were possible only in the Communist Party Colleges. However, in Latvia's case, journalism education was used as a representation of achievements in the field of culture of the new Soviet Republic of Latvia. The main role for the journalism education foundation of the time was played by executives who helped the Soviet regime show those achievements of culture and politics in Soviet Latvia. New dean of the Faculty of Philology at the State University of Latvia, Andrejs Upīts, was a writer turned professor during Soviet times, and he became active in this way. Upīts also believed that philological education must necessarily cover a vast spectrum – the need for journalism education was clear from this perspective as well. Also of noteworthy mention for his role in the foundation of journalism education was Roberts Pelše, both literary critic and professor of the theories of Marxism and Leninism.

In 1945 the Faculty of Philology (as of then not yet officially registered) took over the journalism study programme from the School of the Communist Party Central Committee, whose main goal was to train party, Soviet and ideological activists. The curriculum was supplemented with a few courses from the field of philology and then journalism studies began. Most instructors were graduates from the University of Marxism-Leninism in Moscow or Leningrad. In 1947, when the State University of Latvia prepared to graduate its first group of journalism students, the process was legalized, and the Department of

Journalism and Editing was established. The first specialists trained in the field of journalism were graduated from the State University of Latvia in 1949.

Journalists were considered to be political figures, and party schools felt that they should have a monopoly in training them. Therefore tension between universities and party schools arose. In 1951, it was decided that there was no point in training journalists at the State University of Latvia, and no more students were admitted to the programme. The last graduation took place in 1955. Remarkably, this process was accompanied by the retirement of Andrejs Upīts. During the first period of journalism studies, some 140 people had completed journalism education in this programme (Zelče 2005).

Due to those journalism studies in the State University of Latvia (which took place directly after WWII), journalism education was subject to a rapid revival. Perhaps for this reason it was possible for students of the State University of Latvia to express their initiative and generate an effort to stimulate a return of journalism education to Latvia's education system. In 1958 students were admitted to a correspondence course in journalism in the Faculty of Philology.

In 1969 the Journalism Department was reopened. The Department had new instructors, all of whom had an academic education. In comparison to the situation immediately after World War II, the curriculum was considerably less ideological in content, and there were more practical activities. Still, it remained under the directorship of Moscow State University, and only a few courses could be replaced with local issues and initiatives. These new courses in the programme could only be replaced after intense discussion and fierce debate with the administration.

In the long run, due to requests from Russian language writing newspapers and the Central Committee, full-time Russian- and Latvian-speaking students were enrolled in turns, on alternate years. As for part-time students, both language groups were still enrolled simultaneously every academic year. Considering the imposed bilingualism of public life, education in one's native language was not deemed important at that time – everyone who was able could study in either the Latvian- or Russian- language group.

Overall, in Soviet times 'The Department of Journalism' graduated approximately 963 students. Unfortunately, we may only say 'approximately' as no precise data for the 1949–55 graduates exists.

Journalism studies during Soviet times may be characterized by an explicit orientation towards government demand, with an orientation towards the Soviet Party's doctrine of journalism education more or less modified according to the political leanings of the exact time. Any studying within this period was featured in order of the ideological importance of its subject matter. A study plan was developed by Moscow University and became mandatory for all Soviet Union's Universities. According to this plan, only Russian philology courses could be replaced based on the particularities of the republic. Considering the imposed bilingualism of those times, only part of Russian philology courses could be replaced with Latvian philology and other courses. Yet, even in those instances the replacement became the centre of great debate in the Department of Journalism and with the University's

administration. Therefore, journalism studies were possible only with a great significance upon the philological education in the programme. For students of those times, Latvian (or Russian) philology was essential in their education programme. Ascension to copy-editor or journalist professions was possible only as a collateral profession.

Still, the second period of journalism education in Soviet times may be marked by its orientation towards professional study. Students had four internship courses held in regional and urban media over five years of study. Additionally, several courses were conducted involving practicing professionals – journalists from differing media. In the 1970s and 1980s, the journalism programme was among the favourites at the University of Latvia, and there was substantial competition for study places. The programme brought together strong and creative personalities.

Nowadays

With the time of *Glasnostj* and Awakening, we can speak about the end of the Soviet period in journalism education in Latvia. In 1988, State University of Latvia could dispose of the unitary education plans developed by Moscow University. From that point on, the programme was developed on the spot, reacting to local needs and realities.

This time of change was fulfilled by the regained independence of the Republic of Latvia in 1991. Latvia State University regained its pre-occupation name – University of Latvia. In the academic year 1991/92, students began to study the Communication Science Bachelor programme, which was seen as the first step towards a comprehensive communication science education. In the academic year 1992/93 Department of Journalism was renamed as Department of Communication and Journalism, accordingly validating the tendency and novelty of those new times – including the need to teach public relations (PR) and advertising, as communication spheres supplementary/ competitive to journalism. In 2000, the new faculty of Social Science was established, at once unifying all ‘new’ science departments, which during Soviet regime were taught under strict control and in different faculties. Therefore, journalism was no longer taught in the Faculty of Philology and gained its legal place in the family of social science.

After regaining independence and introducing a free market the media industry rose remarkably along with other industries requiring PR and advertising specialists. In response to these changes in society, the number of available education programmes in communication science was significantly increased. At present, after graduating school, there are three options for the study of journalism, three programmes for advertising and nine possibilities in PR education. The current number of programme attendants and graduates shows that journalism has lost its front-runner position in favour of PR and advertisement.

Current possibilities in journalism education

Journalism studies in Latvia at the moment are available at three levels – bachelor, master’s and doctoral.

The Bachelor degree is available in two variations – a professional Bachelor degree offered by Vidzeme University College for media and journalism studies and an academic Bachelor degree offered by the University of Latvia, under the study programme ‘Communication Science’ and Riga Stradiņš University, under the study programme ‘Journalism’.

To continue their studies, students can choose the Master’s study programme at the University of Latvia (‘Communication Science’) and at Riga Stradiņš University (‘Communication’). University of Latvia also provides Doctoral studies for Communication Science.

There are three schools that provide journalism education in Latvia and before comparing them it is important to acknowledge that they differ greatly in experience and their resource bases. A couple of years ago it was the University of Latvia who played the main role in journalism education because of its history and the number of students who graduated

Table 1: Journalism study possibilities in Latvia.

	<i>LU</i>	<i>RSU</i>	<i>VUC</i>
<i>Level: Bachelor degree</i>			
Programme	Communication Studies	Journalism	Media Studies and Journalism
Specialization	Communication Science (Journalism module)	Journalism	Journalism
ECTS	180	180	240
Study mode	Full-time – 3 years, Part-time – 4 years	Full-time – 3 years	Full-time – 4 years
<i>Level: Master degree</i>			
Programme	Communication Science	Communication	
Specialization	Journalism	Academic research	
ECTS	120	120	
Study mode	Full-time – 2 years, Part-time – 3 years	Full-time – 2 years	
<i>Level: Doctoral degree</i>			
Programme	Communication Science		
Specialization	Journalism		
ECTS	210		
Study mode	Full-time – 3 years, Part-time – 4 years		

from their study programmes during that time. Nowadays Riga Stradiņš University is also competing in the field of academic journalism education by offering different programmes and studies without modules – with a narrower focus on journalism. In 2007 (licensed until 2010) one more player joined the competition – Vidzeme University College – which developed the newest programme for journalism studies; offering the only possibility to focus studies on journalism, with students gaining a professional Bachelor degree after graduation.

Journalism study programmes at University of Latvia have a remarkably high capacity due to the institution's experience and resources – there are around 100–150 first year Bachelor-level students in full-time studies and 100–150 students in part-time studies as well. Riga Stradiņš University gathers groups of around 50 students, but Vidzeme University College only admits 30 students, approximately, each year.

There are State-budget funded places at the University of Latvia (twenty five at BA level, twenty at MA level) and in Vidzeme University College (ten). At Riga Stradiņš University students can only study journalism using their own funds.

Vidzeme University College and Riga Stradiņš University offer full-time courses only. At the University of Latvia students can study part-time – with lectures taking place on Saturdays. Online courses and other materials are made available for these students to allow them to gain an education as good as those who study there full-time. This is an important indication that journalism studies are available not only to high school graduates but also to professional journalists who cannot manage to study full-time or afford to move to the city where the university is located.

Comparing academic staff, University of Latvia is a convenient leader considering the number of lecturers and professionals involved in teaching, as well as the number of teaching professors, associated professors and doctors.

All schools cooperate with universities worldwide through the ERASMUS students exchange programme:

- Vidzeme University College: nineteen universities in eleven countries (Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Italy, Iceland, Germany, Great Britain, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and Turkey);
- Riga Stradiņš University: thirteen universities in nine countries (Finland, Denmark, France, Germany, Iceland, Lithuania, Norway, Slovakia and Turkey);
- University of Latvia: fourteen universities in ten countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Norway, Poland and Spain).

All programmes cooperate with industry – mostly through guest lectures and student internships, as well as during practical tasks within lecture courses and course papers.

Journalism at Bachelor level

University of Latvia and Riga Stradiņš University saw transformation of their Bachelor programmes in the academic year 2007/08 according to the Bologna declaration; reducing the length of their courses from four years to three. As a result both academic Bachelor programmes now count as 180 study units in the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The professional Bachelor programme at Vidzeme University College takes four years to complete and counts for 240 ECTS.

In spotting differences between these programmes, Vidzeme University College is the only one which offers students the opportunity to study journalism in one of the regions of Latvia, as both the University of Latvia and Riga Stradiņš University are settled in the capital of Latvia – Riga.

There are differences in the teaching of the programmes and their approaches to journalism education. In Latvia all programmes are divided into three parts, that are differentiated not as major and minor, but as: compulsory sections for all students (A part); limited choice courses according to students' professional choice and interests (B part); and as open choice courses according to students' interests (C part). The main differences between journalism programmes can be seen in the courses offered and in their division between those parts of the programme.

University of Latvia, unlike Vidzeme University College and Riga Stradiņš University, realizes its programme in modules. For the first three terms all students of the 'Communication Science' Bachelor programme take compulsory (communication and related science) course modules to gain a better understanding of the issues dealt with by communication science and, of course, for a more general academic education. It is only after studying and realizing all professional possibilities available to communication science – i.e. after graduating from introduction courses in journalism, PR and advertising – that students have to make their final choice of profession which will then be applied through professional orientation modules taught in small groups. Considering the current climate, this is a very handy approach to journalism studies – students can be sure of their career choice as it is based on their knowledge and experience in different fields of communication, not only an idea and feeling for their future profession. Module programmes give students a better understanding of what is happening within the competitive fields of communication and increases their communication literacy. This study approach also makes it easier for students to change their profession if there will be such a need in the future.

Vidzeme University College also evaluates the rapidly changing situation that students can face in the industry – several introduction courses in advertisement and PR are also included in the mandatory course parts offered by Vidzeme University College.

The main differences between journalism study programmes can be found in their organizational structure; at Vidzeme University College, the professional Bachelor programme has 83% of professional study courses – meaningful emphasis is placed on communication theory and media studies, a compulsory part of the programme. This course also leaves

Table 2: Journalism BA programmes – organizational structure.

<i>Programme</i>	<i>A PART – compulsory courses</i>			<i>B PART – limited choice courses</i>			<i>C PART</i>
	<i>General education</i>	<i>Internship</i>	<i>Final Thesis</i>	<i>Professional specialization</i>	<i>Internship</i>	<i>Open choice</i>	
VUC Media Studies and Journalism	General education courses (30 ECTS), Professional theory courses (54 ECTS), Professional specialization courses (66 ECTS)	4 Internships (39 ECTS)	18 ECTS	Professional orientation (24 ECTS)	-	9 ECTS	
		86.25%		10%		3.75%	
RSU Journalism	General education courses (18 ECTS), Social science courses (40.5 ECTS), Research methods in social science (19.5 ECTS), Language courses (24 ECTS)	Internship (3 ECTS)	15 ECTS	Professional orientation (55.5 ECTS)	4.5 ECTS		
		66.70%		30.8%		2.5%	
LU Communication Studies	General education courses (21 ECTS), Professional theory and practice courses (57 ECTS)		15 ECTS	Professional specialization – journalism module (63 ECTS), Social science (12 ECTS)	Internship – compulsory (9 ECTS)	3 ECTS	
		51.6%		48.8%		1.7%	

14% of the study modules to individual choice, most of which is meant to give students an opportunity to specialize more – according to different media. The rest of the programme is designed to create an equal level of knowledge and skills for all students. Compared to the other journalism study programmes, Vidzeme University College is remarkable for its practical orientation: 16.25% of the programme is devoted to internships (four of which are held in a different kind of media). The duration of internships rises accordingly to year of study – four weeks in the first year, six weeks in the second and third years, and ten weeks before the diploma ends, in the last year of study. At the moment there are no further journalism education possibilities in Vidzeme University College.

Riga Stradiņš University offer an academic Bachelor programme in journalism. It has strict demands with literature and day-to-day studies – students gain their knowledge through theoretical summary writing and analytical work. The journalism education programme at Riga Stradiņš University is therefore beneficial for its academic education and narrowed focus to journalism and media studies, and uses a theoretical and academic approach to analyse certain journalistic issues. It is possible to continue journalism studies in Riga Stradiņš University in order to gain a Master's degree in 'Communication'. This master's programme is academically orientated, with the main focus on research.

The study programme at the University of Latvia offers its students the possibility of examining their decision to become a journalist. Due to the study plan of the programme students can take their time in evaluating the other options of specialization – PR and advertising; once they have chosen, their studies are focused strictly on their chosen specialization. The programme provides a remarkable amount of base knowledge to every student; this can help graduates to orientate themselves and be more flexible in today's rapidly changing media environment. The other half of the study programme is devoted to journalism studies and individual projects according to students' interests. The journalism module of the programme is made up of theoretical courses that develop students' analytical skills as well as several practical courses according to students' interests and media orientation.

The Master's programme in 'Communication Science' at the University of Latvia is also modular: one module is dedicated to journalism with a focus on media management and research. The Doctoral programme in 'Communication Science' is aimed at preparing highly qualified science personnel with internationally comparable competences in the field of communication science and an internationally-equalized Doctoral degree.

Professional associations and journalism education

At the moment journalism programmes at university are the only way to develop and acquire journalism education in Latvia. Working journalists currently cannot really increase their level of professional knowledge in any other way. This was different during the first years of regained independence when Latvia's journalists were offered different opportunities to

enhance their professionalism. Many lecturers visited Latvia for seminars and conferences that were organized by the Journalist Union of Latvia. Also some of the journalists had the opportunity to go on an 'experience exchange' abroad. Scandinavia, Baltic Sea countries and European journalism organizations cooperated to very great extent at that time. This cooperation was at its peak in the middle of the 1990s. But when the first wave of exaltation passed, and Latvia was not a new democratic country any more, this support and cooperation vanished. Latvia's Journalist Union lost its position and value in society and among its members – now the issue of professional journalism education is in the hands of journalists themselves, or media organizations with their own priorities and interests.

Concluding remarks

Journalism has been one of the most popular disciplines in recent decades, both in education and as a profession. Journalism education developed rapidly according to facilities and growing developments. Considering the developments of previous years, journalism education in Latvia could be at its golden age within just a few years – the media market has developed to a great extent, with different kinds of media channels and interplay, and education programmes could be tailored to the needs and interests of students and the industry. But due to the economic crisis this will not be the case. Tension in the media market is growing each week. Before the crisis, all of the main printed media, as well as some TV and radio programmes developed their online versions using the newest technologies, channels (such as online TV) and social networking (Twitter, <http://www.twitter.com>). Today it is a question of survival – with such hard times in the state's economy it is not just state and advertising market funds that are shrinking, but also the audience's ability to consume those media products. At the very beginning of the crisis many journalists experienced wage cuts and changes to their payment system that were more convenient for the media employer and less profitable for the employee. But now there is the question of who has the staying power to be able to remain until the renewal. The current conditions are not helping working journalists' education and improvement of their professionalism. Due to an increasing workload and decreasing salary, good practice is diminishing. At the same time this crisis can be used as an opportunity to acquire something previously unapproachable – for example – if a job is lost, studies can be approached or renewed.

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