

Abstract **Epp Lauk**

Understanding the Transformation of CEE Journalism Cultures: A Comparative View

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Since the beginning of political, economic and societal transition in the CEE region, the possible trajectories of the development of news media in these countries attracted the attention of analysts and scholars both in Europe and America. A teleological viewpoint was rather commonly shared that the transition would take a route towards Western type liberal democracies. Similar expectations concerned the media, and the initial years of transition seemed to support these expectations. The political breakthrough provided favourable conditions for media democratization by removing state control and censorship, enabling diversity of media ownership and preventing monopolization; and providing the media with the right to freely access and distribute

information. However, the conditions that in Western democracies had shaped the development of media systems over two hundred years, could not take immediate effect in newly liberated CEE countries. The same argument concerns journalism. The efforts to “implant” the western experience of “profession-building” and journalism’s professional ideology were doomed to failure. No successful cases exist of the attempts to “mechanically” replace the communist model of journalism with a “western” one. The ensuing transformational decades have demonstrated a widely varying development of journalism cultures in CEE countries. One may ask: Why did the seemingly similar starting points and initial conditions create a variety of patterns of CEE journalisms?

The level of professionalism and quality of journalism in CEE are most often measured against the traditional values and functions of journalism in the established European democracies. In this light, the many deviations are easy to point out. However, what peculiarities can be discovered by “de-westernizing” the viewpoint and looking at these deviations in their proper historical and cultural contexts?

To answer these questions, this paper will first argue that the roots of the differences in the professional ideology and practice of journalism and journalists largely stem from the political and cultural conditions of the past. Also, connections between the characteristic features of journalism cultures and the contexts of contemporary media systems are important to take closer look at. Second, the development of journalism and journalistic professionalism has never been smooth and continuous, but disrupted in several ways in different periods of time. What kinds of ruptures can be detected and how have they influenced professional values and norms, role perceptions of journalists and the “life course” of the profession in CEE countries more generally?

For comparing journalism cultures, the conceptualization by Thomas Hanitzsch (2007) offers a helpful framework of three constituents (institutional roles, epistemologies and ethical ideologies) and seven dimensions (interventionism, power distance, market orientation, objectivism, empiricism, relativism, and idealism).

The concept of continuity and discontinuity (ruptures) comes from social psychology, which has an explanation

for why continuity and discontinuity are so important in humans' lives. Social psychology links the continuity perception to the individual and group identity (Jetten & Hutchison, 2011), which is also an important aspect of professional identity.

Empirical research for this paper is done within Worlds of Journalism Studies project (<http://www.worldsofjournalism.org/>).