

Informed Journalists. A century of Teaching Journalism in Spain: History and Trends

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In 1971 teaching journalism in Spain officially became a degree in higher education with the creation of the Faculty of Information Sciences at Universidades Complutense in Madrid, and the Autonomous University in Barcelona. The historic event, in addition to adding a new academic and disciplinary status to the profession, can also be interpreted in its historical context as a step toward the incipient process of democratization and transformation of Spanish society (Lazcano-Peña, 2013, p.178). The creation of these new faculties would provide guarantees of greater independence for journalistic training which until then, had been concentrated in deeply religious spaces and subject to Francoist ideological control.

That same year a vignette from the *Vanguardia Española* ironically depicted: "So now you know Mr. Monste, I only give interviews to doctors of journalism". And of course, making journalism a university degree

was not a decision made through general consensus, it was widely debated: "We will support a practical study plan for Information Sciences, and not one based exclusively on science" was a statement from the National Radio and TV Union which reported the news at the time (p.178).

The incident, which could be taken as simply another anecdote in the academic institutionalization of our profession, brings us into the debate on the teaching of journalism. Are you trained to be a journalist, or are you born to be one? What is its place in academia? How does one establish a dialogue on the practical and theoretical training of media and communications professionals?

These questions are also addressed in Pilar Sanchez-García's text, a monograph in which, together with a documented historical review of the evolution of teaching journalism in Spain, there is also

an overview of the manner in which the profession has been interpreted and valued over time, the social contexts in which these changes have been framed, and their impacts – effective or lacking – on teaching the degree:

Journalism is taking a generational, sociological and technological leap compared to what one would assume happened in the aftermath of the invention of the printing press, and later the advent of radio and television. The change we are living as we speak represents a social, economic, family transformation, a transformation in individual relationships and, absolutely, a new model of global communication and information (Sánchez-García, 2017, p. 25).

The study is divided into five chapters that combine conceptual and historical reviews. The book opens with a first chapter debating the academic training in journalism in terms of what is understood of the trade, and its valuation. In accordance with their research Sanchez-García (2017) state the following:

The arguments repeat themselves throughout the century: those that consider the prac-

tice of the trade as the staple for training journalists believe that today the basis of training lies in technique, arguing in favor of the self-taught journalist, reliant on talent and intuition; and those that consider Journalism a profession, that it requires a specialization in communication and multidisciplinary qualifications, they defend the social responsibi-

lity of the profession, and the independent criteria of journalists with intellectual backgrounds (p.35).

The historical overview is concentrated in two chapters. To start, a tour through the first spaces dedicated to teaching journalism in Spain (1887 with the first journalism course in Salamanca), up until recent history "passing through schools of journalism in the first half of the 20th century, before and during Francoist Spain, the pre-university programs in the 60s, and the university stage from 1971 onward with an exponential increase in the number of Schools offering the professional degree of Journalism, rea-

aching 40 in 2017" (p. 27), the year this text was published. The revision compiles a wide variety of data such as legal frameworks, the first bibliographical references used in university Journalism courses (p. 105), and a chapter dedi-

cated to the evolution of the syllabus, from the first formal program consisting in three courses – Criteriology, Reporting and Composition – of the School El Debate in 1926 (p.98), to the study plans derived from the Bologna Process.

Given the relevance and recent implementation of –until now–, the latter in the evolution of

completed in 2010 for degrees in communication, has had positive practical effects such as fostering academic mobility for example – an aspect highly valued by students and institutional indicators in recent years – the text also describes the criticism that warns – in every affected country and all degrees – "the universities' greater concern for quantita-

tive results rather than qualitative results" (p.137), and a growing professionalization of teaching with study plans that:

Move to training in new competencies and in the case of studies in Communication, affect «a complex dynamic of knowledge, skills, capabilities and attitudes that empower the student to express, produce, reflect, analyze and critically interpret texts, communicational artifacts of varying natures, handling scientific criteria and values» (Lorente en Sánchez-García, 2017, p. 139).

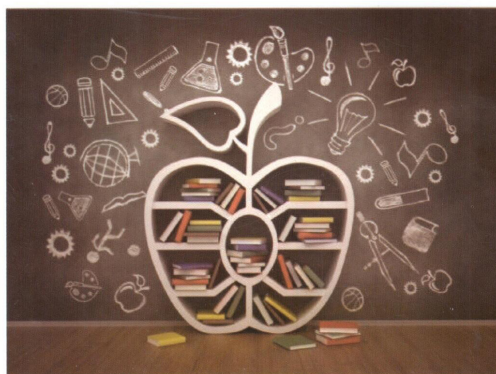
Faced with the aforementioned circumstances the author provides empirical evidence of her own research, to later conclude that:

"Another effect of the EHEA is that over half of the 35 fa-

Pilar Sánchez-García

PERIODISTAS (IN)FORMADOS

Un siglo de enseñanza periodística en España: historia y tendencias



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teaching Journalism, the text includes a paragraph dealing specifically with the standardization of higher learning derived from the implementation of the European Higher Education Area. Although the process, which was only recently

culties analyzed in this study opt to increase the number of specialized courses in the area of Journalism and Communication, cutting back on material inherent to Social Sciences and Humanities (Literature, History, Law, Sociology, Philosophy etc.) while increasing the number of courses focused on practical-technical teaching of the professional journalistic practice" (p.140).

In summary, the history of teaching journalism – as with other phenomena – can and should be understood based on location; on our continent the academic institutionalization of Journalism was unaffected by Francoism, for example, but influenced by international organizations (Mellado, 2010). Learning these stories contributes sufficient new elements to project beyond specific experiences, and, from the space of teaching journalism in Chile, question and delve deeper into comparative analysis (Cabalin & Lagos, 2012), especially considering the challenges of the current global communications ecosystem. What encounters could there be? How have we understood journalism here, and there? Even without a Bologna Process, wouldn't the institutional accreditation we are subject to here in Chile have similar effects in standardizing and professionalizing the teaching of Journalism and Communication?

In this context Sanchez-García's book, as a study on the

teaching of the profession, is highly useful and of great interest for those that form part of the academic field of Communication – as teachers, students, researchers and professionals – not only in Spain but the entire Iberian American community. Beyond particular historical, political, technological, legal and social conditions that mark the limits and frame our profession "the grand challenge of teaching contributes to elevating the quality of Journalism, preparing students in the new language, with innovating formats and emerging communicational models" (Sanchez-Garcia, 2017, p. 155).

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