

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNICATION SCIENCE IN ROMANIA. CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES

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Abstract: The present paper is an analysis of the development of Communication Science in Romania during the last decades. It starts with a search for a definition for Communication Science and a short history of the research field. One of the main questions to be discussed is whether Communication Science is rather part of social sciences or part of the humanities. Another interesting issue to be discussed is that of the challenges and perspectives regarding the future of Communication Science in Romania.

Keywords: communication science, professionalization, social science, humanities

1. Emerging areas of interest

Communication Science is a relatively new science that deals with the research of human communication, both interpersonal and mass communication. Some authors stressed that the origins of Communication Science are related to the Greek philosopher Aristotle and to rhetoric. Many centuries later, the German researcher Otto Groth developed the so called *Zeitungswissenschaft* (newspaper science). The newspaper as a first vehicle of mass communication was the main focus of scientific studies in this field. In the United States of America, during the 40s and 50s, empirical studies on mass communication were conducted. As a result, theories such as: Two step communication flow or later in the 70s, The Agenda Setting Model and the Uses and Gratification Approach were developed. Thus, a strong theoretical background for the new science emerged.

Human communication was analyzed also from the perspectives of other sciences. This is why it is legitimate to talk about an interdisciplinary field. Starting with history, which analyzed the history of communication and ending with psychology or sociology, there is a bright spectrum of sciences that were interested in a communication approach. The history of communication can be presented from different perspectives such as: a history of the communication vehicles, a history of communication institutions, a history of inventions related to communication etc. Philosophy has also developed a philosophy of communication, which is very much involved in analyzing the ethical aspects of communication. Sociology focused on the impact of mass communication on groups and also on society. Many of the theories that build the theoretical framework of communication science were developed by American sociologists. Psychology and especially cognitive psychology is also involved in communication research by analyzing the impact of communication on persons. The research studies conducted on perception, attention, memory played an important role

in understanding how advertising works, for instance. Political science should be also mentioned. The relationship between politics and communication is a relevant issue.

Taking into consideration the aspects that were mentioned above, there is one legitimate question: is communication science a social science or is it part of humanities? The question is certainly not a simple one. There are different approaches towards communication science in different countries. In the United Kingdom, communication science is related to cultural studies, the origins of that theoretical framework is Birmingham. Other countries such as the USA, Canada, Australia imported cultural studies in the 90s. In France *la science de l'information et de communication* includes paradigms from both, social sciences and humanities. In Italy and Spain, the situation is similar. The German communication science is strongly influenced by the American communication science. The original period of *Zeitungswissenschaft* was followed by the period of *Publizistikwissenschaft*, the science of public communication. Thus communication science is considered to be a social science. In the 70s German philosophers and philologists developed the so called *Medienwissenschaft*. The science of media is part of humanities.

2. Romanian communication science: history and trends

Romanian communication science includes the following directions: journalism, communication and public relations, library science and advertising. Those are also the names of the BA programs, developed in this chronological order. The MA programs in the field of communication science bear a variety of names such as: media production, media management, communication in globalizing age. Besides those examples, some Romanian universities prefer to use the same name for BA and MA programs, such as: public relations or advertising.

The number of students enrolled in communication programs increased in the last decades in Europe and particularly in Romania. This is the result of the growth and development of the media industry in Romania. Media research is a permanent issue. On the one hand, media change rapidly. The media use has dramatically changed and evolved. Social network sites or smart phones are just some of the examples in this regard. Media changed people's lives in a very interesting way. Those changes are part of the research in communication science. Not only the media has changed, but also the way people relate to media has changed. Today media reception is different. In which way, that is a question communication science is constantly studying.

Because of the media development, there was an increasing need for employees in communication areas. Journalistic positions were filled by professionals coming from various backgrounds, with no journalistic education and who acquired knowledge regarding their job mostly through hands-on experience. Some of them attended courses and training sessions mostly organized by international media (BBC, CNN etc.). This particular situation applied not only to Romania, but to the vast majority of the Eastern European countries, where a young generation of journalists with little

professional experience and education entered the media organizations in the early 90ies (Thomaß et al., 2001: 241). Twenty years after 1989, representatives of this generation can be encountered in decision making positions in Romanian media organizations (Balaban et al, 2010).

However, after the year 2000, the situation of journalistic education changed and a large number of academic programs had been successfully set up and their graduates brought a fresh approach to communication professions. International media organizations entered the Romanian market as well, implementing to some extent their *corporate cultures*, while the competition between media products becomes more intense every day.

The local and regional press took the same path of development. The policy of decentralization reflected in the number of new public local radio and television stations was succeeded by private initiatives to set up local and regional newspapers, both print and online editions, radio and television stations as well. Markets for local information emerged and the interest of the public for local information increased.

This development brought, in our assumption, a heterogeneous population of journalists, with different habits, attitudes and different professional definitions. Similar to other Eastern European journalists, the issue of differences between generations in assuming professional roles will be taken into consideration in this research. Some papers concerning this subject were published in the Romanian language (Vasilendiuc, 2008), but also several international comparative researches that include information on Romanian journalists (Coman, 2000; Hanitzsch, 2009). We have to mention that in the last years the research studies on this matter has increased, there are several scientific studies concerning the role perception of Romanian journalists. To the list of research papers on Romanian journalists we might add the papers published by Natalia Vasilendiuc and the yearly reports of foundations like Freedom House or the studies of *Consiliul Național al Audiovizualului* (National Audio-Visual Council) or *Agenția de Monitorizare a Presei* (Press Monitoring Agency). A monitoring of the role perception of the Romanian journalists is part of the international project conducted by the German scientist Hanitzsch called worlds of journalism.

In an attempt to emphasize the differences between the local or regional and the national press in Romania, Balaban *et al.* distinguish at least three types of categories: financial differences, subjects' diversity differences, and the quality of information. Thus, while in the central media, financial motivation is very strong due to advertising, sponsors and investments, in the local or regional media, the budget is limited. In addition, although information can be collected and verified much easier at the local level, the number of events happening is smaller than that at the central level, and so is the diversity of subjects. Furthermore, while journalists from the central media are perceived to be more responsible, at the local and regional levels competition is lower, the subjects are superficially treated and the audience is narrow (Balaban *et al.*, 2010).

During the last decades communication is facing a process of professionalization not only in the field of journalism that enjoys higher visibility than all the other professional communicators. An appropriate scientific definition of professionalization

in the communication industry has been elaborated during the last decades. In his book, *Einführung in die Kommunikationswissenschaft*, the German scientist Klaus Merten considers that in the last years there has been a global trend towards professionalization of the communicators. Professionalization is defined by Merten using following items: education in the field, codes of ethics, professional organizations, regulated access to labor markets etc (Merten, 1999). There are several researches on professionalization of the communication field in Romania, still the question is worth being analyzed. The rising number of BA and MA programs in communication science is one of the signs for professionalization. Nowadays for jobs in the field alumni of such programs are preferred. Professional communicators such as journalists or PR officers have usually a diploma in the field.

The German scientist Romy Fröhlich sees a causal relationship between professionalization and quality in public relations. Professionalization is achieved by the rules of the profession, professional education, a specific role of the institutions, professional ethics (Fröhlich, 2005, 600).

James Gruning developed a theory of excellence in public relations. He analyzed more than 300 successful companies in search for good practices. *A search for excellence, (...) consist less in a search for excellent management or excellent companies than in a search for attributes of excellence that can be isolated from a study of good companies* is Gruning point of view (Gruning 1992, 220). Among the characteristics of an excellent PR practice he mentioned the following:

- PR as part of the dominant coalition with connection to the senior management – principle that can be easily identified in an organization by the placement of the department in the structure, the PR or communication department should be situated in the proximity of the top management level,
- Integrated PR function – means that PR, marketing, advertising should work in an integrated way in order to communicate inside and outside the system,
- PR as separate management function – there should be a constant practice of communication management,
- The role of the PR practitioners in the organization should be an important one,
- Internal communication should function in a symmetrical way, that means interaction,
- A system that works well needs well prepared PR practitioners, this can be achieved through the specific education of the practitioners, education that takes different forms from BA or MA specific degrees to trainings sessions at the working place,
- And finally, not just the internal communication, but also the external communication should be symmetrical; the practitioners must also conduct evaluation activities of their work (Gruning, 1992).

The Romanian scientist Adela Rogojinaru published the results of a qualitative study on public relations in the public sector in an article, in the magazine *Revista*

Română de Comunicare și Relații Publice, in 2008, under the title *Structure, Roles and Communication Strategies of Public Relations in Public Institutions in Romania (2006-2008)*. The research was focused on the quality of information and communication of public services and the professionalization of the public relations' functions in public institutions (Rogojinaru, 2008: 99). One of the main questions of the present paper is whether public institutions draft communication models with their public. Some of the results of this study are similar to those presented by Adela Rogojinaru: the local councils and the municipalities presented complex hierarchies in which the PR services were integrated in general structures mostly in charge with European Affairs, Economic Integration. In terms of human capital, the lack of initial qualification in the field was observed.

If we take into consideration the short history of public relations in Romania in the last fifteen years, we will notice multinational corporations or international PR and advertising companies that have introduced PR services on the Romanian markets. We can also observe a constant professionalization of PR, arguments with respect to this issue being presented below (Balaban, Iancu, 2009).

Adela Rogojinaru emphasized the difference between corporate communication and public communication. *While corporate communication tends to strengthen its strategic role within organizations, public communication developed in a hectic way, setting up linear (with predominance of technical role) or diffuse model (with predominance of cumulated roles assigned to managers themselves)*, (Rogojinaru, 2008, 102). The PR professionals in the public sector tend to act much more as technicians and not as strategic planners and the asymmetrical communication is predominant.

The results of a research published in 2009 in the *Transylvanian Review for Public Administration* showed that the professional qualification of PR professionals working in the Romanian public sector is very different and can be related to the dimension of the organization they were integrated in. The bigger the structure they were working for, the better their professional qualification was, by attending specific academic programs or professional trainings. There is a tendency towards having better prepared PR specialists in bigger public institutions. This can be explained by the fact that the size of the community influences the administrative capacity of the communities.

This study of exploratory nature allowed to take a closer look at the role and the understanding of public relations in the public sector in Romania. The Romanian public sector at its local level was only analyzed from this particular point of view. The few scientific approaches that were published both in scientific communication publications and public administration publications focused rather on the central public administration (Balaban, Iancu: 2009).

The professional communicators' labor market is not as regulated as that for medicine or lawyers. There are still different degrees of regulations in different countries. The border between journalism or PR and advertising is not impassable. It is a common practice in Romania that after some years of experience in journalism,

communicators move towards the direction of PR. Some employers prefer to have former journalists in PR positions in their companies. They often argue that former journalists know how media is working and have far more contacts with other colleagues from the press. The enrollment in professional organizations that exists also in Romania is very low. This is a tendency that has been reported in other Eastern European countries.

In an attempt to resume the chronological development of communication science in Romania, the following periods were identified:

- 1995-2003 introducing new programs in the field, mainly in the largest Romanian public universities; the first programs have been BA programs in journalism, communication and PR programs at the University of Bucharest, the National School of Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest, the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași and the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca;
- 2003-2009 a large number of programs were introduced all over the country, both in public and private universities; the first BA programs in advertising were introduced in three Romanian universities: the National School of Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest, the Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca and the Western University Timișoara;
- since 2007 PhD programs in the field were introduced at the University of Bucharest, the National School of Political and Administrative Studies Bucharest, the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University in Iași and the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca.

Although the Romanian scientific publications in the field of communication science are not numerous, four of them have succeeded to be present in international data bases, such as Ebsco, CEEOL, ProQuest etc. The majority of members of the scientific community disseminated the output of their research in these publications. The first publication was *Revista Română de Jurnalism și Comunicare* edited by the Faculty of Journalism and Communication Science of the University Bucharest. It was followed by the *Romanian Journal for Communication and Public Relations* published by Comunicare.ro Publishing House of the National School of Political and Administrative Studies. The Babeș-Bolyai University enriched the field with two publications: *Studia Ephemerides* and *Journal of Media Research*, the last one publishing papers mainly in English or in foreign languages. The Romanian community of scientists is making efforts to be part of the main international flow by publishing scientific reviews and papers in foreign languages, by organizing international scientific events and by actively taking part at international events from abroad.

3. Conclusions

The future perspectives regarding communication science in Romania are predicting a period of stagnation or decrease in the number of enrolled students. One of the causes for this is demography, since Romania reported low birth rates starting with the 90s. There are also other causes for this decrease in the future years: the economic crisis diminished the job offers for professional communicators, the cross media offices in many news rooms will hire not as many employees as before. Also other educational fields that faced high enrollment rates in the 90s or at the beginning of the year 2000 are facing a dramatic decrease in the number of enrolled students.

According to the EU strategy in the field of education, universities have to work much harder in the process of internationalization regarding both educational programs and scientific outputs. A closer work with the economy and the community is needed. In this regard, education in the field of communication science was developed closer to the needs of the market but further efforts are required to maintain the viability of jobs in the years to come.

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