

## 6 (b). Role Perceptions and Professional Values Worldwide

*Meeting summary report by rapporteur Bharthur Sanjay, Vice Chancellor, Central University of Tamil Nadu, India, with back-up from rapporteur Liesbeth Hermans, Radboud University Nijmegen, The Netherlands; syndicate expert Thomas Hanitzsch, University of Munich, Germany; background report by Hanitzsch and Ludwig Maximilians, University of Munich, Germany; chairs Kaarle Nordenstreng and Ari Heinonen, University of Tampere, Finland; and team members.\**

This syndicate began its debate by reviewing Thomas Hanitzsch and Ludwig Maximilians' (2013) background paper and *The Worlds of Journalism Study* (worldsofjournalism.org), an academic project that regularly assesses, via some 21 countries, journalists' perceptions of their role in society and how they influence their work. Participants agreed with *The Worlds of Journalism Study's* conclusions about four ways journalists worldwide tend to approach their jobs and framed their discussion accordingly.

Hanitzsch (2011) described and explained these four journalistic milieus/approaches/roles, in person and via his research, as follows:

1. "Populist disseminators": Journalists who pay the most attention to their audiences and, accordingly, are most likely to cover what their audiences' consider "interesting news" in order to attract bigger numbers. This group tends to see itself as a detached observer who shies away from journalism's monitoring function.
2. "Detached watchdogs": Journalists who value both of their seemingly contradictory roles as detached observers and watchdogs over political and business elite. They provide readers with interesting and important political information for financial and civic life purposes. And although they lack interventionist tendencies, they are the most opposed, among the four groups, to supporting official policies.
3. "Critical change agents": Journalists, critical of government and business elite, who advocate for social change and work toward influencing public opinion and setting political agendas. Of the four groups, they are most likely to push their audiences to participate in civic and political debates and actions and least likely to cater to their audiences' desires and to take an opportunist approach (explained next).
4. "Opportunist facilitators": Journalists most likely to view themselves as constructive government partners in economic development and political transformation. Of the four groups, they are least interested in detached observation, watchdog activities and political information and mobilization functions.

Hanitzsch also explained that while the detached watchdog approach characterizes the way most Western countries view their journalistic roles, the critical change approach is especially strong in the Middle East. And while the opportunist facilitator approach is popular in many developing, authoritarian and transitional countries, he argued that the populist disseminator, since it appears to exist everywhere in the world, is the only truly global journalistic approach.

The group agreed that although such typologies are helpful, they should not be used to pigeonhole countries and media systems. Instead, such groupings should be used as instruments to critically reflect on values underlying different journalism approaches.

Although the group agreed that it's important for journalists to recognize, and be sensitive to, cultural differences that help determine countries' journalistic approaches, it argued that universal ethical aims should be promoted. Accordingly, journalism teachers should not only teach students what role their country's journalists tend to adopt, but what roles journalists worldwide tend to take on as well.

Students should also be taught that overtime such roles can change and that competing roles can exist simultaneously. For example, while the early European press took an activist role in political movements, with market concentration and commercialization came increased detachment. Yet in more recent years, it's becoming more activist again. And, when it comes to issues like the environment and gender equality, both activism and detachment should be considered.

The syndicate also discussed specific goals that journalists should pursue. For example, participants argued that journalists should try to accomplish all of the following:

1. Pursue and report verified information
2. Critically monitor important issues
3. Forewarn citizens about upcoming significant issues and/or crises and their possible consequences
4. Promote social cohesion/integration, especially in developing countries
5. Help citizens better understand their lives by orienting them to matters that influence them most
6. Help citizens empower themselves, encourage active citizenship

Participants concluded that more research is needed to contextualize and clarify journalistic roles worldwide.

### ***Recommendations***

*After a final meeting between parallel groups, this combined syndicate group agreed on the following recommendations for colleagues worldwide:*

1. The roles of journalists and functions of journalism in society should be taught and researched as a central element in journalism education, taking into account cultural and societal contexts.
2. The dynamic nature of professional roles should be recognized in journalism education and be the subject of continuing conversations among relevant stakeholders, including educators, practitioners, researchers, civil society and industry.
3. Journalism education should build upon universal values, such as truth-seeking and public service, and respect human values articulated in international law.
4. Journalism education should promote journalistic practices that emphasize diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism in local, national and global contexts.
5. Journalism education should promote professional roles that are sensitive to issues of inequality, poverty and deprivation within and among nations.

#### References

- Hanitzsch, T. (2011). Populist disseminators, detached watchdogs, critical change agents and opportunist facilitators: Professional milieus, the journalistic field and autonomy in 18 countries. *International Communication Gazette*, 73 (6), 477-494.
- Hanitzsch, T., & Maximilians, L. (2013). *Role perceptions and professional values worldwide*. Unpublished WJEC-3 background paper.

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