The Spanish Journalism Education Landscape

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The School of Journalism of *El Debate*, in 1926, was the first one to offer training courses for journalists in Spain. Promoted by the catholic newspaper of that same name, it worked uninterruptedly over ten years until the outbreak of the Spanish civil war (1936–1939). Regarding its teaching methodology, it was directly influenced by the journalism schools of the United States, which were visited by the new School’s promoters before its foundation with the purpose of gathering experiences to undertake their task. After the civil war, in 1941, the Escuela Oficial de Periodismo (Official School of Journalism) was created. This school was highly politicized, since it depended on the dictatorship government of Franco (1939–1975). It served to control access to the profession, because it granted the journalist accreditation card, either through its regular courses or through special intensive courses for the qualification of working journalists. With the passage of time, the political control on the Official School of Journalism slightly tempered regarding content as well as organization matters. In addition, the government allowed the creation of some private education establishments led by the Catholic Church.

The first university institution for the education of journalists was Instituto de Periodismo (Journalism Institute) of the University of Navarra, bound to the Opus Dei, a personal prelature of the Catholic Church. From 1958 to 1971 it was, as a matter of fact, a University School, although it was not legally established, because the Spanish legislation did not allow it. The students attended courses in Navarra, but their studies had to be confirmed by the Official School of Journalism, in order to get the journalist card by means of an examination that they had to take at the end of their studies. In 1960, another School of Journalism of the Church started to work in Madrid, with a similar validation system for its studies.

The studies of the Official School of Journalism started with a three-year programme, but then become four-years long with the reform of 1967, to which the two above mentioned private institutions adapted too. As of 1971, the government promoted the studies of Journalism, Broadcasting, and Advertising and Public Relations in university studies of a higher level. In accordance with those new regulations, during the academic year 1971– 72 three new Schools of Communication started up in Madrid, Barcelona and Navarra, with study programmes lasting five years. The first two involved the disappearance of the Official School, which had offices in both cities, whereas in Navarra the transformation of the Journalism Institute was less complicated due to the university tradition that it had had.
since the beginning. Doctorate studies began in 1976, and in 1978 the first doctoral thesis in Communication was read at the University of Navarra by Ángel Faus.

In 1981, the School of Communication of the Basque Country started to work. The boom of the new Schools of Communication took place in the late-1980s and early-1990s: some of them were of catholic inspiration, such as Cardenal Herrera-CEU in Valencia and the Universidad Pontificia in Salamanca and others had a public character such as those of Seville, Santiago, Málaga, Vigo, etc. The number of universities with degrees in Communication – that is, Journalism, Broadcasting, Advertising and Public Relations – rose from 23 in 1999 to 40 in 2004, although not all them were offering the Journalism degree.

In many cases, the School that offers some of the three Communication degrees includes other knowledge disciplines (mainly Social Sciences and Humanities), and therefore offers degrees in different areas other than Communication. To be more precise, around 2004 there were only thirteen Schools which were specifically Schools of Communication, against the 27 that could be considered as ‘mixed’. This is due to the young character of Communication Studies as well as to the fact that a good number of these new degrees have had their origin within other departments or university Schools, but do not have enough entity to make a specific School of Communication by themselves.

However, after five decades of university studies of communication in Spain, there is a case for saying that there is a well-grounded, if young, academic tradition. At the beginning it was difficult to find and train journalism professors, both in the pioneering experience of the Journalism Institute of Navarra of 1958, as well as since 1971 in the recently-created Schools of Communication in Madrid and Barcelona. Up until the implementation of doctorate studies at the end of the 1970s, the professors who constituted the initial faculty members came mainly from other disciplines such as Law, History, Philosophy, Sociology, Philology, etc. In addition, there were many cases of journalists that left their professional field in favour of education – starting doctorate studies in Communication or other areas where it was possible to enrol. Since the 1980s, and more especially in the 1990s, the trend in the model of recruitment of professors has changed and nowadays the Schools of Communication are mainly fed by people trained in Communication degrees.

From a numerical point of view, the increase of the teaching staff has been significant: the initial 139 professors of the academic year of 1972–73 rose to 1,205 during the academic year of 1993–94. Therefore, in twenty years, its number was multiplied by ten, increasing in the same way as the number of students. The problems arose in other scopes – logically due to the youth of the studies, such as subjects that were roughly consolidated in terms of contents – such as a lack of manuals and the lack of economic resources to cover the necessary teaching staff and to build the adequate facilities.

The flexibility of the hiring formulas for teaching staff and the particular specificity of Communication Studies, with remarkably practical aspects, allow the collaboration of professionals of mass media, advertising agencies and public relations firms as part-time associated professors. This formula is even more used in master’s degrees, where specialization and practical aspects are more emphasized than in graduate studies.
The university Schools of Communication, therefore, present a double profile: at the same time as they are the usual place where the future professionals are prepared, they are also the academic environment where research in communication is carried out, within the context of the departments. Together with the increase of the number of students in Schools of Communication, there has been a rise in the scientific production both at a national and international level. Thus, Spanish professors have reached, for instance, the presidency of important associations of research in communication such as Manuel Parés i Maicas and the IAMCR (International Association for Media and Communication Research) between 1996 and 2000, and Esteban López-Escobar at the WAPOR (World Association for Public Opinion Research) between 2005 and 2006.

On the other hand, there are diverse national associations of professors and researchers in Communication. The main one, with several hundred members, is indeed the most recent one: Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación, AE–IC, (Spanish Association of Research in Communication), founded in February 2008 with the aim to foster research in communication, to promote cooperation between researchers and to create research networks of investigators, and to establish a cooperation policy with other international research associations. The national scene of academic associations on Communication is completed with the Asociación de Historiadores de la Comunicación, AHC, (Association of Communication Historians), created in 1992, and Asociación Internacional de Jóvenes Investigadores en Comunicación, AIJIC, (International Association of Young Researchers in Communication), founded in 1997. In addition there is an academic association exclusively focused on journalism: Sociedad Española de Periodística, SEP, (Spanish Journalism Society), founded in 1989. All of them organize annual or biennial meetings, and publish their own proceedings.

It is also worth mentioning the educational work that the unions of journalists and professional associations of the press carry out, mainly organizing congresses, seminars and workshops for the continuous education of their members. Besides, many of those organizations also promote research around the journalistic profession, through the publication of magazines and annual reports, with the collaboration of both professional journalists and university professors. Nevertheless, the level of associationism of Spanish journalists remains quite low. In 2008, there were seven unions of journalists in Spain which gathered a little more than 2000 professionals. In addition, there were around 50 press associations in a number of cities throughout the country, all of them integrated in the Federación de Asociaciones de la Prensa de España (Federation of Press Associations of Spain; FAPE).

Back to the academic field, throughout these fifty years of university journalism and communications education, the contents have little-by-little become richer thanks to the increasing maturity and stability of the Schools, especially of those with greater tradition. Although there have been and there still are variants as far as the educational approaches of each institution are concerned, university education in journalism in Spain has generally tried to keep a balance between subjects on (1) the fundamentals of social sciences and
humanities, (2) those referring to communication studies from diverse viewpoints (law, ethics, history, sociology, public opinion, business, etc.), and (3) the practical courses aimed at training the students in the basic skills and know-how of each profession or specialization.

The second and third groups are the most characteristic of the School, where the specific teaching staff is necessary to develop an education of quality based on the particular theoretical foundations that distinguish communication in general and, more particularly, journalism from other scientific disciplines.

In the beginning, the need to differentiate communication studies from surrounding areas led to the shaping of a new field with a strong theoretical focus. Moreover, the practical subjects were limited due to the lack of technological facilities and by the difficulty of providing personal attention to all students. Over the years, however, these defects have been progressively corrected. Nowadays there is a fairer balance between cultural background, communication theory and professional training in schools, and students enjoy a wider range of facilities.

Since its establishment as a university School in 1971, Communication Studies were divided into three fields, as referred to above. These fields were initially called ‘sections’ and later, with the 1991 reform, became ‘degrees’: Journalism, Broadcasting, and Advertising and Public Relations. ‘Journalism’ mostly included the studies aimed at training professionals for the press; ‘Broadcasting’ embraced those aspiring to prepare practitioners for radio, television and cinema; whereas ‘Advertising and Public Relations’ provided the necessary knowledge to develop a career in all these fields, including the communication departments of companies and all kind of organizations. In recent years a new trend has emerged to also group under the Journalism degree those studies that give qualification to inform, regardless of the platform (press, radio, television, Internet), leaving to Broadcasting the responsibility for the education of professionals focused on fiction genres: cinema, television and other audio-visual new formats.

There is no unanimity as far as the itineraries of education in each one of the three degrees is concerned. Some universities opt for offering one or two years common to the three degrees, and a second period where each degree has its own subjects. Other teaching models prefer to distribute the students according to their degrees from the very beginning. Therefore, the primary specialization level is determined by the three official degrees that can be offered. A subsequent level of specialization is optional to the Schools, should they want to offer their own specific degrees or diplomas derived from the selection of certain subjects on the part of the student all along the four, or five, years of the degree. The recent approval of the master’s as official postgraduate studies has turned them into the most suitable way to offer specializations that enable for specific professional tasks in communication.

The legal reform of the curricula in 1991 was based on: (1) the reduction from five to four years in the majority of the undergraduate studies, (2) the increasing autonomy of the Schools to organize their own curricula, and (3) a wider disposal of optional subjects and the number of credits awarded for extracurricular activities and for the accomplishment of professional internships during the summer. At the same time, the beginning of exchange programmes
with European Union countries through the Erasmus and Socrates programmes promoted the geographic mobility of students and professors, thanks to the numerous agreements signed between the Spanish Schools and those of other countries.

While awaiting the in-depth reform that will bring about the new European Space for Higher Education in 2010, the Spanish university system structures its knowledge and education around five main sections: Humanities, Social Sciences and Law, Experimental Sciences, Technical Sciences and Health Sciences. Journalism studies are part of the 31 degrees assigned to the category of the Social Sciences and Law, the most popular branch of all, which attracted 46% of university students during the academic year 2004/2005. In this section, which is integrated by other degrees such as Law, Sociology or Political Sciences, Journalism Studies have reached, in recent years, a high level of popularity among students, along with other related degrees such as Broadcasting and Advertising and Public Relations.

According to the report La Universidad española en cifras/ The Spanish University in numbers (2006), published by the Conference of Presidents of the Spanish Universities with data from the academic year 2004/2005, Spain had a total of 1,191,201 university students, out of which 17,232 were enrolled in Journalism degree (1.45% of all Spanish students). The number of students registered in any of the three degrees in Communication, including that of Journalism, was 43,827 (3.68% of the total).

Both the absolute figures as well as the relative percentages of Journalism students have increased in recent years. During the academic year 2000–01, 15,980 students registered in some of the courses offered by the Journalism degree. Five years later, during the academic year 2005–2006, the number amounted to 17,122. This growth is especially significant if we consider that, between 2002–07, the population of under-30s in Spain underwent a fall of 5.12%, resulting in a general decrease of the registration in university studies.

One of the factors that explain this high demand of Journalism studies has much to do, undoubtedly, with the increasing feminisation of the University in Spain. Already during the academic year 1984–85 there were more women than men registered in the Schools of Journalism. In recent years the percentage of female students has steadily grown, especially in certain areas such as Social Sciences and Law, but at a lesser extent in the Technical and Experimental degrees. As a consequence, according to the Informe Anual de la Profesión periodística/ Annual Report of the Journalistic Profession, during the academic year 2006–07 nearly 70% of the graduates in Journalism were women. Another obvious result is the fact that 60% of the new affiliations to professional organizations of journalists correspond to women as well. However, such a high proportion of college students is not parallel to the number of women journalists in active-duty, since this profession still remains mostly masculine in Spain; 57% of journalists in active-duty are men.

In 2008, a total of 33 Spanish universities were offering the degree in Journalism, out of which 45% were public and 55% private. Nevertheless, although there were more private than public centres, the latter were those who had a higher number of students: during the academic year 2003–04 the students registered in the first year of Journalism in public
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universities were 3,597, whereas those registered in private universities came to 1,017. In any case, during the last decade there has been a noticeable transfer of students from public towards private universities.

As for the geographic distribution of the graduates in Journalism, Spain presents a remarkable centralism: a little more than a third (more precisely, 36.5% during 2004) belongs to one of the universities in Madrid. The rest of the Journalism graduates studied at public or private universities from other regions of the country, notably from Catalonia with 8.4% of Journalism students. Out of the seventeen autonomous communities into which Spain is divided, only four of them – Asturias, Cantabria, La Rioja and Extremadura – lack a University with Journalism Studies.

By 2008, all the courses in Journalism required compulsory attendance. It is not possible to graduate through online courses. Some universities, especially in Catalonia, offered only the two last courses of the Journalism degree, with an open access for students from other degrees. The average registration fee for the first year of Journalism was €611 in public universities and €5,668 in private centres.

Along with the progression of Journalism studies, over the last decade there has been a proliferation of postgraduate courses, mostly with a more professional than academic nature.

Regarding academic postgraduate degrees, several universities have doctorate programmes in Journalism or, more often, Communication. Among them, only the University of Navarra and Universidad Complutense have, since the academic year 2007–2008, their own Doctorate programme acknowledged with the Quality Accreditation of the Ministry of Education and Science. This Quality Accreditation, among other privileges, allows them to receive public aid for the mobility of students and professors.

The offer of professional postgraduate courses is now even wider. According to the Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodistica/Annual Report of Journalism Profession 2007, there were 90 master’s programmes in Spain that year. Since they usually have between fifteen and twenty five students, the total number of students of professional postgraduate courses in journalism can be estimated at between 1,500 and 2,000.

As a general rule, they are one-year courses and are taken by young university graduates of any major. In addition, they usually offer either a kind of thematic specialization – politics, economy, sports, fashion, etc. – or specialization by media – press, radio, television, agencies or Internet. Their cost is quite varied and goes somewhere between €1,500 and €12,000, depending on the specialty, the centre and the modality (personal attendance or online courses).

Many of these programmes are nowadays organized by media companies. The first one of those master’s degrees started up in 1986 thanks to the initiative of the newspaper of largest circulation, El País, under the name of Escuela de Periodismo. Following the trail of this postgraduate programme many other master’s have arisen around the main Spanish newspapers, such as ABC, El Correo, La Voz de Galicia and El Mundo; the radio networks, such as Radio Nacional de España and COPE; and, even, the news agencies (Agencia EFE).
In order to give more prestige to their studies, these media have looked for university partnerships: Universidad Autónoma de Madrid in the case of El País, Universidad Complutense with ABC, the University of the Basque Country with El Correo, the University San Pablo-CEU with COPE, etc. Those programmes always include an internship period in media pertaining the group that organizes the master’s. This way, the media companies have a group of young journalists ready to be hired by their own publications each and every year, although the hiring rates of these students are far from being high.

Aside from these master’s offered by journalistic companies, the professional postgraduate programmes might be classified in three categories: (1) master’s exclusively offered by universities, independently of media companies of any kind, (2) professional programmes offered by schools and non-university educational institutions, and (3) journalistic training programmes organized by foundations. Just like the doctorate programmes, the professional master’s that meet certain academic requirements may also, since 2006, obtain the recognition as an Official Master by the Ministry of Education and Science and, in fact, several programmes have already received this accreditation. The adaptation of all the university careers to the new European Space for Higher Education is causing an academic reinforcement of the professional master’s, because those students who aspire to enrol in a doctorate programme must have previously studied an Official Master’s programme.

The processes of quality accreditation have been consolidated in the Spanish university system in recent years. In 2002, the Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación, ANECA, (National Agency for Quality Evaluation and Accreditation) was set up. This public Agency supervises the quality of Spanish universities, by means of processes of certification and accreditation oriented to promote their integration in the European Space for Higher Education. These filters of quality are applied to university schools and departments, to syllabi and even to professors.

Graduate and postgraduate studies in Journalism offer professional versatility that qualify those who take the courses to carry out very diverse job positions, including those not related to journalism. Nevertheless, in spite of that versatility, the huge number of graduates in journalism that leave university every year make it difficult to achieve full employment in the labour market. Thus, according to the registry of the Instituto Nacional de Empleo, INEM, (National Employment Institute), 3,473 Journalism graduates were unemployed in Spain at the end of 2006. This number might certainly seem quite high, however it is necessary to consider that, according to the Informe Anual de la Profesión Periodística/Annual Report of Journalism Profession 2007, the total number of Journalism graduates between 1976 – the year in which the first promotion accessed the labour market – and 2007 is near 64,000. Out of that total figure of graduates, around 26,000 worked professionally as journalists in 2008, that is to say, hardly 41%. Another statistic that helps to put this number into context comes from Informe del Mercado de Trabajo de los Jóvenes (Young Labour Market Report) 2008, according to which, Journalism is not amongst the twenty five graduate programmes that generate the highest employment rates for young people.
Concluding remarks

In spite of the difficulties to access the labour market, the truth is that, in barely four decades, Journalism university studies have consolidated as the main way to access the profession. Although after the end of Franco's dictatorship in 1975, the journalist accreditation card was not mandatory and access to profession remains free in theory, media companies usually choose, in a high percentage, journalists trained at the Faculties to build their teams. This is certainly a sign of the recognition that professionals grant to the education developed by the Schools.

The brief history of these studies shows, nevertheless, how there has not been a unique model equally shared neither throughout time nor by all the universities. The curriculum reforms have been relatively numerous due to several reasons: the non-existence of a previously solid tradition in this field, the development of the academic and scientific structure for journalism and communication, the changes in the professional habits that have led to new demands in the labour market, and the challenges that new media and technologies have brought to our field.

The educational model in journalism has been changing, according to the different schools, between giving priority to common and mandatory subjects in order to provide a solid and homogenous background, or rather focusing on the different thematic or media specializations. Supporters of the first model emphasise the need for a solid scientific knowledge of communication, its processes and its effects on the part of journalists, whereas those that support the second model, consider that Schools should connect the students as much as possible to the real world that they will live in after their passage through the classrooms. Evidently, between these two poles there are intermediate visions that try to make both models compatible or to reach a balance of priorities. The high margin of autonomy that Schools enjoy regarding the design of their study programmes makes possible this disparity of models. However, all the new programmes, adapted to the demands of Bologna, need to be submitted to the approval of ANECA, who may put a stop to the excessively theoretical or practical-professional approaches.

As a result of these evaluations, ANECA published a report with some recommendations to the Schools of Journalism in 2006. Along with some organizational weaknesses, the report emphasised four main challenges for university curricula:

1. Lack of coordination among the departments involved in the teaching of the graduate subjects.
2. Insufficient manpower to face the new educational needs raised by the European convergence.
3. Scarce supervision of the internships that students carry on in the companies.
4. Disregard for the results of graduates, in order to improve and review the curricula.
In short, on the one hand, this report raises the concern about internal logistic problems at the universities, reminding the need to adopt a training model that suitably combines theoretical knowledge and professional skills. On the other hand, it also points out the necessity of tuning up the educational offer of the Faculties with the professional demands of the journalistic companies. In fact, the Spanish media companies have been, for years, demanding from the Faculties of Journalism a training programme that meets the professional needs of the market. However, it should also be remembered that those same companies often give little help to the necessary professional training on the part of the students and recent graduates. Not in vain, many of those companies do not consider their interns as students in a training process, but rather as totally trained journalists who, temporarily, take the place of journalists on their staff in exchange for harder labour conditions and a much lower salary.

While these problems are solved, a new trend that has recently started and that will probably continue is the specialized education provided by university master’s programmes. The initiatives from the professional or associative spheres have focused indeed in programmes of specialization through master’s – often in collaboration with universities and especially aimed at young graduates – and courses or seminars for practitioners. However, the amount of economic resources that the Spanish journalism companies devote to the continuous education of their journalists remains quite low.

In summary, there is a growing trend towards the rapprochement between the academic and the professional world, either through the presence of professionals as associated professors or guests in activities of the Schools of Communication, or by means of the close relationships that journalism professors try to maintain with practitioners and their companies. Time will tell if this process ends with a robust educational system for young journalists which, at the same time, meets the changing demands of the professional world.

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