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Introduction

A pivotal task for investigating mass media is based on searching for a common spiritual background which seems to be universal and convenient in absorbing information. Since media exist as a public institution gathering around them different strata, then the above spiritual background has to be searched within people's interests and needs. This background seems to be discovered in cultural frameworks which, in turn, can be observed through the very definition of culture, this term being one of the most complicated for scientific analysis.

Culture has been traditionally viewed, to a greater extent, as a public system of people's priorities within the process of manifold social transformation. Therefore, culture keeps inheriting the results of thinking spirit from generation to generation in a process of accumulating the social experiences of the people. It is worth referring, for instance, to the well-known 18th century German writer J. Herder who fairly identified culture with the nation, in the sense that each na-

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tion possesses its own unique national spirit, or culture¹. The standpoint in this observation is that culture consists of some important elements “encompassing” the spiritual backbones of society such as values, norms, beliefs, orientations and expressive symbols which in sum create the everyday mental and emotional realities of society.

Media seem to be an integral part of the material and spiritual cultures of any society since it has always been and still keeps acting as a tool of its actualization. Leaving media apart as a part of industrial production which has a certain self-price it is worth dwelling on media as a cultural entity being much more elusive from everyday observation. Nonetheless, without this context, media can never be properly understood in their effects and jeopardize being neglected as a cultural phenomenon. Through the involvement into cultural priorities media cultivate common orientations for people. Therefore, the role of the media is unquestionably immense in terms of shaping the “character of the nation” and of supporting or breaking down cultural and, correspondingly, political (as being dependent from cultural) stereotypes affecting people’s mentality. It is worth agreeing with McQuail mentioning the symbolic content or message of mass communication which is typically “manufactured” in standardized ways (mass production) and is reused and repeated in identical forms².

Following this, cultural motivations of society originating historically seem to be a very good background for understanding priorities of not only current media practice but also of the media centuries-old evolution. Why did this evolution go in a particular way and create specific media concepts existing in one or another society? This is an extremely important question to be raised in searching explanations of the media “make-up” and its historical background which enables us to understand the past and the present of media orientations. This also stimulates a very good priority for specifying how to make the media more accommodating to people’s minds and feelings.

During many previous decades, Russian media concepts including historic ones totally ignored the cultural approach. They were based on Lenin’s theory of the press defending the concept of overwhelming penetration of ideology in people’s minds. This theory undermined any different approaches towards the development of the information process. Those ones based on cultural priorities were regarded as being non-class-oriented and therefore evaluated very negatively. In turn, the involvement of this approach into the study process at universities was leading to a non-objective narrow evaluation of historic facts and events. Correspondingly, entire reality represented in the media, was regarded eclectically, even through the omission of some data from historic contexts.

¹ A. O’Connor, J. Downing, *Culture and Communication*, [w:] *Questioning the Media: A Critical Introduction*, eds. J. Downing, A. Mohammadi and A. Speberny-Mohammadi, London 1995, p. 8.

² D. McQuail, *McQuail’s Mass Communication theory*. 5 ed., London 2005, p. 55.

Media history at journalism faculties of Russian universities was traditionally absorbed by the ideological and propagandist concepts of educating journalistic cadres, and this was limiting the understanding of media history as an evolutionary process. Imperfection of this approach became especially obvious in the early 1990s when the communist ideology, albeit formally, suffered a defeat. Those years were noted with remarkable changes of the media landscape. New printing and electronic media appeared; management and advertising developed greatly. A renewed media activity stimulated discussions about how to teach media history to students. In addition, the priority question of how to teach media history was put on the agenda. This question especially concerned the history from 1917 onwards which looked most vulnerable towards the then political changes.

This article examines new approaches towards teaching a lecture course on “Russian media history since 1917” construed by common cultural priorities which makes more voluminous the context of media studies.

The Soviet media history: following the traditional concept

For many years the main priority of the above lecture course was Lenin’s theory of the press. It has been based on three basic principles relating to the state of the media: their party spirit, class character and their support of the consensus between the power and the people. These principles, in total, determined the content of the Soviet media as well as the specifics of their social and organizational work. Lenin’s theory was dominant for the evaluation of the whole media development. Therefore, journalistic activity being traditionally studied during the course had to be correlated to party decisions. Following this, one of the most important criteria of evaluating knowledge on this subject was an ability of students to memorize the texts of party documents. To successfully pass the exam on history of Soviet journalism every student had to remember the content of over 50 party decrees and resolutions.

Media, in turn, were regarded as “the party instrument”, and journalists were considered to be playing the role of “assistants to the party” (following the claim of Nikita Khrushchev). Stemming from it, a great deal of attention was focused on the study of party materials including materials of party congresses on media issues. Every student had to memorize in the Soviet years the content of over 50 party resolutions and decrees fixing the “behavior” of the press in different historic periods. According to the traditional perusal of Soviet media history another three issues also determined the context of the course which was caused by the dominance of the party ideology:

1. circulation dynamics of the press;
2. activity of editorial staffs aimed at propaganda and agitation;

3. works of the most prominent party journalists and publicists.

It is not unsurprising that the investigation of the media history during the Soviet period focused around the above issues. They made journalism as a creative sphere undermined by the formal development of the media process. Simultaneously, it undervalued spiritual orientations of Russian society which were considered as being insignificant against the background of ideology. Meanwhile, these orientations exerted great influence on the evolution of all contemporary political and cultural institutions of society within which mass media exist. It is worth adding that the above orientations always affected the vector of the national development. What is not least important today, they provide teachers and students with good reflections about what the journalistic profession needs to do in terms of gaining more public trust.

Dialectical links between the past and the present in the form of congruence of culture and politics were totally ignored in the process of studying the evolution of the Soviet media. Moreover, there was an overall perception that the Soviet media developed as though they had never been linked to their pre-revolutionary development, and existed without historic prerequisites. Sometimes it seemed that the Soviet media have been created independently from their frameworks which commenced long before 1917. Much effort was done by Soviet political scientists to introduce these media as being independent from the entire journalistic process rooted to the previous two centuries when the media evolution started and consistently evolved.

This paradigm was referring to reflection of the entire model of Soviet society and its politics — the concept that originated in the country immediately after the Bolsheviks took power and, in fact, rejected as superfluous the whole historical process of modification in Russian society. Thereby, history as a whole and the media history in particular were seen as broken with the past or, to be more precise in connotation, fully torn from the past which meant it could not elaborate a complete understanding of its history.

Did it affect the students of journalism faculties involved in studying media history? Certainly, it did. Having pretty good knowledge regarding the evolution of the Soviet media, the students were not able to correlate it with the integral evolution of the media process in Russia. Even more difficult for them was to be able to trace the development of the Russian media with media in overseas countries since no compatible skills have been elaborated.

Also, according to this background, some media titles and names of influential journalists were silenced due to their incompatibility to the adopted frames of the Soviet media development after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. During the course it was impossible to speak out about the emigrant and dissident press being a specific “field” of the native media but simultaneously existing beyond a “permissible” way of its entire evolution. Both of the media trends were re-

garded as being alien to the political culture adopted for university students in the Soviet Union.

This made for scanty content in the lecture course “History of the Russian media since 1917”. It is fair to say that it was traditionally focused on the interpretation of the media evolution in the very mechanical way and was construed from start to finish without figuring out the historic contradictions which became significant during the last century.

A renewal of the concept of media history: main priorities

In the new political conditions taking place from the early 1990s, the way of studying Soviet media had to be renewed. There was a clear necessity for making it more detailed and less streamlined especially as under the “developed socialism” the whole picture of the media evolution was painted in two colors: black and white. The most important course changes concerned three pivotal things.

Firstly, involvement into this course of additional historic stuff being left out before. It relates, for instance, to the media role in shaping a repressive mechanism in the 1920s – 1950s and the media engagement in political campaigns against different minded people (*inakomislyashchie*) as well as the development of the emigrant press in the XX century.

Secondly, is the reevaluation of the journalistic legacy of most Soviet journalists. It seems to be necessary due to contradictory nature of these people who favored the party political system and ostracized everything that came as a result of the limitations of “possible” thinking.

Thirdly, the enlargement of the course’s empirical background. In terms of the Soviet political hierarchy the names of some journalists turned out to be undeservedly forgotten. Yet, their practice can be usefully extrapolated into modern life and successfully “consumed” by a new generation of journalists.

The fulfillment of this multifaceted strategy assigns the above lecture course to the systematic understanding of media activity based on the idea that media history does not only satisfy cognitive interests of students and improves the level of their knowledge of the humanities but also enables to enhance the frames of the current journalistic activity. In accordance with this, the perspectives of conceptualizing the studying material become more realistic. Besides, congruent comprehension of native media history discovers certain outlines, too, following inevitable congruence of pros and cons which can be disclosed through this approach.

The Soviet media history like history of any other period looks as a reflection of the dialectical conformity and succession of events. This makes it necessary to peer at the media “make-up” taking into account a pre-revolutionary evo-

lution of Russian society. While ignoring main historic tendencies of the society's evolution it is impossible to imagine what role was played by the media in the process of construing the relationship between the state, the power and society which has always been fundamental for media research.

This approach considering the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary existence of the media as being unstoppable can indisputably be called as being new in teaching media history.

Along with it, the suggested concept lays down some pivotal points:

1. Any social occurrence or kind of social activity (including media practice as the parts of the both) can not be shaped spontaneously but have a long-term vector of development. The author's understanding of the Russian media evolution since 1917, thereby, is construed by historic observation. As a matter of fact, this evolution is treated on the basis of its cultural genesis characterizing both the entire development of society and the changes within the journalistic process.

2. The media activity is viewed in this regard as the integrity of the cultural development of society and its specific political interests assembled in the post-revolutionary period of native history. The activity of editors and journalists is thereby scrutinized not during the separate decades as it was traditionally within the frames of studying media history in the Soviet time, but according to an unstoppable consistency. An attention is paid to a long evolution of social and political institutions existing in the country. As a result, the inter-disciplinary character of this study course it becomes actual, due to the strengthening of its educative background and causing a bigger interest from students aimed at understanding of the problematic sides of any occurrence.

3. The subject's comprehension in this particular way is based on the overlapping of two independent categories: culture and politics. Such a polysyllable notion as culture is determined by the active transmission of social experience and social information. Mass media also participate in this process. The subjects of intrusion – an editor and/or a journalist – are not included in the statistical material only but as a priority of studying. Thanks to it, the course turns out to be more personified, and a historic reality is treated as a part of activities of individuals. Along with it, each of them becomes more visualized as acting in the certain political environment and permanently connecting with the power and society.

From the very beginning the most important goal was to find *a unique algorithm* enabling an investigation of media history following the evolution of Russian culture and politics. This algorithm can be called the *spiritual and political traditions of society* being openly reflected in the media content. Traditions which seem to be a specific memory of society enable us to imagine more precisely the standard of moral and ethical relations being created in society and specifics of the mass consciousness, and through them the media content. It goes

directly to the point that the methodological approach suggested within the frames of the given lecture course suggests the study of the Soviet media is not only as an ideological instrument of the power. Media seem in the first place as the social institution acting on the basis of historical experience and the political agenda of the day.

This background stimulates the shaping of a problematic field regarding the political power, society and the media. The relationships between these different elements have been significant and consistent during the entire evolution of the Russian media.

One of the main and specific Russian/Soviet traditions can be referred to as the *authoritarian nature of the political power* which has resulted in the dominance of the state over civic society which in fact existed in Russia for many centuries, long before 1917. The intention of the state to promote its superiority has been traditionally caused by the wish of the power to protect itself during numerous conflicts encompassing the country on the national and international levels. The authoritarian nature of the power stimulated the existence of the tradition of *collectivism* being inspired by the state and reflected in the idea of superiority of the collective over the individual. Collectivism, albeit not a democratic trait, was favored by society as a measure of protection itself from dominance of the state. Although the state pressure was comprehensive, the political development of Russia was not consistent.

In the pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods this development was stimulating one more picturesque tradition such as changing *conservative (long in time) and liberally oriented historic stages (of short duration)* determining the relationship between the state and the power, on the one hand, and the media on the other one. For the greater part of the historic evolution, the media were thoroughly affected by strict political censorship but periodically they got a “breath of air” that was shaping the uniqueness of their content. In the meantime, it is impossible to call the above indulgencies of the authoritarian powers as the liberal periods (in a classical connotation). The changes from the very beginning were promoted from “above” which was different to Western countries where the changes were stimulated from “below” through open disputes in public places. Moreover, in Russia the power could at any moment refuse or refrain from adhering to political decisions made before that, and the lack of civic society in this country made these changes vulnerable and inconsistent. Therefore, regarding this situation the definition of “liberally oriented stages” in the course of political evolution looks more appropriate for understanding how the state/society relationship developed in Russia than the notion of “liberal periods” which, in fact, have never been practiced in Russian history.

The above traditions do not deny other evidence of social and political development of society which, affect the state of the media too. Nonetheless, paying attention to the above three obviously creates a common background for

sorting out empirical stuff and making observations of the entire media process. Besides, the integrity of these traditions enables us to imagine the originality of the socio-cultural evolution of Russian society within which the media have traditionally acted.

The tradition of the authoritarian nature of the political power was indisputable after 1917: the media actively promoted the state interests and were organizationally subordinated to the current political system. In addition, during the Soviet period the state hierarchy was strengthened by the party ideology. The authoritarian frameworks of the political power towards the media were especially noticeable during the first stage of the Soviet power (due to prohibition of opposition publications and the creation of the powerful propagandist mechanism that resulted in making media more obedient to the state system). Along with it, under the Soviets the media mirrored party orientations which openly affected the content of an average publication and displayed a specific image of a hero the psychology of whom had to be part and parcel of the authoritarian-oriented mass consciousness. A long-term subordination of the mass media to the ruling power has connected the Soviet and post-Soviet periods and substantiated the idea why contemporary media are unable to overcome political servility and one-sided evaluation of the reality multiplied by peremptory judgments. It is followed by certain media content that has evolved for many decades before.

A collectivist tradition also became absorbed by the Soviet media exemplified in the media structure and the typical hero of journalistic publications. Following Lenin's assertion, expressed in making the Bolshevik press in the early XX century, a party newspaper had to be always treated as a collective propagandist, collective agitator and collective organizer. Its development should have been supported not only by professional journalists but also by non-staff (working class and peasant) correspondents. Correspondingly, the so-called positive hero of the correspondence and articles had to be "a man from the people", i.e. a worker or a low level party apparatchik adapted to the canons of mass consciousness. The media were actively promoting stereotypes of thinking. An individual being a "positive" person had to be exemplified as "collectively oriented", and his interests had to be fully correlated with the social needs of proletarian masses. A "negative" hero, in turn, looked adversely because he was disengaging himself from implementing collective tasks and was getting out of step of those who tended to fulfill the party decisions and considered the personal higher than the collective. Following these parameters in grasping and evaluating heroes of essays and reportages enables us to see a systematic character of the media transformation.

The pivotal idea of the above mythological concept is scrutiny of the change between the conservative and liberally-oriented historic stages in an evolutionary way. Attention is paid to the media development in the periods of the New Economic Policy (the 1920s), of the Khrushchev's "thaw" in the early 1960s and of

Gorbachev's perestroika. While analyzing different landmarks of the political and media history it is easy to designate common traits of their evolution. One of these traits is that along all the stages of evolution the media not only reflected ongoing changes but affected mass consciousness thanks to different forms of the relationship with the audience. The role played by the Russian media in the time of liberally oriented existence makes them unique against the background of the world media evolution.

Not less specific for the media process seems to be the period starting from 1991 when the course for shaping market relations was proclaimed. However, during the next two decades the Russian media did not find a long-awaited independence. Moreover, during this time they have been repeating the recurrence of their development taking place in the preceding years. The only difference between Soviet and post-Soviet periods is the economic dependence added to the political one. Admitting unique traits of the media evolution in the conditions of post-Soviet reality, the author sees a renewed situation a number of common signs which provided an evolution of the media process since 1917. In this regard, the study of spiritual and political traditions seems to be a key moment for investigation of not only the current situation but of the prospects of native media development. The above traditions can also build the emigrant press into the content of this lecture course which is of great importance for getting a complete understanding of the unique media process in Russia.

Owing to the suggested concept the course on the history of native media seems to be analytical and problematic. This teaching approach enables the elaboration of a world view position of students which seems to be necessary for them in terms of their current and future journalistic activity.

The structure of the lecture course

The above methodological trends define the structure of the lecture course. On the one hand, the lectures are construed on a particular empirical basis (with regard to studying historic facts and the writings of leading journalists), and on the other hand, they treat the media as being evolutionarily developed.

It is worth stressing that the formal frames of the course are defined by the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks but not by the early XX century or the 1917 February revolution. It was the Bolshevik's *court-d'état* which became the starting point for creating the principally new media system and shaping unique media content (with regard to a specific type of a journalistic hero). These things appear to be essential for the evaluation of the entire political situation and the specifics of the journalistic process.

Stemming from the above conceptual priorities of media history, the lecture course consists of eight main topics:

1. Spiritual and political traditions of Russian society as the basis of studying Russian media;
2. The Russian state policy towards the media in the early Soviet years;
3. The appearance of the Soviet literary journal;
4. Soviet journalistic process in the 1920–1950s;
5. The mass media in the period of the Khrushchev’s “thaw” (the 1950–1960s);
6. The mass media in the 1970–1980s: keeping legacy of the past;
7. The Russian media within the system of shaping new political relations since the early 1990s;
8. The emigrant press: following its evolution in XX century.

It is worth underlying some pivotal things. Firstly, the content of the lectures does not switch to the evaluation of reality in a so-called positive or negative way as it was traditionally for the previous years. It does not mean the lack of the author’s opinion on discursive topics; however each topic includes the analysis of party decrees and resolutions, articles by party leaders regarding media and also the journalistic material. This integrity enables an evaluation of each historic period as being many-sided, with regard to many contradictions. Observation of the relationship between politics and the media is regarded as being of paramount importance.

Secondly, each lecture is not simply bulky in volume but includes some levels of knowledge. In total, they give an opportunity to imagine the entire complexity of the historic process as a whole and its different stages in particular. Therefore, most of the above topics can not be taught in the traditional two academic hours and are divided in parts. For example, telling about the media policy at the first years of the Bolshevik ruling, it has to be kept in mind that the policy itself was a complex occurrence including the abolishment of the pre-revolutionary press and the appearance of the new media wholly supporting the Bolsheviks. In turn, the talk about the Soviet journalistic process in the 1920–1950s, a “make-up” of which was originated on existing political priorities, can be also divided in two parts. In the first part, attention is focused on peculiarities of creating a so-called “new hero”, the second part is concentrated on forms and methods of the journalistic activity aimed at the eradication of negative occurrences in public life. These two occurrences taking place simultaneously in writings of different publicists of the Soviet time, illustrate an extremely complicated nature of the then journalistic process.

A heterogeneous nature of this process showed itself during the media evolution in the 1950–1980s. These decades united the Khrushchev’s “thaw” and the Brezhnev’s stagnation. Despite an obvious difference of political orientations between the two periods, it is possible to discover common trends of the media development during these years. It also concerns the topics of media functioning in transition to a market economy in the early 1990s and of the emigrant press evolution.

Thirdly, the logic of the course affords an evaluation of journalistic practice more thoroughly. Since some journalists worked for many decades, then the new problematic/analytical approach suggested for the course, provides an opportunity to see the entire journalistic practice for the last few decades as being integral, being formed on the dialectics of social evolution.

The suggested lecture topics enable not only to analyze one or another historic stage and the media role during its evolvment. In accordance with the course logic, they give an opportunity to represent common evolution of the media process. This is of great importance because it correlates modern journalistic practice with media history. Following it, there appears an opportunity to answer, at least, two questions which seem to be actual for everybody who is involved in journalistic activity:

1. Can the modern mass media learn something from their past, and if yes, to what extent it is possible?
2. What traditions did the Russian media lose during the contemporary political transformation occurring since the early 1990s?

The new problematic/analytical approach on which the entire lecture course is based makes the students more certain about the future perspectives of the media in Russia. Studying a preceding media evolution lay the foundations for that.

Forms of reciprocity with the audience

The main form of the interaction with the students is the lectures. The latter, however, do not mean only the author's monologues. Non-standard methods are being used. They create a specific emotional background for treating the media history.

One of these methods is the stimulation of brief discussions between the students. Debates may be developing around such provocative questions as validity of rightness/non-rightness of the Bolshevik policy towards the press in the early Soviet years. Also, logic/non-logic of the changes in the field of the media under Khrushchev and Gorbachev as well as current media politics can be publicly discussed. These disputes promoted in the class, to the extent that they serve for stimulating the consciousness of the students.

One more non-standard form of teaching is holding music lectures. To the piano accompaniment, the author performances Soviet songs which makes lectures more vivid. These exercises can be regarded as being something funny but, to the author's mind, this effect carries a deep content sense. The Soviet songs were somewhat a specific reflection of the Communist ideology and morality which, in turn, were penetrating into the "fabric" of journalistic writings. The type of the song's hero in all times was very similar to the hero covered by the media. Thus, the use of the songs enables to better understand the peculiarities of media influence on society with regard that the both media and song's contents can be imagined as displays of the spiritual culture.

Conclusion

Investigation of the media content seems to be one of the most reliable ways to understand and evaluate the national cultural priorities. Therefore, it is of great importance not only to enumerate the facts and events absorbed by the media during their historic evolution but to endeavor to structure them in a particular consistency. Researching journalistic data with the context of a more rich use of cultural and political traditions looks very promising because it discloses the regularities of media development.

These traditions affect significant social groups tremendously and simultaneously can be seen as universal. By cultural tradition the author means the long-term existence of certain spiritual values thoroughly affiliated with everyday people's perception and being regarded by them as an integral part of their lives. Every tradition absorbs the fruits of social and political processes (in some way, at least) and indispensably unifies them in a single entity. As an extremely important priority of national evolution, the traditions illustrate the past, the present, and to some extent, the future of society and its cultural identity. They also turn out to be a very good algorithm of evaluating the media content priorities so that the media history could be better understood.

Streszczenie

Ucząc historii rosyjskich mediów: problemy związane z konstruowaniem nowego pojęcia kultury

Analiza treści przekazów medialnych wydaje się jedną z najbardziej niezawodnych metod umożliwiających zrozumienie i ocenienie narodowych priorytetów kulturowych. Badanie danych dziennikarskich w kontekście bogatego wykorzystania tradycji kulturowych i politycznych wygląda bardzo obiecująco, ponieważ ujawnia prawidłowości rozwoju mediów.

Te tradycje silnie oddziałują na znaczące grupy społeczne i jednocześnie mogą być widziane jako uniwersalne. Przez tradycję kulturową autor rozumie długotrwałe istnienie pewnych wartości duchowych gruntownie powiązanych z codzienną ludzką percepcją i dotyczących ich jako integralna część życia. Każda tradycja wchłania owoce procesów społecznych i politycznych i nieodzownie jednoczy je w spójną całość.

Jako wyjątkowo ważny priorytet narodowego rozwoju, tradycja obrazuje przeszłość, teraźniejszość i w pewnym zakresie przyszłość społeczeństwa i jego kulturową tożsamość. One także okazują się bardzo dobrym algorytmem oceny priorytetowych treści mediów, powodując, że historia mediów może być lepiej zrozumiana.