

István Palugyai: Training Science journalists in Hungary

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There are remarkable traditions of science journalism in Hungary. The first scientific popular periodical, the so called "Science Gazette" was published in 1859, 129 years ago and its present cessionary, which title is "World of Nature" is the oldest continuously published Hungarian printed matter. On the margin, and this is not a small thing, this has been the third oldest magazin of its kind in the eorld.

This is not coincidence, as the Hungarian scientific development rivelled the international forefront at the end of the last century at the beginning of the 20th century. The developing bourgeois civilisation procreated a kind of educational system from which emerged a generation of scolars, mostly making good use of their knowlegde abroad - owing to the unfortunate historical-political situation. To verify this statement here are some names and achievements which may not really known over our borders.

To popularize the science was glanced very important in dinamically growing country in the second half of last century. The greatest hungarian scientists abided by it in the press. After the First World War the importance of this activity decreased in the politically and economically weakend country. The next turn came with the communist regime, as the ruler ideology gave a significant subsidization to popularize the scientific knowledge.

Though it happened mechanically, it had doubtless achiements in this field. Like in other soviet model-countries they sterted with several popular science medias. There was a growing number of published educational articles in the daily and in the weekly papers, and in the electronic media as well. In the broadcast and in the 1958 starting Tv there have been made science programs. There was a need for experts, so lot of engineers and mostly teachers started to do it either in part time or in full time job.

Science columns came alive, which were censurized mostly in the fifties and in the sixties, so some western scientific achievements - like genetic, cybernetic and computertechnic was false interpereted. This pressure weakened only from the late seventies, and hungarian journalists tried to follow this developments. From the late seventies, early eighties some market mechanism has been felt in Hungary differently from the other eastern bloc countries.

Unfortunately this process led to decreasing importance of popular science. At the same time the first generation of science journalists, contemporay teachers and engineers slowly aged.

When started this occupation it has more attraction for them like their previous job.

Meanwhile the situation had changed. This type of journalism became lower paid, so even less youngsters chose this field, so this profession continuously aged.

As the political system changed papers with scintific profile expired loosing their financial background, which happened to be a state owned publisher or other social organisation. The state holded companies when bankrupted, the social organisations left without money and in the free market nobody find direct profit in this activity. Journalists, working at the expired papers and not been old enough to retire, changed their field of work or continoued their oroginal job. Very few could remain in a job in the science journalism or became freelanced. The political turn changed the position of journalists as a profession as well. Previously this kind of activity needed higher education in science journalism it was natural, since they arrived with some technical or scientific degree. Most starters in the seventies hd to obtained a degree in journalism too which counted to have university degree, althoug they did not get it in the university, since there was not such education in the seventies. The school ogf

journalism was operated by National Association of Hungarian Journalist, which was a social organisation with state control.

The political line was strong in this school, but otherwise it gave intensive professional knowledge to those successfully got through it.

After the system changed the papers proliferated and needed a lot of people, so much chief editors couldn't demand the university degree, so in the already free press there was a stream of people having no degree, failing the social prestige of journalism. Recognizing this fact communication courses opened on universities. Most of those finishing this courses, rather theoretical people, so papers and broadcasters can't use them immediately.

Recognizing that, great newspapers and the National Broadcasting started courses for journalists and some practicing journalists open their courses too. Some of them tried to integrate in university programs, yet they can't give an official degree. Despite this fact it seems to be a good business to train journalists in Hungary today, so many of them advertise themselves. The standards are mixed and the diploma doesn't guarantee the job.

The number of applicants is high, because the job in journalism means higher than average-income, and those without any kind of degree consider it a high status job. There is middle level journalists courses, which is absurd considering that eighteen-year-old youngsters without literacy, who failed the entrance exams at universities are rather sources of money for the organizers.

But what is important from our point of view is that there is not a world about science journalism in these courses. As if this field does not exist at all.

The financial background needed for science popularization has been missing till today. The economy developed in the last two years, but this is not that level of development, where the industry has interest of this branch of the press. So the remaining papers survive very hard, and this can be seen on its outfit. This is real disadvantage in the competition. There are few science programs on the TV networks as well. They are at wrong time without sufficient periodicity on the national channels and on the commercial channels do not broadcast this genre telling: it does not bring enough ads.

All these facts stimulated the only official organisation of science journalists, which was established in 1990 as an independent professional organisation, the Chamber (later Club) of Hungarian Science Journalists. We thought, that we have to make steps, otherwise after some years there will be no successor to continue this work. After years of preparation in 1996 we advertised the course in science and environmental journalism. We combined the ecology in the studio, because this topic in the press was treated without the essential scientific background. This also can be a reason, that the ecological articles did not get the respect according to their importance in the press in Hungary, or was treated as political matters, that leads to strong emotional charge and little objectivity.

In the transaction we had a partner, the School of the National Association of Journalists which is the best in the profession even now. They made the administration, a member of our Club organize the course, and it was me, who was the leader of the group. We had some financial support from the Environmental Department, but we remained independent in the content, we worked out the methods and the program. However this support gave the opportunity to decrease the fee compare the other course.

This was important, because our principle was to target with this topic a special group. We did not advertise the course among journalists, BA-s, economists. But we advertised it among students of universities and colleges in technical, scientific, agro, and medical field in the press, on the internet and through student councils and uni papers.

We planned the course for one semester, with an intensive afternoon weekly. The lessons were both theoretical and practical in two times two hours. The first course started in February

1996 and lasted fifteen weeks. The applicants went through an interview, which helped to decide for both parties.

In the program we had:

First week: Theory of communication, mediasociology, the structure of the press, the basic knowledge of genre.

Second week: Making news, the history of the press, sources of information and how to obtain it.

Third week: Relationship between science, ecology and the media. The suspicious scientists.

Without going in to all details some of the remaining titles:

- different level of popular science
- style and form mean articulation
- the journalist as a partner of the scientist and expert, and the psychological aspect
- science and publicity, how to build a partnership, how science controls the news.
- The students went through the genres: report, interview, analytical article, big science reportage in theory and in the practise
- The students had homeworks, which were analyzed together on the next occasion,
- Editing of journals from daily newspapers to magazines.
- Science in broadcasting and broadcasting practise

At the end of the course the students had to write a paper in a chosen topic, which was evaluated by a committee. The trainers and lecturers were mostly professionals (14) or researchers (10). Among the journalists we had a broad and great selection from the Hungarian media: the largest newspapers, periodicals, magazines, radio and TV.

On the first course we had 31 students. We can divide them on this way:

Most of them were originally biologists or teachers. There were some environmental engineers and physicians. Lifeless science (physics, chemistry etc.) was represented with fewer students.

From this group 21 students finished the course with success. Among them there were:

After finishing one of the students became editor, another press secretary in the Environmental Department, the third makes daily science news in the Public Television and two of them are working occasionally for daily newspapers and television.

The second course started in February 1998. We had not much increase in the fee, because we had the support from the Environmental Department again (the inflation rate was almost 20%). Evaluating the experiences the first course we made some changes. We gave more practise, had a more definite scientific and environmental line. Tracking special topic became more important. The students had more time for practise in the radio. They had a new topic: public relations. We put into the programs seminars and increased number of lessons.

The second course was advertised the same way like the first. From the 35 applicants on the interview we met 32. There were students with MSc-s and PhD as well, some of them also worked in the press.

In June 1998 21 students finished the second course. Their professions are:

From this group more students tried to get work in the press. From those, who did not work previously in the press, already nine have regular publications in daily newspapers and films in the Public Television. One of them got steady job at starting newspaper.

We recorded the lectures and now plan to edit and publish it. We have no such written educational material in Hungary, so it would be the first one.

We are preparing the third course right now. We hope that early next year we can start it and hope that it will be wellknown in the country. In the case that there will be couple of people after each course, there is an opportunity that the Hungarian science journalism will be renewed and in a better economical situation in the future, personal conditions for the science popularization will stand ready

Traditions of science popularization in Hungary

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|--|-----------------------|
| - flourishing period | 1850-1914 |
| - decreased activity | 1914-1948 |
| - communist subsidisation | 1948 - |
| - beginning market mechanism | late seventies - 1990 |
| - after the political system was changed | 1990- today |

Need for training science journalists

- continuously aged profession
- lack of successors
- keeping alive the continuation of science journalism

Situation of training journalists today in Hungary

- universities (communication)
- private schools
- School of Journalist Association

Professional background of students in the first course

Engineer in agronomy	1
Physician	1
Teacher	
Biology-geography	2
Biology- chemistry	1
Biology- ecology	1
Biology - P.E.	1
Biologist	3
Bioengineer	1
Chemist	1
Architector	1
Dentist	1
Geologist	2

Environmental engineer	3
Economist	1
Foreign Trader	1
Physicist	1
Cultural Organizer	1
Computer engineer	1
Horticultural engineer	1
Business administration student	1

Professional background of the second course

Chemist	2
Horticultural engineer	1
Teachers	
Biology	1
History	1
Biology - geography	1
Chemistry - physics	1
Engineers	3
Hygienic	1
Psychologist	1
Dentist	1
Engineer in Agronomy	3
Economist	2
Business administration student	1
Therapist	1
Physician	2