

RESEARCH

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INNOVATION PROJECT IN THE TEACHING OF JOURNALISM HISTORY

Proyecto de innovación en la docencia de la historia del periodismo

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RESUMEN

Este trabajo presenta, contextualiza y describe una experiencia docente innovadora en el marco de la enseñanza de la historia de la prensa y el periodismo en entornos universitarios. El diseño del proyecto, radicado en el grado en Comunicación cultural de la Universitat de Girona, parte de la constatación de diversas tendencias que inciden en los actuales estudios en Comunicación y Periodismo, la evolución de los perfiles profesionales y la relación entre universidad, territorio y sociedad.

Palabras clave: comunicación, digital, docencia, historia de la prensa, innovación, medios de comunicación, periodismo.

ABSTRACT

This work presents, contextualizes, and describes an innovative teaching experience within the framework of teaching press history and journalism in university settings. The design of the project, based on the degree in cultural communication of the University of Girona, is part of the observation of various trends that influence current

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studies in Communication and Journalism, the evolution of professional profiles, and the relationship between university, territory, and society.

Keywords: communication, digital, journalism, innovation, mass media, press history, teaching.

Translation by **Paula González** (Universidad Católica Andrés Bello, Venezuela)

1. INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of digital journalism in the last quarter of a century has led to the greatest transformation of the profession and of the media (Salaverría, 2019), which in turn poses significant challenges in university education in communication. This challenge is combined with the adaptation of university study plans to the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which has favored the rethinking of curricula in various ways and also the need to increase university-society dialogue and integrate it into teaching. (Benito & Cruz, 2005; Rubio et al., 2013).

Starting from this scenario, this article presents an innovative project for a module on the history of the press and journalism in the degree in Cultural Communication at the Universitat de Girona. The initiative, entitled *La història de la ciutat de Girona a través dels seus mitjans de comunicació* [The history of the city of Girona through its media] integrates these trends and aims to have an authentic and significant impact on the formation of future journalists and communication professionals. Through the generation of informative itineraries articulated on significant locations, students research and discover the history of journalism and the local press and create content about it, while mobilizing transversal skills with specific skills of historiographical and hemerographic research.

1.1. University teaching of journalism

Digital journalism is emerging as a sector in constant transformation to find solvent formulas when it comes to generating content and satisfying increasingly segmented audiences. Continuous updating, instantaneity, hypertextuality, interaction, and multimediality are established concepts. The diversification of the media offer and the synergy with other sectors of the new communicative scenario appear as two growing trends, to which university education must respond with curricula that emphasize specialization. The training of new professionals is aimed at “promoting new narratives that connect the reader/user with relevant information in a new and meaningful way” (Palomo & Palau, 2016, p. 189). The challenge, then, lies in combining the acquisition of the professional and ethical foundations of journalism with the understanding of the digital technological environment and the learning of its tools (López-García et al., 2017). At the same time, this process is part of a broader one, that of literacy in the digital culture of web 2.0, which transcends the use of specific tools to achieve “the significant appropriation of the intellectual, social, and ethical skills

necessary to interact with the information and to recreate it in a critical and emancipatory way" (Area and Pessoa, 2012, p. 20).

In the last decade, faculties of journalism have not only responded to the transformation of the profile of communication professionals but have also had to adapt to the new general university framework established by the Bologna Plan (Doménech-Fabregat & López-Rabadán, 2011; Rodrigo-Alsina & Lazcano-Peña, 2014; Sánchez-García, 2016). In the field of journalism studies, the EHEA has reactivated the debate between supporters of multidisciplinary training and supporters of a specialized one (Sánchez-García, 2016, p. 126). In most cases, the debate has been resolved with a balance between both proposals (López, 2012) and with the increase in practical-oriented subjects. The intense use of ICT, collaborative methodologies, and competency-based learning are aimed at guaranteeing "the employability of students, meeting the new needs that society generates" (González, 2015, p. 267).

Although this has been a slow and timid process (Salaverría, 2011, p. 138), innovation has become the main axis of journalism curricula. The common point of innovative teaching proposals is the search for the active role of students and their involvement and commitment in the learning process (Ríos & Herrera, 2017). However, innovation in teaching does not seem to be a relevant element for journalism students at Spanish faculties, according to a transnational study by Roses and Humanes (2014). Among the possible causes, the authors point out the lack of pedagogy on this concept or the overabundance of innovative experiences that do not contain, or fail to transmit, significant learning for students.

On the other hand, the process of adaptation to the EHEA entails a rethinking and intensification of the relationship between the university and society. Thus, the university is a polyhedral actor, "open to the outside and receptive to the economic, social, and political changes that surround it and that are defined from the interaction that is generated between people, resources, the environment, and the rest of society" (Ruiz & Fandos, 2018, p. 189). Whether based on notions such as knowledge transfer and service-learning (Ruiz & Fandos, 2018) or through university social responsibility (Gaete, 2012; Martínez de Carrasquero et al., 2008), the relationship with other social actors defines the role of the university itself and directly influences teaching and research. Therefore, the progressive imbrication of the university with its environment and the vocation to contribute positively to it must be part of the way teachers teach. This perspective aligns with the principles that guide the model that emerged from the EHEA and is key to achieving an active role for students and the acquisition of transversal skills: students are placed in dialogue with society and encouraged to learn to provide solutions to the problems it raises. It is about "bringing students closer to

reality so that the learning activity they carry out is as authentic and significant as possible" (Girona et al., 2018, p. 215).

1.2. Teaching journalism history in the digital age

In the current paradigm of competency-based learning, the subjects of media history and journalism are part of the disciplinary knowledge of the degree, as stated in the White Book of the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA). It is indicated that this subject must have as objectives to know the evolution of journalistic traditions, their topics, and their practices, to understand the nature of journalism in historical contexts, and to relate the debates, modalities, and outstanding figures of different times with the current state of the profession (ANECA, 2005). It is a subject that, together with communication theories, "does not form technical training in professional practice, but rather aims to teach how to think, to develop critical thinking, to understand the world in which we live" (Rodrigo- Alsina and Almiron, 2013: 99).

A survey carried out within the framework of the White Book shows that knowledge about history is considered the least important of all disciplinary knowledge by students, professionals, and university managers (ANECA, 2005, p. 195). This assessment is detected in subsequent studies on training in journalism, which reflect the skepticism of students regarding subjects with a theoretical profile (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2013; Rodrigo-Alsina and Almiron, 2013). However, these misgivings are neither new nor exclusive to the Spanish context; In the eighties, it was detected in the United States that students did not understand the relevance of studying the history of the profession and that professionals considered it irrelevant (King, 2008, p. 169).

Various authors refute the skepticism around the historical content in university journalism curricula. King (2008) considers them neuralgic knowledge, "a body of knowledge that students must possess to have a basic education" in the journalism profession and thus "be truly self-aware of their social and political role" (King, 2008, pp. 170-174). Acquiring this knowledge leads to "weighing social relationships, professional assumptions, technological limitations, and cultural contexts" that affect the creation, transmission, and consumption of journalistic pieces in the past and today (Tucher, 2011, p. 552). This is why Sánchez-Illán advocates "placing the history of journalism at the core of university curricula" in journalism (2013, p. 325).

A fundamental basis for innovation in the teaching of the history of the press and journalism is the digitization of the historical press, which has not only had an impact on research but also teaching (Eiroa, 2008). Having a growing number and variety of easily accessible historical headings on the web increases the attractiveness of learning

subjects on the history of journalism, by making it possible to diversify teaching, combining master classes with practical orientation sessions in which students seek, analyze, and write from the press consultation of the past. According to Sánchez-Illán, in Spain, the teaching of the history of journalism has "very actively embraced new media technologies, as tools and also as sources" (Sánchez-Illán, 2013, p. 329). However, a study by Méndez-Muros (2014) clarifies that journalism students perceive a lower and less diverse application of digital technology in the subject of History of Journalism compared to other subjects in their degree.

In recent years, several innovation projects have been generated within the framework of this subject, such as those proposed by Baena-Sánchez, using theater "as a collaborative learning method" (Baena-Sánchez, 2015, p. 159) and implementing the journalism-action for the preparation of an "informative report of historical interest on the origin of journalism" (Baena-Sánchez, 2019, p. 1712); the project led by Rubio for the creation of teaching and didactic content by students, later collected on a website on "media memory" (Rubio-Moraga et al., 2018); or that of De Haro, where students create podcasts or audiovisual pieces in groups around topics of journalism theory and history (De Haro, 2020). All these initiatives share an approach that combines theoretical content with an active and critical role of the students to favor a process of autonomous and competent learning from the initiation of research in the history of the press and journalism. Despite its interest, the number of experiences detected is still low, which suggests a wide margin for teaching experimentation.

2. OBJECTIVES

Having exposed the current situation of university studies in journalism, with special attention to the teaching of the history of the profession and the dissemination of journalistic heritage, we establish the following objectives of the teaching proposal:

The first objective is to achieve the acquisition of knowledge about the history of the press and journalism, both nationally and locally.

The second objective is to generate a propitious framework for learning on these issues based on competencies, in which knowledge and know-how are integrated.

The third objective is the generation of an informative product, in the form of interactive itineraries, about the local journalistic heritage aimed at the general public.

3. METHODOLOGY AND MATERIAL

3.1. Presentation and context of the subject

The teaching innovation project is developed as a module of 6 ECTS credits of the subject Language and media II, in the third year of the degree in Cultural Communication. The class group is made up of 38 students and teaching and coordination are carried out by two professors

from the Department of Philology and Communication. In the teaching guide of the subject, the transversal competencies "Communicate orally and in writing" and "Teamwork" correspond to the module, as well as the specific competencies "Analysis of the main written, audiovisual, and digital media", "Analyze the different journalistic genres from various perspectives: academic, professional, and critical", and "Apply different levels of reading to different sources of information". The learning outcome that is expected of the student at the end of the module *La història de la ciutat de Girona a través dels seus mitjans de comunicació* is the "Creation of a historical account from journalistic sources".

The teaching methodology proposed to achieve the learning objectives contemplates the combination of two types of face-to-face sessions, master classes, and seminars, besides autonomous work outside the classroom. In the paradigm of learning by competencies, the master class obeys the purposes of "facilitating the understanding of complex concepts", "fostering attitudes of the approach of the students", and "providing (...) keys of understanding of the fundamentals in which a discipline is established" (Rodríguez-Sánchez, 2011, p. 88); all this avoiding the classic unidirectional and merely expository scheme to seek the participation of students in the construction of knowledge. These theoretical profile sessions are the basis for the seminar sessions. In them, the students, organized in 8 teams of 4-5 members, search for information, mobilize resources and knowledge, and solve problems, key skills for future information professionals, so the seminar is a teaching method that is especially suitable for Journalism or Communication degrees (Arráez-Betancort et al., 2011).

The structuring of the class group in small teams is not only due to the complexity and extension of the task. The main reason is the creation of a learning network, an "online learning environment that helps its users to develop their skills by collaborating and sharing information" (Sloep & Berlanga, 2011, p. 60). This organizational methodology is based on the participation and collaboration between all the parties involved – teachers, students, and other agents– so that each project constitutes a unique framework adapted to its context. The network structure encourages a higher level of intragroup interaction and feedback (Gewer et al., 2014).

3.2. Organization of evaluable content and activities

In the preparation of the subject, the teaching team defines and organizes the thematic blocks in which the teaching of the master sessions and those that make up the itinerary are structured. Starting from reference literature on the history of the press and journalism in Spain (Fuentes and Fernández, 1997), Catalonia (Guillamet, 1994), and Girona (Costa, 2003), the following periods or blocks are established: 1) from the origins to 1868; 2) from the Revolution to the Restoration; 3) ideological press, the weight of tradition; 4) from the Renaissance to Noucentisme; 5) from the First World War to the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera; 6) the Second Republic and the Civil War; 7) the Franco regime, and 8) from the Democratic Transition to the present. With this

proposal, the main transformations and structural factors that have shaped the activity of journalism and the press in Spain are contemplated from their concretion in the closest and most recognizable environment for the students; in this case, the city of Girona. In this sense, the module works with a historical and conceptual framework that can be adapted to any other urban context.

The type of evaluation of the module tasks is continuous and formative, since it occurs throughout the learning process and stimulates it with constant feedback (Hernández, 2012). Although the subject is oriented toward the generation of a specific product, the interactive itinerary, its complex elaboration requires that the evaluation be carried out gradually as each group develops its work, so that teachers can monitor progress and indicate eventual corrections or improvements. This feedback is carried out both during the preparation of the materials and in the evaluation of the partial tasks that make up the final product. In this sense, the module contemplates various evaluable partial practices, which each group must complete incrementally until the assembly and generation of the itinerary.

These practices, whose added value makes up the final grade for the module, consist of a description of the historical context of the corresponding period (10%); the creation of a small dictionary with the most significant terms, profiles, and events (10%), a hemerographic record of the selected media (10%); the analysis and commentary of the informative pieces (20%); conducting and presenting in writing and on video interviews with experts and/or testimonies of the period (20%); the selection of locations for the itinerary and the writing of its description using the previously worked materials (20%), and the generation of the itinerary, with a text and a short introductory video (10%).

3.3. Work environment

The design of the teaching project requires a face-to-face and virtual work environment, accessible from the center and outside it with any device and that facilitates the tasks of creating, editing, and sharing content. At the same time, it must allow the generation of metacognition teaching spaces to reflect and consolidate content, besides enabling a careful review with constant monitoring and evaluation (Kieser & Ortiz-Golden, 2009). The chosen platform has been Google, since its offer of applications and tools encompasses the entire process developed in the module, from the creation of the virtual workspace in Drive to the generation of itineraries, through Maps, and their public dissemination through Sites. The use of these applications has been common for years both among journalists and among students (Meneses, 2009). Specifically, the Docs tool provides a series of functionalities of special relevance for collaborative learning: it facilitates and enhances the exchange of ideas and the

continuous generation of knowledge; it contributes to increasing the commitment to the task, and overcomes the space-time limitations of face-to-face group work, as well as allowing teachers to monitor the progress of the tasks (Sanz, 2013).

As for the sources to obtain the information on which to support the story of the itinerary and obtain the elements to structure it, the module mainly benefits from the historical newspaper library digitized by the Girona City Council, through its archive service. It is a database that contains the majority of periodic publications of the city from 1793 to 2019 and that allows advanced searches based on terms and chronological parameters². The tool makes it easier for the student to "directly access the object of study, the raw material of the history of journalism" (Eiroa, 2008, p. 2) and encourages autonomous learning, for which the teacher must adopt a role "as a guide and counselor" in the process of discovering relevant historical elements (id., 4).

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1. Module development

The module is developed over 12 weeks. As has been pointed out, the teaching methodology combines lecture sessions, with the entire group in a single classroom, and seminars, in which the class is divided into two, with each teacher in charge of three teams. In the classes focused on the presentation of content, issues such as the information process and language, news and journalistic genres, and the evolution of the figure of journalists and their social function are reviewed from a historical perspective. Likewise, it focuses on certain events, media, and significant professionals that every journalism student should know to understand the particular forms that the profession takes in a given context (King, 2008, p. 169); in the case of the module, that of Spanish, Catalan, and Girona journalism and press.

The seminar sessions are dedicated to training in specific practical skills, those that have to do with the search for and analysis of historical journalistic information, and to carrying out the different tasks contemplated in the teaching guide. In the first of these sessions, the teachers present and explain the virtual environment with which they work, organized through Google Drive, where each group has its own folder, which they can manage autonomously to manage collective work. Upon entering this folder, each group has a file with details about the characteristics of the texts and audiovisuals to be produced, the locations they must choose to put together the itinerary corresponding to their block, and an itinerary already generated on Google Maps as a reference.

² <https://www.girona.cat/sgdap/cat/premsa.php>

The groups prepare their preliminary materials in face-to-face sessions in the classroom and through autonomous work outside the classroom; the latter consists of archival consultation. All collected materials and crafted content are uploaded to the Drive folder. Students have read permission to view the folders of the other groups, so they can follow the progress of their task and see how the project as a whole is progressing. Teachers track, review, and provide feedback using the Google Docs comment feature, which streamlines communication processes.

4.2. Results and diffusion

The eight groups concluded the elaboration of their respective itineraries satisfactorily. The routes and the accompanying materials were inserted on a web page created by the teachers through Google Sites, publicly accessible and free to use³. Thus, the final result of the project constitutes a cultural cartography available to the entire population, whether they are residents of Girona or visitors to the city. A product with such characteristics responds to the current needs and challenges of digital applications to publicize historical heritage; it supposes an advantage of the technological possibilities (Grevtsova, 2013), and, at the same time, it offers contents endowed with historical rigor (Gómez & Quirosa, 2009).

The project was announced at a public event at the headquarters of the Col·legi de Periodistes de Catalunya in Girona. The dissemination of the website that contains the itineraries and the texts and audiovisual materials that accompany them has the collaboration of this professional organization and the Girona City Council. This interrelation between training centers, professional entities, and administrations has a direct impact on the teaching of the module and allows the results of the learning process to circulate beyond the academic field and constitute an exponent of service-learning (Ruiz & Fandos, 2018).

4.3. Evaluation of the experience

To evaluate the impact and interest of the module project among the students, a discussion group was chosen. In pedagogical research, this tool provides evidence of the experiences of students and facilitates the transmission of opinions and perceptions thanks to a structure closer to dialogue than to questioning and the generation of an informal environment that stimulates feedback (Winlow et al., 2013, p. 2).

We proceeded following the model proposed by Steinert (2004, p. 288). The teachers responsible for the subject stated that they had held a discussion session in the first class of the module and remembered it in the last; Before the end of the semester, a

³ <https://itinerari-mitjans.csii.cat/>

Doodle form was sent to set the date of the celebration according to the day of greatest availability of the students; a script with open questions was designed to structure the conversation; the one-hour session was held, during which the teachers wrote down the opinions and evaluations of the students; At the end of the session, the key points were validated with the participants.

The perceptions collected are grouped around three axes: preparation and resources, development and dynamics of the subject, and impact on training. The students highlight the added value represented by the generation of a product that transcends the space of the classroom and the university but point out the lack of preparation, especially in historical knowledge, to be able to deliver texts of greater quality and depth. Regarding the workload, they consider that it may become excessive, and point to the possibility of increasing the number of credits dedicated to the module. The use of the Google environment, with which most students are familiar, is considered appropriate for group work. From the comments, it can be deduced that the impact on training is positive, by allowing creative development and with a notable degree of autonomy of the information and knowledge compiled by the students themselves throughout the subject.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The teaching of journalism is in a process of constant adaptation to a scenario of profound transformations, both in the technological and social role as well as in education, from the paradigm shift towards learning by competencies established by the EHEA (González, 2015; Rios & Herrera, 2017). In this context, teaching innovation is essential to update knowledge and skills that respond to the needs of the media and society (Palomo & Palau, 2016); therefore, it must be applied comprehensively to academic curricula to educate future professionals in the key skills not only of journalism, but also of the digital environment in its technological, intellectual, and ethical dimensions (Area & Pessoa, 2012).

The teaching innovation proposal *La història de la ciutat de Girona a través dels seus mitjans de comunicació* starts from the consideration of the importance of the history of journalism as a neuralgic element of learning the profession (King, 2008) and its impact on the development of professional identity (Tucher, 2011). At the same time, the methodology responds to the nature of competency-based learning and current pedagogical trends, which place the student as a central actor and responsible for regulating their learning process; In this sense, the acquisition of knowledge has been produced proactively, with the students being in charge of searching and selecting informative and documentary sources to understand the elements of context and relevant facts from the history of journalism (Sánchez-Illán, 2013). The module is designed in such a way that students learn to link the main moments, events, trends,

and characters in the history of the press and journalism at the state level with the concretions that these have had at the local level. Thus, it is adaptable and replicable to cities and regions that have a notable tradition in local press and journalism, to which it offers, as a result, a historical dissemination product prepared with academic rigor (Gómez & Quirosa, 2009).

The module is linked to other proposals in the line of renewing methods to transmit knowledge about the past of the media and the practice of journalism (Baena-Sánchez, 2015; 2019; De Haro, 2020; Rubio-Moraga et al., 2018). The common element of these projects is their orientation to promote deep and perceptible learning for students, which at the same time gives them knowledge and skills for their professional careers. Therefore, they overcome two of the limitations indicated in the introduction to this article: they constitute an exponent of significant teaching innovation that is well valued by students, as opposed to many others (Roses & Humanes, 2014), and they address the teaching of the history of journalism and the media in a stimulating way, making students consider positive and useful a subject traditionally relegated in their scale of preferences and priorities (Casero-Ripollés et al., 2013; Rodrigo-Alsina and Almiron, 2013).

The development of the module presents several limitations, observed by the teaching staff and collected through a focus group dedicated to the evaluation and comment of the experience by the students. Although the general perception is positive, elements for improvement are detected, which fundamentally point in two directions: better planning and more preparation of teachers for the design of innovations, and the need to increase the basic knowledge of students so that they perceive themselves competent in searching and interpreting historical documentation. It becomes clear that it is necessary to continue the path of innovation in the teaching of the history of journalism since it manages to stimulate the interest of students and facilitates the assimilation of fundamental knowledge for professional practice.

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