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Abstract: This study is structured on two levels, because it aims for two combined goals. On the first level we find the scientific description and significance of an educational activity, since the students have been instructed to collect information and to redact a communication product as similar as possible to a journalistic investigation. The theme was the following: how much do beggars in Timisoara earn. On the same axis, students were encouraged to use their own electronic equipment (digital mobile phones, tablets, laptops, video recorders). On the second level we find the selection of relevant information about the beggars' situation in Timisoara, about their incomes and also about their specific and individual situation. Special attention was given to the communication texts used by the beggars to interact with potential donors, thus fulfilling various objectives: 1) students had the opportunity to act as real professional journalists and to produce communication products publishable by any respectable editorial; 2) a practical didactic activity with results rating much higher than the ones currently being lectured; 3) a closely real image of begging activities in Timisoara, accomplished with diverse but convergent approaches.

Keywords: *communication research, investigative journalism, beggars, students, money, social research, educational practices.*

Introduction

Postmodernity brings into question social values, opening an analysis in a new context, but also of the used methods of this evaluation. The perspectives opened by postmodernism are situated beyond fragmentary, individualism and relativism that characterize the phenomenon (Paton, 1996) asking for an morally appropriate discourse (Baumann & Tester 2001, p. 54). In this context, a social reality like begging is investigated approaching journalistic techniques of making communication products. In postmodern society, mass-media is a domain of provocative transformations (Christians, 2011), some of them migrating in education studies.

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Mass media is recently being subjected to a large variety of pressures; there is a risk of professional identity loss. Between specialists, certain published genres show a reduction in frequency; here we can mention investigative journalism. There are multiple causes, at least in Romania: media crisis, digital media pressures, administrative and political pressures, lack of human and material resources to reify investigation products. A particular case is represented by the low number of journalists preoccupied to undertake investigations (Hellmueler & Mellado, 2015). From documented sources, many editors reckon that journalism study graduates are ill prepared for the challenges of the profession, serious matter to consider (Pardue, 2013), especially when listing and acknowledging the elements of investigative journalism. Considering arguments above, it is not surprising that reporters resort to intermediary genres, as the semi-investigative journalism (Poler Kovačič & Erjavec, 2011).

In this context, the role of profiled schools to form professional identities for the future journalists is a difficult one, especially when discussing subjects to divulge information that for one reason or another it is recommended to remain hidden (Birnbauer, 2011). However, efforts to revive investigative journalism in schools and practised journalism are considerable (Bacon, 2012; Richards & Josephi, 2013). Postmodern culture discussed social and ethic significant aspects, including the media, the way that major events in community are communicated to public. The trust in traditional media will disappear gradually, without existing a growth in new media (new, digital, citizen or social) (Timberg, 2015). On the opposite, this shall amplify fragmentation and postmodern relativism.

Professional identity is an important element, being tenaciously constructed depending on the success brought by these activities (Fredriksson & Johansson, 2014). Within this context, the challenge for an important number of students is to assume the role of professionals of journalistic investigation, doubly aiming for: 1) training professional abilities for investigation, 2) collecting concrete data regarding the begging phenomenon in Timisoara. As expected, the proposed theme had a high emotional impact, surpassing the average course in the educational process, where emotion is a current phenomenon (Arpiainen et al., 2013). In this case, the students had to face certain educational challenges that force them out of the regular working spectrum and in exceptional situations, high impact situations, similar to other events in social living, as for instance accidents (Lu, Yang, Ye, Lei & Mahmood, 2015). Considering this, students

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have been closely monitored in their activity in order to avoid frustration accumulation and thus avoid hindrances in fulfilling their tasks (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015).

Beggars, the ones that demand public mercy, to emulate a less harsh phrasing, are a constant presence in public spaces of large cities, preponderantly in the cities with a higher living standard, higher income, and cities with dynamic productive and commercial activities. From a legal standpoint, begging is forbidden, although fines and punishments are of a lax nature. Sometimes authorities caught begging, but generally, it is a tolerated phenomenon by the authorities, considering, that at least in Romania, a large category of individuals are unemployed or earn modest incomes, basically living in poverty. Poverty and begging are not to be confused, however they do represent concrete manifestations of social vulnerability (Cojocaru, 2005, 2006).

The role of investigative journalism is to underline non-legalities, showing the bad elements of society are very important (Waisbord, 2002). Investigating how beggars earn their income is a legitimate subject for a journalist, exposing profiteers; all in the effort to make the general public understand the phenomenon (Olesen, 2008). People who offer small sums of money or products do so out of compassion and they are partially right, some of the passer bys wish for beggars not to be a part of the scenery. Studies regarding social cohesion also undertaken in other countries show that these individuals or rather being rejected in areas where they appear (Orgambidez-Ramos, Borrego-Ales, Relinque-Medina, Dominguez-Gomez & Vasquez-Aguado, 2015).

Beggars do not form a unitary category, they are characterised by a great variety of individuals. One of the first partitions can be drawn between the ones that directly appeal to public mercy, soliciting money, valuable objects, often satisfied with something to eat or drink, or even items of clothing or footwear and the second category, represented by individuals practicing marked begging in various forms. Some of the persons present low value products (flowers, toys, cosmetic products, calendars, books and other), objects which they try to sell. In some situations, on the streets or other well-populated areas we find individuals with artistic sense, singing and/or playing an instrument, expecting rewards for their performances. Evidently, a low number of them are talented. There are cases of different associated facts with the beggar phenomenon, for instance, minor presence on the streets, sometimes of very young ages. Other identified associated

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antisocial behaviours range from implication in crime to theft and prostitution.

Timisoara is one of the important cities in Romania and is located in the western part of the country. Timisoara is the spark location for the Romanian Revolution in December 1989. It is a cosmopolite city and represents an interest point for internal migration even before 1989, various individuals from different corners of the country chose to settle here to live and work on accounts of it being a prosperous area, citizen income is higher than in other comparative areas of Romania. In these conditions, the high beggar number should not surprise. It is a social phenomenon with a challenge for the future journalists, context in which the students are guided to investigate (Sandu, 2017). Their activity has entailed communicating with beggars to collect as much data as possible and redacting an adequate journalistic product, containing text, pictures, audio and video material.

Student activities were undertaken on two coordinates: didactic and profession. It started off from the necessity that students complete actual journalistic products on a professional redacting level, of high quality. Following along the lines of Donche, Endedijk & Daal (2015), the coordinating teacher has also faced a challenge, intending to find new work techniques to help the future media and social communication professionals, more easily develop abilities to solve present of future difficult situations in the work place. A stereotypical approach of depicting social reality, as the one often present in mass-media was avoided (Luca, Filipeanu, Anton, Cananau, Luca & Anton, 2016), rather preferring to spark real interest for individuals in difficulty by highlighting social reintegration possibilities.

When performing their data collecting and redacting the investigation, students have been encouraged to utilise the available electronic equipment (even if some of the equipment is no longer up to date or specifically designed for such professional activities). Activities were focused on furthering the following: data collecting by writing a didactic project (journalistic investigation), a professional communication product for a wide-audience appeal, as well as primary data collecting to be used in a future social research. Especially interesting was the manner in which emotions resulting from interacting with individuals on the outskirts of society, possibly aggressive and revolting through looks, dress, smell and behaviour were administered (Grover, 2013). Living on the edges, it is possible that some of the beggars present major integration problems, manifesting *personality disorders* (Ciubara, Chirita, Burlea, Lupu, Mihai, Moisa,

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Untu, 2016). The didactic experiment resulted in fixed knowledge and perfecting communication abilities, surely helpful to our future journalistic communication professionals, facilitating the use, making the process more efficient.

Approach and methodology

The study wants to answer the following questions: 1. In the context of postmodernist distrust in research, is there any method of investigating the begging as social phenomenon? 2. It is possible to collect valid information about beggars and their revenues? 3. In what way these type of field research can complete the educational ground of students? 4. Can we use the results of research for the conception of quality communication content?

Participants: 73 second-year Journalism, Philosophy and Communication Science Department students at the West University Timisoara. For gathering and interpretation of data, there were use the following techniques: observation, interview, content analysis and case study. These are specific journalistic techniques, moreover investigative journalism, as they do occupy and important corner in the communication science sector. Specifically adapted and nuanced, they are widely used in social sciences; field specialists underline how their separate or combined usage can bring about good results. The author Vasile Miftode proposes a hierarchization of the investigation techniques used in social fields, the observation being mainly technical in sociological perspective, and the interview in psychological approaches (Miftode, 1995, 48). All of the aforementioned have been taken into account when deciding student activities and used techniques.

The observation has been utilised by the participant students to identify the individuals appealing to public mercy. They were instructed to observe distinguishing characteristics in such individuals: overall look, posture, waiting attitude, without gesturing or holding out a hand, inscribing messages or calling them out to solicit donations. The students were also able to observe donor attitudes as well as the attitudes of those interacting with the subjects or avoiding them.

The interview technique was the one used when directly interacting with the beggars to collect information, but also made use of when relating to authorities. The semi-structured interviews had three clearly stated questions: 1) how much does a beggar earn per day; 2) how do they spend

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the money; 3) problems with authority representatives' as much as private persons they come in contact with. Supplementary, the students were free to ask any other question to help them fulfil their goal, using their imagination and communication abilities in the relating process with the subjects. Fabrication attempts and presenting presumptions as factual have been clearly stopped. Creativity was welcomed only in the documentation process on the way to obtaining relevant data (Fulton & McIntyre, 2013). Students had to prove them ingenious and creative to actualize professional communication products, the educational system role is also one of stimulating and proposing such activities, facilitating a better integration in the workforce market (Allen et al., 2013).

After redacting, a content analysis method has been used to work over the communication products resulted from student investigation. Identifying problematic and positive elements was the next step, on to reworking less accomplished elements by revising documentation (either for the already researched data, or procuring new data), identifying specific, differential and common elements in the information collecting activity, redacting and editing presented journalistic products. Student debates have enriched content analysis and have been performed periodically over the entire duration of the project, meeting to set and verify action coordinates for the near future. When evaluating the final form of the communication products, the students have also made use of the analysis method.

Case studies have started off by devising an individual chart for each beggar, setting certain common elements in their activity, but also their distinguishing elements aiming to obtain as accurate a profile as possible to join the main characteristics of the Timisoara beggar phenomenon. Special attention was provided to recording their individual stories, determining the characteristics of the presented data, manner and content – discourse elements that beggars use to impress donors. Situations have been difficult and delicate, given that the future journalists had to go through fact-checking (Graves, Nyhan, Reifler, 2016) but also consider the special circumstances of their situation when supplying information, with a low educational level, preoccupied to tell a story which might bring them certain advantages and partially oblivious to the fact that their public image can be manipulated and simulated. Each of the following control elements had to be provided and specified for each individual case:

1) Name, age, gender, social status;
2) Place of birth (residence);

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3) Location where they beg, "working hours", reason for choosing that specific location and reason for resorting to begging;
4) Daily income;
5) Interaction with the general public and authorities;
6) Authority position regarding begging and the beggar phenomenon in Timişoara.

Activities

In the classroom, participants were presented and the theme and action axes were defined. Discussions ensued to clarify certain uncertainties and suggestions for the working manner were recorded, by guidance of the Teacher Clarity concept, essential in contouring investigation paths (Titsworth, Mazer, Goodboy, Bolkan & Myers, 2015). The students have undertaken field activities and identified individuals relying on public mercy; at this level discussions with the beggars took place. In most of the cases, the individuals have been audio recorded, filmed of photographed, with their consent, and thus usable in the final products. As control images and for their own satisfaction factor, some of the students have taken pictures of themselves with their interlocutors. Supporting the recorded data, written notes have been taken. Further on, the official position of the Local Police Department Timisoara was requested, although communication with this specific office has been difficult. Communication products (final journalistic investigations, used as marking projects in educational activities) were periodically presented in various stages of accomplishment, benefiting from counsellor and peer suggestions. We must mention here, the counsellors have acted more as mentors and less in their position as teachers in order to encourage students and have put some of the classical educational specific inhibitions and reservations aside (Hsiao, Brouns van Bruggen & Sloep (2015).

The communication products have been professionally redacted and edited, accompanied by suggestive pictures, page layout elements, mostly using a two-column layout. The final product has been the A4 page, to make it more printing friendly, graphic elements were depicted in either one or two-column layout (over the entire width of the page) aiming to achieve an attractive and pleasant overall graphic presentation for the reader.

The phases of redacting and editing the material were next, focused on neat phrasing. Students have chosen headlines and inter-headlines and

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article-introductions. The graphic elements (pictures) and captions were added.

Proofreading and improving followed, stage where the next elements were considered:

1. Discarding grammatical errors;
2. Discarding stylistic, logic and expression errors;
3. Verifying convergence between headlines, article introductions, inter-headlines, texts, pictures and captions;
4. Processing pictures and replacing the challenging ones, where needed;
5. In cases where needed, documentation has been redone or new data demanded;
6. Devising a final form and releasing it for publishing.

Some of the resulting publishing material is to be found in various published forms, in newspapers, printed press and also on-line, with minimal changes, in accordance with each publication profile. Considering this context, two new professional challenges have presented themselves. First – the publishing activity undertaken under coordination of professional editors, the second – adapting the content to its corresponding offered space, more restrained in actual publications and more generous in online posts. Students have had the opportunity to distinguish between old and new media, diversifying their experience through convergent approaches as well. To fulfil their tasks, the students had a timeline of two months, but summed up, their entire activity duration extending to less than two weeks. This signifies a reasonable timeframe for Slow Journalism, media category inclusive of such productions and communication (Drok & Hermans, 2015), but according to other specialist it "requires the time for deeper reflection and/or investigation" (Le Masurier, 2015).

Results and discussion

Only 62 students have been able to fulfil their task, accomplishing coherent communication products. Out of those, 35 have rated good quality, fulfilling professional rigors adequate to be published. Three of them have already been published locally in Timisoara. A number of 15 have been of mediocre quality, presenting various shortcomings, needed revising (in documentation and redacting). They were lacking in information (missing the answer to one of the main questions, deficient redacting, lacking images or use of images of very low quality). Twelve presented major deficiencies,

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being basically unusable. Some of them have been revised and rewritten, resulting in an acceptable material. The majority of the communication products forged in this practical instruction activity has had professional qualities that recommend them for professional publishing without alterations or with minor corrections and adaptations. Ensuring the activities, the students have acquired experience in writing and devising professional journalistic products, acting as journalists and developing abilities to interact with persons outside their relational circle and the capacity to interact with information sources, representing difficult human sources. They have utilised the ethnographic method for data collecting, exercising observation and interview techniques in the field. As to make the entire instruction process efficient, the students have been advised to utilise the data in narration, to tell the stories using all the important collected data (Osler, 2015).

Regarding the beggar phenomenon, we notice the usage of "appeal to public mercy", beggars being the ones to ask for passer-by mercy. The phrase "appeal to public mercy" is a less exclusive one, is softer and used mostly by authorities and in the academic circles. In their fields' activity, the future journalist students have identified two major categories of beggars in different locations in Timisoara or the neighbouring cities and towns. In the first category we find direct, visible begging. Those representing this category are to be found in high foot-traffic areas, populated by a diversity of peoples, aiming for the ones with high compassion sentiment and the more giving ones. The attitude is directly asking for material help (mainly money, less products, and if so, food). Other beggars waited to receive money, neither without directly asking for it, verbally nor by means of a written message on cardboard. They would just simply wait in strategically chosen places. The second category is one of hidden begging. Here we notice diverse strategies. One of them is selling small goods, toys, key chains, flowers, wooden spoons, calendars, notebooks, icons. Most of these products are of doubtable quality. Another masked form of begging is the offering of services: offering to help carry your shopping from to supermarket to the car or returning the shopping trolley to its designed location, guiding the shoppers to an empty parking space in crowded parking facilities, taking care of dogs while the owners are shopping and so on.

Correlating the information obtained by the students, we can estimate the income of such individuals in Timisoara, living on the mercy of

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others. The determinations have been made with circumspection, excluding the largest sums of money stated, due to obvious doubts. Small and medium sums have been confirmed by various sources, thus recorded values are as close to reality as possible. The income of the investigated beggars come around to 10 and 20 lei per day, on a lower level of the scale, meaning between 2 and 5€. There have also been instances where for some the income comes to over 100 lei, the equivalent of 20-25€ per day. Over the course of a month, this adds up to approximately 3000 lei - 600-700€. The aforementioned sums are significant for a country like Romania, because they represent a higher income than a school teacher, as an example, where the average salary is 350€.

Most of the participating students have made enquiries on the local authority level, most notable the Local Police Department Timisoara, institution, legally forced to handle the beggar phenomenon. At first, students have been met with reticence due to institutionalised inertia and provided little data and information, because of their low soliciting status position as simple students. After insisting continuously, core investigative journalism characteristic, the Local Police Department Timisoara has supplied them with interesting data, although wider in scope than expected. The students have found the following numbers for the year 2014: 1893 individuals without shelter or appealing to public mercy, 207 of which being minors at the time. Another figure that was supplied was the number of unjustified individuals in the city of Timisoara, namely 2172, mass that was advised to return to the original residence. The highest sum of money found on a person begging was 3500 lei, approximately €750.

Conclusions

The educational experiment has successfully reached its aim; a large number of students have come away with relevant work experience in their journalistic activity, on their way to becoming future communication specialists. They were able to manage their emotions in an adequate way, in order to fulfil their assignments. After getting over their initial abstention and in dialog with the beggars, they were able to obtain interesting information, often times surprising. The students have also found that a large part of the interviewed individuals were cooperative and not aggressive. In some of the cases, the students have found themselves listening to interesting stories, under the impression that their dialogue partners have been waiting to communicate with other individuals. However, in the

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instances where the beggars felt observed or disturbed by the persevering future journalists or social workers, they've reacted with a raised voice, but no instances or records of physical nor verbal abuse or aggression, students being advised to retreat quickly in the three instances where this was necessary. The reaction has been professional, thus imparting a professional ability to react in difficult situations on the students. When provoked to describe their emotions on the day when they started interacting with the study subjects and the ones after completing the investigation, the students have admitted to take part of a unique experience, and at the end of it, they stated a strong feeling of satisfaction, convinced that in the future they will be able to manage professional challenges with more ease. The students voices, as future professionals, were heard (Blair & Valdez Noel, 2014) in the conception of the media content when they carried out discussions with the other colleagues and learned from each other's experiences, but also by finalizing publishable journalistic investigations. Remarkable here is the *professional power*, concept utilised by Bundy-Fazioli, Quijano & Bubar (2013) as a functional element in practical educational activities, facilitating forming necessary abilities for students wanting to work as journalists in the future.

In the other plane of the study we mentioned that we obtained a coherent image of the beggar phenomenon in Timisoara, focused on the relatively large sums of money earned daily. Evidently, we add that this is an incomplete image, in need of further more detailed social investigation, but the preliminary data was of the fines and most accurate quality, obtaining publishable products, up to standard where professional rigor is concerned. Developing and continuing the social and educational experiment are two important points to highlight here, to see if for the future, the present recorded results keep levelled and to find the new trends and elements in our interest area. We also insist on a widening of the investigated social scope, by approaching beggars in other cities and towns, most notably, the ones surrounding Timisoara (Arad, Resita, Lugoj) in order to obtain data for comparison and contrast. Further research on the age and birth place basis is needed to determine the percentage of locals and outsiders. Another necessary element is a tighter and better relationship with the local authorities to discuss the eradication of the phenomenon and the support for the truly needy. In this context, future research requires the discussion and heavier involvement of the state offices and institutions, state public officials and also experts in the field of those living on the outskirts of society.

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