THE INFLUENCE OF THE LABOR MARKET ON EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BY PR-TRAINERS FROM THE UNIVERSITIES OF EUROPE, RUSSIA AND THE USA

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Abstract
This research analyzes public relations (PR) training methods in universities of Russia, European countries and the U.S. and looks at distinctions of the existing education approaches caused by different regulation and management practices in higher education. An important aim of the study was to determine the degree of universality or specialization of educational programs in different countries. The authors define whether the educational programs are predominantly the ‘PR programs’ in its pure form or the joint programs in ‘Advertising and PR’. To answer that question, they analyze the information about universities that have PR programs in Europe, Russia and the USA as well as the most significant factors influencing educational programs. The methods used for collecting the data include an analysis of scientific literature, a content analysis of Internet sources, multiple experts’ surveys of teachers and administrative staff of several universities. In the course of the study it was found that the differences in training of public relations specialists in Russian, European and American universities largely depend on existing educational standards, different ways used for university programs accreditation and the labor market demand. The analysis also shows that Russia, the United States and Belgium demonstrate different mechanisms of labor market influence on the training of specialists in the field of business communications. The existence of different mechanisms brings up a concern of comparability of PR education in these regions.

Keywords: public relations, specialists in public relations, educational program, professional standards, labor market, comparative analysis.

1 INTRODUCTION
The history and specificity of PR education in different countries need further research due to the following factors: the growth of globalization in the development of the PR sphere and the increase of multinational PR agencies, transnational corporations [1]. The training of PR specialists in Europe, Russia and the United States has national and regional characteristics which do not allow to unify its substantive and organizational directions. However, the problem of such unification have already been studied and formulated in the scientific field of research about the problems of professional training faced by PR specialists across the globe. For example, S. Celebi notes that the two the main problems in improving PR education in the world are the problem of choosing a single approach to assessing the level of PR specialists’ professionalism and the problem of training students who would meet the requirements of the PR industry [2]. E. L. Toth and L. Aldoory state that very little is known about the current state of PR education [3].

Public Relations area has always been linked to media and communication studies and mostly to advertising and journalism in Europe. In the beginning of the twentieth century, followed by the American example, there was mass development of the media studies. After World War II, communication and information studies started to develop. In the 1970s, the development of advertising studies followed. Finally, the 1990s marked the introduction of the digital media. At the same time journalistic and communication studies were developed in universities and higher education institutions across the world. The Public Relations area was a part of communication studies which was separated later. It is hard to get a full vision of the studies as their names have changed and they do not always refer to the same areas. Belgium followed this trend. From the 1960s, communication studies appeared in universities, such as the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, the Université Libre de Bruxelles, the Université Catholique de Louvain and Higher Education Institutions, such as the Erasmus Hogeschool or the Institut des Hautes Etudes des Communications Sociales. Journalistic studies as a
part of communication studies started to develop. Later, in the 1970s, advertising and Public Relations studies appeared.

In the 1990s, Russian universities faced the need to train specialists in new field of study for the current vocational training system. The labor market which was developed after the market-driven economy required marketing specialists, public relations specialists and advertising specialists. There was no previous experience of training of such specialists in Russian universities but it was obvious that having specialists in social sciences or general humanitarian background at enterprises is a temporary issue as the processes of institutionalization of professions require the emergence of appropriate vocational education.

Initially, academic training of specialists in public relations and advertising was carried out separately as it was largely determined by the development of the market. The huge impact on the Russian academic tradition was brought by the Western educational tradition where public relations (PR) related to the communication faculties but advertising — to economic faculties and business schools. However, the ideas of business communications management and accordingly the professional training in this area have significantly changed. The high degree of susceptibility to these changes was demonstrated by Russia, having created in 2009 the standards of the third generation where the educational program should combine training in advertising and public relations.

Thus, with the development of new market requirements at the end of the 20th century Russian universities launched educational programs focusing on forming PR professionals. During this period of time market required such specialists who should be able to use tools of public relations and advertising. In its turn, the vocational training system responded to these demands.

The longest tradition of the development of education in the field of public relations belong to the United States. This is due to the fact that the public relations establishment as a profession began in the USA in the 17th century. The first PR campaigns had political nature. They were developed as the technologies of pressure on the UK and only then they began to be used in business and social spheres. Since the beginning of the twentieth century PR has penetrated into all spheres of public life. Researchers call this period the era of PR establishment as a profession and scientific discipline. At present, there is virtually no sphere of activity left unattended by PR in the United States. As a special sphere, the activities of specialized PR-agencies are singled out.

Analyzing the changes in communication, Professor of Sorbonne Jean Pierre Baudouin, general director of the consulting group I & E (Paris) notes that in recent years the division of competencies between communication specializations has substantially decreased [4].

But, at the same time, a comparative analysis of the specifics of the regional labor market impact in the relation with Europe, Russia and the United States remains relevant because their requests are regionally different and, thus, determine the reproduction of differences in the training of specialists in the field of communications. It is important to analyze and record the similarities and differences of PR training in universities to understand how the labor market influences this training.

So far there is no common standard for PR education in the world. The difference in theoretical approaches and accordingly in the educational level of PR specialists, on the one hand, reflects market demands in each region and, on the other hand, builds a set of their professional qualities.

The lack of a common standard of training is also due to the fact that public relations is a theoretically and technologically developing profession and a scientific, educational discipline [5], [6]. Its content, stages and level of development largely depend on the historical and cultural characteristics of the region, the country [7], [8], [9]. There is no common theoretical approach in this area which has been shared by all scientists [10]. In the scientific discourse of public relations there is an imbalance between the practice-oriented and theory-oriented articles, in the favour of the first (approximately 80% and 20% respectively) [11].

The theoretical imbalance is reflected in the professional training of PR specialists. E.L. Toth and L. Aldoory write about the world’s trends of PR education on the basis of extensive research [3]. They found that different countries share the same difficulties in the development of “public relations” programs. These difficulties are related to the qualifications of professors, the lack of necessary resources, the cultural characteristics of countries that affect the understanding of public relations role, the requirements for the structure of educational programs.

Recently, scientists have paid considerable attention to the tie between qualification requirements and the development of educational programs [12], [13]. Considering the training in the universities of
different countries, it is important to focus on the skills set that is necessary for the PR specialist to work successfully.

According to The European Community Monitor 2016 European communication professionals spend 36.2% of their working day for operational communication which includes talking to colleagues and journalists, writing press releases and print/online texts, producing communication media, monitoring results of PR activities, organizing events etc. 27.8% of their time is devoted to managing communication activities and their team (planning, organizing, leading staff, budgeting, evaluating processes and strategies, justifying communication spending, preparing for crises. 18.8 % of a working day is spent for aligning communication, the organization/client and its stakeholders (studying business and social research reports, identifying organizational goals, monitoring public issues and stakeholder expectations, debating visions and business strategies with top management and other departments, developing scenarios, building legitimacy) and 17.2% is spent for coaching, training, consulting and enabling members of the organization or clients (on the vision, mission and other communication related issues as well as upgrading their communicative competence, preparing them for communicating with the media, stakeholders etc.) [14].

In 2011–2012 the authors of this article conducted a study of 250 specialists in public relations in order to find out what responsibilities they have at enterprises. In 2014 212 extra PR-specialists were interviewed in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg. Thus, 462 practitioners in the sphere of communications who work in business, non-profit organizations and government bodies have been interviewed. Among them 24.3% were top-level executives, 34.3% were mid-level executives and 41.4% were entry-level practitioners. As a result of these surveys, the influence of the labor market on the training of PR specialists in Russia was revealed using the example of Ekaterinburg. The situation in Russia shows that specialists in public relations perform various functions. Communication activity is represented in the following way: 69.3% of respondents are engaged in the development, work and editing of sites; 69.3% are involved in writing articles, press releases, reports of speeches; 64.2% are responsible for planning communication activities. In addition to this work, specialists in public relations perform the functions of advertising specialists more or less equally: the development of advertising ideas, concepts (68.9%); creation of advertising layout, booklets and other promotional products (60.8%). Public relations specialists perform functions for implementing other types of marketing communications in a less degree: carrying out exhibitions, presentations, events (67.0%); organization of corporate events (52.4%); preparation of the budget for marketing (41.0%). According to the data of this study, it is possible to conclude that a separate structural unit, where one can see the vector of the notion of public relations role is shifting towards the interpretation of this activity as one of the marketing tools for such companies.

Over the past decades in Russia, on the one hand, understanding of public relations necessity has been formed but, on the other hand, only large enterprises and government bodies are able to maintain separate structural units dealing exclusively with public relations. Small and medium-size companies are interested in hiring a specialist who have skills to carry out and manage all types of marketing communications in order to promote the enterprise and its products. This proves the fact that the vector of the notion of public relations role is shifting towards the interpretation of this activity as one of the marketing tools for such companies.

As a result, a university graduate is more competitive in the labor market if he/she has skills set in both advertising and public relations spheres. The ability of a graduate to use multiple communication tools also increases his/her opportunities to adapt to situations caused by financial crises: when enterprises reduce advertising budgets they prefer to support communication activities through less expensive marketing communications.

In the United States, by the end of the 1980s the two main roles of PR specialists were singled out [16]: a communication specialist who is the executor of already planned programs [17] and a communication manager who is responsible for monitoring, evaluation, development of a key PR strategy and is an expert in conflict management [18]. For successfully accomplishing the tasks, PR practitioners in the United States need to have a wide range of knowledge and skills. The relevance of the multifunctional training of specialists in the field of communications is constantly growing. PRSA in 2014 published the results of the study where 256 respondents took part. A survey of practitioners showed that the roles of PR specialists today are diverse: negotiator, policy adviser, brand manager, corporate communications manager (internal communicator), press agent. The roles of “negotiator” and “policy adviser” were identified as the most important in PR practice [19]. It is obvious, while
performing these tasks, there is no mixing of the functions of specialists in public relations with the functions of marketers and advertising specialists.

2 METHODOLOGY

The research hypothesis is following: in Europe and the United States educational programs in PR are dominating while in Russia the main focus is on joint training in Advertising and PR. The labor market determines whether it needs narrowly focused educational programs or combined ones. The levers of market influence are professional standards and public accreditation. In the education system, this influence is reinforced with educational standards.

In accordance with the stated hypothesis, our research was conducted in a following way: the information about universities that have PR programs in Europe, Russia and the USA was gathered with the help of aggregated Internet resources and Internet search engines. The analysis of the educational programs was carried out with the aim of finding out if the term “public relations” is used in the title of the program or if there are also the terms “advertising” / “marketing”. Based on this information, it was possible to define whether the educational program is a ‘PR program’ in its pure form or a joint program in Advertising and PR.

For the study of the factors influencing educational programs, the following procedures have been undertaken: 1) the study of professional standards in the field of PR: availability of professional standards in the country has been defined followed by an analysis of their content; 2) the study of the availability of public accreditation — whether it exists or not in these countries in relation to educational programs on Public Relations; 3) the study of common educational standards for PR specialists’ training — whether they exist or not in different countries, by whom they are established; 4) the role of the university in the implementation of the educational program — what structural unit of the university conducts training in PR, what terms are in the name of the structural unit.

Taking into account that the situation in different European countries may differ we have chosen Belgium to analyze the situation with PR education.

3 RESULTS

There are two official languages in Belgium and two linguistic communities. This makes the educational situation more complex. There is a differentiation in the academic and professional programs.

In the period from the end of World War II up until 1970 Public Relations was a part of communication and media studies with a focus on advertising and marketing. Public Relations has been offered as a professional Bachelor Degree program since 1970 at six institutes of higher education in Flanders and at eight institutes of higher education in the French community. The bachelor degrees have developed into master’s degree a decade after the bachelor degrees had been created. In the French programs the approach is operational with an emphasis on the practice and professional tactics, writing and presentation skills and the dimension of citizenship, whereas Dutch-language programs integrated certain managerial dimension in their curriculum [20] and combined PR and “awareness” (“voorlichting”). It should be noted that the bachelor programs in Flanders have recently opted for an integrated approach, bringing together PR (“Public relations in voorlichting”) and the communication marketing (“Commercial Communicatie”) under the banner “Management of communication”. For more information in this regard, it is possible to refer to the reports Quality visits organized in 2012–2013 by the Vlaamse Universiteiten en Hogescholen Raad (VLUHR), the Flemish Quality Agency (See http://www.vluhr.be/default.aspx?PageId=514). Dutch programs focus on the media and information.

Among 62 Belgian Universities and colleges about 38 of them offer programs in communications (See http://www.4icu.org/be/belgian-universities.htm). The main array of educational programs in Belgium is represented with two areas: “communication management” and “communication and media”. There is a great variety in names of programs “Communication studies” (40%), “Multimedia and communication” (10%), “Communication management” (30%), “Public Relation” (10%) and “Advertising” (10%). It is very important to note that none of the institutions has joint programs “Public Relations and Advertising”.

Although there are differences between the French and Dutch programs, there is a big emphasis on the international programs. Public Relations students are encouraged to go and study abroad for three
months and to have different professional training programs abroad as well. Therefore, they receive European or international accreditation. Foreign teachers and students are encouraged to teach in Belgian higher education institutions dealing with Public Relations. Several classes are given in English and there is a special program for foreign students. This applies to the French and the Dutch programs in Public Relations.

Until 2010 in Russia there were separate educational programs for PR and Advertising. Since 2010 all educational programs are implemented simultaneously in Advertising and PR. Currently there are no educational programs in PR only. In Russia, training in the major of “Advertising and Public Relations” is carried out in 191 universities.

In the USA, most universities organize training only in public relations / communications. However, it should be noted that some universities provide simultaneous training both in Advertising and Public Relations. Such programs are called: “Advertising and Public Relations”. The main array of educational programs in the US is represented with two separate areas: “Advertising” and “Public Relations / Communications”. So, 220 educational institutions carry out training in Advertising and 1480 high schools — in public relations / communications. The calculation was carried out by the authors in 2016 on the basis of site data “My College Options” (See www.mycollegeoptions.org). Also in the United States there is a great variety in the names of programs where the most used names are “Public Relations” (24 %) and “Strategic Communications” (14%) [21].

There is no any professional standard in PR or communications in Belgium. The final acquired competences of students are determined in consensus with the different partners (professional bachelors) but each university is free to teach the way they want. Universities are free to define their subjects because academic freedom is the key. PR associations also don’t play any determining role in curriculum development.

There is no approved professional standard of a public relations specialist in Russia. Currently, there is a draft standard prepared by the Russian Public Relations Association (RPRA) which states that the professional standard is developed in accordance with the requirements of the Ministry of Labor. The project is shown for discussion to the professional and university community. The draft standard emphasizes that public relations activities in the Russian Classification of Economic Activities (OKVED) belong to the subclass 70.2 “Management Consultancy” while advertising activities belong to another subclass. This immediately determines that the professional standard doesn’t have integrative nature and does not combine public relations activities and advertising activities into one profession.

It is indicated only that “knowledge of marketing communication tools” (advertising, BTL, digital, etc.) and “maintenance of communication integrity in various channels” (media, Internet, service, advertising, etc.) are important for a public relations specialist. However, this approach is too openly in conflict with the needs of a large number of employers. Association of Directors in Communications and Corporate Media of Russia (ADCCM) has proposed to expand the work functions of a public relations specialist towards carrying out works related to advertising and marketing taking into account the processes of integrating this professional activity with other marketing communications.

In the United States, in 2000 the Commission on Ethics and Professional Standards organized with Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) developed the current professional standard for public relations “Code of Professional Ethics”. Accreditation of educational programs in the USA is carried out by professional associations and certification of educational programs in public relations is the responsibility of the PRSA based on professional standards.

The analysis of accreditation of educational programs in the studied countries is provided below.

Until 1970, there was no special accreditation for Public Relations in Belgium and in most European countries. Public Relations studies were part of communication and media studies. In 1970, Public Relations became a separate department. Students usually receive a diploma either in communication with the specialisation Public Relations or in Public Relations. Students become Public Relations specialists once they graduate. This is standardised for Belgium and most European countries.

There are federal state standards for higher education in Belgium and in most European countries. The federal standards for higher education are similar in the French-speaking part of Belgium and in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

In addition to the state accreditation, there is also a public accreditation: there is the Agency for Evaluation of the quality of High Education (Agence pour l’Evaluation de la Qualité de l’Enseignement
Supérieur, AEQES) whose mission is to ensure that the curricula organized by the institutions are regularly evaluated, to highlight good practices, inadequacies and problems to be solved; to ensure the implementation of evaluation procedures; to promote, through cooperation between all components of higher education, the implementation of practices to improve the quality of education provided in each institution and etc. AEQES is an independent public sector agency, practicing formative evaluation based on a dialogue between all stakeholders within the Wallonia-Brussels Federation. Fully embedded in the European context, the Agency is responsible for assessing the quality of higher education and working for its continuous improvement.

There are federal state standards for higher education in Russia. All universities should use them in order to have state accreditation of the educational program. Students who graduate from the university which doesn’t have state accreditation cannot work in state institutions and enter the next stage of higher education (Master programs). For training on PR in universities there are federal state standards of higher education 42.03.01 Advertising and Public Relations (Bachelor program) and 42.04.01 Advertising and Public Relations (Master program).

In Russia, public accreditation only begins to be developed and there is not much influence yet. This applies to programs on PR education.

As for the United States, there is no common educational standard there. As we have already mentioned above, all training programs in public and private universities are accredited (verified and approved) in the relevant public accreditation councils.

All training programs in public and private universities in the US are accredited in the relevant public accreditation councils. Accreditation is carried out by private non-profit organizations designed specifically for this purpose. Control of the internal quality of the work of higher educational institutions is a non-governmental initiative. There are four types of accrediting organizations in the United States:

- regional accreditors;
- national faith-related accreditors;
- national career-related accreditors;
- programmatic accreditors (accredit specific programs, professions and freestanding schools, e.g., law, medicine, engineering and health professions) [22].

Each educational program is accredited only in terms of quality. In this process, professional communities are also involved. They provide recommendations on the content structure of the program curriculum but universities make decisions whether to follow these recommendations or not. Since the accreditation of educational programs in the United States is carried out by professional associations, the American Public Relations Society (PRSA) is engaged in certification of educational programs on Public Relations based on professional standards.

In Belgium, educational programs on public relations are implemented, as a rule, in the faculties of communications along with journalism and advertising.

In Russia, the most common situation is when training in PR (advertising and public relations) is concentrated in the units of a humanitarian-oriented higher educational institution — in 60.7% of cases. These are such names as “Faculty of Humanities”, “Institute of Humanities”, “Philological Faculty”, “Journalism Faculty”. In non-state institutions of higher education such departments as “Faculty of Advertising and PR”, “Faculty of Public Relations” prevail. The next most frequent situation is the training in this major in the structural departments of higher educational institutions that have a “mixed orientation” — in 18.3% of cases. The names of the structural units are: “Institute of Social and Humanitarian Technologies and Communications”, “Faculty of Philosophy and Sociology”, “Institute of Social and Philosophical Sciences and Mass Communications”, “Social and Humanitarian Faculty” and etc. Also training in this area is concentrated in structural units with the focus on “economics and management” — 14.1% of cases. The remaining variants are common in single cases, in general, it is 6.9% of cases. The names of the structural divisions are “social sciences” (1.1% of cases), “service sector” (1.1% of cases), etc.

Today in the US, according to the annual survey, Public Relations programs are mostly implemented at the faculties of communication and / or journalism [23].
4 CONCLUSIONS

In Belgium, educational programs of public relations and advertising are implemented separately. For educational programs there are both state and public accreditation. Because of the impact of the labor market — in some cases, PR-specialists work in advertising but with the perspective of public relations.

In Russia, all educational programs on PR are joined: ‘advertising and public relations’. This is related to the needs of the labor market. But the labor market does not directly impact through professional standards and public accreditation but indirectly through the instruments of state policy in the field of education. In Russia, a federal state standard in the field of advertising and public relations has been approved which establishes the responsibilities of joint programs. No matter what the characteristics of the structural units that implement educational programs on PR, universities have to follow the requirements of the educational standard.

In the United States, most programs are educational programs on PR although there is a certain number of a joint program on advertising and public relations. The situation in the USA shows a close correlation between professional standards and training on PR because Public accreditation of educational programs is carried out on the basis of professional standards by the PRSA. While developing educational programs, universities can take into account the resources of those structural divisions in the frame of which an educational program is implemented and this affects the diversity of educational programs.

The main question on the agenda today is whether PR-education comparable in Europe, Russia and the United States in terms of the graduate’s ability to work in any of these countries. Is the regional specificity of training connected with the needs of the regional labor market limit the mobility of the PR-specialist? This issue is updated in the age of Internet development, since it is not always necessary to be in the country of work and along with transnational markets, the Internet market is growing that has no territorial boundaries.

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