Plenary panel in IAMCR Lyon 2023
The contribution of academia to peace-building: Critique, creativity and activism

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Does communication research and education take peace seriously?

Let me first take you back 41 years to New York June 1982, when the UN held its Second Special Session on Disarmament, while outside, in the streets of Manhattan, hundreds of thousands of people demonstrated in support of peace.

The main UN plenary hall had a day allocated for international non-governmental organizations to present their viewpoints on disarmament and I was speaking on behalf of the International Organization of Journalists (IOJ), of which I was at the time President. Let us pick up three minutes of my talk from the main UN podium – not because it was the highest point in my professional life, but because my message serves as an apt introduction to this presentation. See here.

"The journalist's instrument is the word. This instrument can be used only under conditions of peace; therefore promotion of peace is the most effective way of defending freedom of speech."

This is an interesting position, which, together with the Mexico Declaration, demonstrates what I have called *a great leap of professional ethics* among journalists at that time. The reasoning goes as follows.

There are two ways for journalists to support and further the cause of peace:

1. Peace is an *important social question*, which calls upon the journalists' association to lend its prestige to the pursuit of peace. Accordingly, the professional association takes a stand on a civil movement and recommends its members to support the movement, eventually by formally joining it like any civil society organization. Peace is here supported because it is an important matter – not because we are journalists.
2. Peace is a *professional value* next to truth and other core qualities of journalism. We do not operate as citizens but as professionals. Peace is here not just a social challenge but a professional obligation.

From the 1970s on, both alternative approaches could be found among journalists as well as among the general public – not everywhere and by all, but more widely than ever since the outbreak of the Cold War. And there was a trend from the first towards the second alternative, justifying talk about a great leap forward of professional ethics in journalism. At that time a strong movement for peace and disarmament was sweeping throughout the world and the Finnish journalists' associations established a broad-based committee for peace activism.

In the same spirit, journalism research and education devoted a lot of attention to issues of peace and war, and also to how international law relates to journalism – this was from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. The seminal work by Galtung & Ruge – the article "The structure of foreign news" in the *Journal of Peace Research* from 1965 – was known to all and the scholarship on war/peace journalism gained momentum from the Persian Gulf War in books by Kellner (1993) and Nohrstedt & Ottosen (2001).

The agendas of professional journalists and also of academic media researchers were seriously analytical and peace-oriented. But alas, not any longer. In the new millennium much of this tradition been forgotten. The principles of international law have played a diminishing role in media research and journalism education, while the agenda of the field has been determined by expanding digitalization and changing economies. The Russian invasion of Ukraine and the protracted war have pushed both media and societies more in the direction of militarism, away

from a peace orientation highlighted in those times by the Helsinki process. Finland's recent NATO membership serves as a sad reminder of the new trend.

Nevertheless, peace remains a fundamental concept in communication studies, as shown in Cees Hamelink's *Communication and Peace* (2020) – it just needs to be clarified in communication theory and pedagogy. Today academia should wake up and reinstate peace-building as a broad-based intellectual and ethical priority, alongside the questions of environmental issues. Communication research and education need to critically review their contemporary role and agendas; they should creatively revise their programmes and curricula. Once this is done, activism will naturally find its rightful place.

So we should not fall in despair in these unfortunate days but to become more determined to work as academics and as social activists in support of peace in the middle of all the military build-up. Cees' book offers us optimism and the intellectual capital provided by tradition on media and war/peace is rich indeed. It's waiting for our follow up work.

My title asks: "Does communication research and education take peace seriously?" The answer is twofold. First: No, our field today does not take peace seriously. Second: Four-five decades ago it was taken very seriously. Conclusion: We should bring back peace to our field.

Thank you.

References

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