

A Different Window to Common Concerns: Editorial to BRICS Special Section

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This special section represents former *Journalism & Mass Communication Educator's* (*JMCE*) Editor Maria Marron's policy to internationalize the journal, in this case, seen through a particular window provided by the co-called BRICS countries: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. BRICS as a new constellation in the global arena has turned out to be a useful tool not only for politics and economy but also for media studies as shown by an international project, which employed BRICS as a prism to critically examine the concept of media system.¹ This project focused also on journalism education, with the authors of the following articles among the members of the project team.²

Each article provides a brief history of journalism education in the country in question and gives an overview of its contemporary landscape including the current concerns. What follows is a review of the state of the art in the five BRICS countries, made in a standard way which provides a basis for later comparative analyses. Accordingly, this is an overview of journalism education in a particular group of countries, without an ambition to present a comprehensive analysis of the questions at issue. However, some leads for further analysis and reflection are suggested in this introduction and the afterword from the perspective of UNESCO.

As a starter, Table 1 presents the figures for the BRICS countries in three central indicators of journalism education: the number of schools/programs, the number of students, and the number journalists. Absolute numbers are accompanied by figures relating to the size of the country (population in millions). The figures are only indicative as no comparative statistics are available; they are estimates by experts, notably by the authors of the following articles. Although not found in official sources and given here in only round figures, they provide a framework for reflecting the conditions of journalism education in these countries.

The first observation raised by the absolute figures is a striking difference between China and the rest of BRICS: There are more than twice as many programs in China as there are in the four other countries combined. The number of students in China is about twice the number of the others combined. The size of the journalist population in China is nearly the same as in the rest combined.

The picture is quite different when the size of the country is taken into consideration. China is no longer so dominant: the number of programs in relation to millions of the population is approximately at the same level in China as in Brazil and Russia, while South Africa falls clearly behind these three and India remains at a marginal level. The

Table 1. Indicative Figures of Journalism Education in the BRICS Countries.

	Programs		Students		Journalists	
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> /population	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> /population	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i> /population
Brazil	230	1.09	45,000	213	45,000	213
Russia	150	1.05	20,000	140	150,000	105
India	130	0.10	30,000	22	70,000	5
China	1,300	0.94	200,000	14	250,000	18
South Africa	30	0.55	5,000	89	4,000	73

Note. The population figures used here are in millions.

number of journalism students in relation to the population size is quite high in Brazil and Russia compared with especially China and India, with South Africa in-between. The same overall picture applies to the number of journalists in relation to population size: the descending order being Brazil—Russia—South Africa—China—India.

Another general conclusion suggested by these figures is the abundance of supply in journalism education compared with the labor market: The number of programs and students is so high that obviously many graduates have to look for jobs outside the news media and related institutions of conventional journalism. This is especially true in South Africa, but also clear in Brazil, India, and China. Only Russia seems to have a better balance between the supply and demand of educated labor; it can be estimated that there are clearly less graduates than there are new jobs available for them in Russia.

On the other hand, the field is no longer limited to strictly defined journalism but covers nowadays not only the established branches of organizational communication, public relations, marketing, and advertising but also the rapidly growing market of digital labor. Compared with many other fields of higher education—especially in humanities and social sciences—journalism education does not need to consider reducing its volume. Nevertheless, it is clear that the years of quantitative growth are over and it is now time to put emphasis on the quality and content of education. The focus on quality and content will naturally lead to issues of curriculum, including the model curricula proposed by UNESCO.³

Reading the following five articles leads one to conclude that the pertinent issues are pretty much the same in BRICS as in the rest of the world, notably in the so-called West. While BRICS as such opens a window, which is clearly different from the conventional (U.S.-dominated) Western mainstream, the questions faced by journalism educators in both camps are largely the same—“de-Westernization” notwithstanding. Common to all are such general trends as these⁴:

1. Journalism is a *popular* field of higher education and professional training—there has been a proliferation of schools and programs.

2. Journalism education is increasingly *integrated* with other media and communication studies—the traditional concept of journalism and mass communication is challenged by multimedia and social media.
3. The field is in dynamic *flux* around curricula and underlying philosophies—the dominant Western tradition is challenged by alternative models and soul-searching.

Admittedly, these are generalizations leaving a lot to be elaborated and discussed. We do not suggest that the BRICS countries provide a model for journalism education in a brave new world, but we are convinced that it is an instrumental gallery to examine how things are moving in a world of global connections and contradictions.

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Notes

1. The project in 2012-2016 was financed by the Academy of Finland and coordinated at the University of Tampere, see <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS.html>
2. See <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS/members.html>. Preliminary profiles of journalism education in the BRICS countries are available at <http://www.uta.fi/cmt/tutkimus/BRICS/data.html>
3. See <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001512/151209E.pdf> and <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002211/221199e.pdf>
4. The author first suggested these at the International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference in Hyderabad (India) in July 2014 and further elaborated them at the first Asian Forum of Deans of Journalism and Communication in Shanghai (China) on 30 November to 1 December 2016.