

Summer School with Journalists

24 – 27 September 2018

Part I: Challenges in Media and Public Relations:

Roundtable: PR meets Journalism – Goals and challenges in dealing with international media contacts.

International media contacts still play a small role in the daily work of communication in the four scientific institutions which were represented at the roundtable debate. The press releases are mainly in German and it is dominantly German media which contact the press departments, was a common experience of Virginie Michaels (GWZO Leipzig), Daniela Schimming (IAMO Halle), Dirk Böttner-Langolf (IMW Leipzig) and Carsten Heckmann (University Leipzig) who were taking part in the panel discussion. Some of the individual scientists coming from abroad have their own contacts to journalists in their home countries. There is also some interest from foreign correspondents who are based in Germany regarding specific questions. Sometimes delegates from IAMO travels to other countries to attend a conference, and Daniela Schimming often does not find a partner, because there is nobody dealing with communication. Another difficulty in communication with foreign media is that you need to know the media landscape in a specific country. Another challenge is also to deal with state-owned media, such as Russia Today, which tend to have their own agenda and try to put information into a false context.

Part II: PR Meets Journalism – Practical Advice

Experiences in media work: Germany and Eastern Europe:

The German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations deals with 29 countries, but German media show most interest in Russia, said Andreas Metz, their head of communications since 2008. About 90 percent of the questions posed by journalists relate to Russia. The German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations follows a classic approach to media. They have two big press conferences a year: one at the beginning of the year giving an outlook of the activities of the companies, and the second parallel to their annual conference of members. There are also several background meetings with journalists arranged to discuss special topics, for example, Nordstream II or Reforms in Ukraine. They are visited mostly by specialist journalists in Berlin. The German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations has its own magazine for members and is active on its Website, Twitter and Facebook. Three big events, where prominent guests play an important role in the media coverage, take place annually, according to Metz.

Concerning propaganda media, such as Russia Today or Sputnik, Metz said that they are invited to press conferences like other media but would get an exclusive interview. He underlined that it would also harm the reputation of an institution such as the German Committee on Eastern European Economic Relations to be presented in the context of such a media. Therefore, they are hesitant to make closer contact.

Members are offered the opportunity annually to meet Russian President Putin or Kazach President Nazarbayev, but behind closed doors, to discuss the situation of companies in the country. “Part of Communication can also be not to communicate”, Metz said. As a former journalist, he is often surprised that press releases find their way directly into the media without any further research or the journalist’s

own. He often finds a similar narrative, for example, to the reports on certain figures and the same spin in most of the reporting media. He criticized the consumer attitude of many journalists and would like to see more proper research and active reporting. The media very often only reacts to certain events or dates and should be more proactive in setting an agenda. Exemplarily, Metz mentioned that every time before the EU prolongs the sanctions towards Russia, he gets similar telephone calls from journalists asking for one figure which would show how much damage the sanctions have done to Germany's economy. Journalists are often disappointed when he explains that this subject is much more complicated than presenting only one figure. He sees a lack of background information explaining complex subjects sufficiently in reports.

A lot of companies, due to bad experiences previously, are not very open to the media and journalists. "The economy has a bad image in Germany", said Metz, and that media tend to be negative in their approach when reporting economic stories.

Best practice: Online media decoder.de

The media platform decoder.de started in September 2015 and offers Russian articles in German translations mostly from independent media. They also publish photographs from Russia. "We want to be a window to Russia", said editor Leonid Klimov. Additionally, they show interesting infographics about subjects in Russia, such as monocities. The translation of Russian texts includes "Gnoson", which work as links to another text written by a scientist and explaining certain issues which are understood differently in German or Russian. Klimov mentioned "liberal" as an example of a word which has a different meaning in each country and could be explained in the "Gnoson".

At the beginning, those explanations would have been a short text, but nowadays they can be long essays from a scientist with up to 10,000 characters. The editors have a long list of scientists with whom they cooperate and are constantly looking for new contacts. One of the authors in the audience said that publishing on decoder.de has already achieved a high reputation among historians and literacy scholars, because it is seen as a scientific publication. The online media would like to expand its work into Russian and English but is still looking for more funding.

Part III: Trends and Spotlights

Interview Workshop: "My scientific work: short, concise and understandable"

"People are interested in people", said the lecturer Ulrich Grünewald from the National Institute for Science Communication (NaWik). He is a physician, working as a freelance journalist for the German TV station WDR, giving workshops and as an actor in improvisation theatre. He gave a practical workshop where the participants learned how to describe their project in a few words. Grünewald had an interesting tool, the NaWik arrow, showing the most important points for communication: goal, target group, medium, style and topic. Grünewald made clear that every scholar has an ocean of knowledge in which he needs to find one crab, which is like the main topic he should present to his audience. The dilemma is that a scientist knows too much and needs to pick a small aspect of his work to communicate to the public or the media.

Four main questions will always be asked by journalists and could help to prepare an interview: What is your topic about? Can you contextualize your topic in a greater context? How does knowledge about this topic benefit the audience? What do you think about your research topic personally?

Time constraints are another issue, because a quote cannot last more than 20 seconds in a radio interview. The participants had a few practical exercises where they had to present their topic and answer some questions in a very short time on camera.

Forum: Double burden or chance? Tensions, crisis of trust and scholars under pressure

Most participants in this panel agreed that scientists and journalists face similar experiences today. There is a high politicization of their content and research and they find themselves in heated discussions about certain topics. “Fake News” is also a challenge for both groups.

Reinhard Vesper, political editor at the daily newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, pointed out for which purposes he needs scientists and scientific research. He deals with mostly historians or political scientists in his daily work. He contacts them to acquire a deeper insight into a certain subject and contextualize events. He needs a fast reaction from a scholar and has to finish an article quickly within several hours for daily newspapers. This contact is sometimes used for a quotation; sometimes it is only a background talk. Foundations and Think Tanks have a different approach to PR said Vesper. Some are very professional and spread a lot of information about their findings, others are perhaps more profound in their results but too hesitant in publishing them in time. This is a specific dilemma for journalists and media when dealing with those institutions. Vesper also mentioned that a lot of German scholars tend to use language in their work which is too complicated, because this creates a certain image of science. If a journalist has dealt with Eastern Europe for a long time, he or she is well informed regarding which institute and which scholar can be taken seriously and which not.

Vesper’s colleague, Ivo Mijnsen, working as a political editor at the Swiss daily newspaper *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, added that he is often looking for new scholars and new ideas. His newspaper still provides space for topics which are not mainstream and likes to report on rarefied subjects. Freelancer Heuke Janßen from Hamburg said that there could be much more done by universities and institutes to improve public relations and to bring more knowledge about their scientific work to the public. Most journalists are generalists today and do not work in a special field, which makes them an easy target for manipulation and false information. Therefore, Janßen sees the growing role of scholars and underlined their importance for proper journalism. EEGA Fellow Gilad Ben-Nun from the University of Verona said that there is a disturbing loss of reality of facts and shrinking room for debate. His thesis was that it would be more important today to have an opinion piece in the New York Times as a scholar than a book published in the Cambridge Press.

Panel: Current topics in reporting – priorities in the media versus priorities in science?

Moderator Steffi Marung from the University of Leipzig said at the beginning of the panel that Eastern Europe should be seen as an important component of globalization processes. She criticized that this is sometimes not sufficiently portrayed in the media. She also stated that certain disciplines find their way into the media more often than others. She mentioned, for example, that there are many interviews carried out with historians or political scientists, but very few with geographers or literary scholars. For a scholar, there are three motivations to deal with the media, Marung said. One could be a review of a

book, an article or study published by the scientist. Secondly, there could be the wish that a certain topic should find its way into the media to be dealt with in a different way than in scientific work. The third reason could be the interest of an institution, a university or institute to get more media attention.

Freelancing radio journalist Gesine Dornblüth, who has been the Moscow correspondent for German national radio for several years, shared her experiences in reporting from Eastern Europe. She tries to show what is happening in the region, needs to earn money and needs to compete with other journalists for the limited space available for such reporting. She struggles with the constant pressure of having to convince her editors that a certain topic needs to be reported and that it is worthwhile travelling somewhere to do a story. Dornblüth spoke about a difficulty that certain fashionable mainstream topics pose, for example, around certain events like the Football World Cup in Russia in 2018 or remembering historical dates like the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. She is a journalist who travels a lot through Eastern Europe to do radio features from different places, including from the Caucasus regions in Russia, such as Dagestan. Scholars are important for her work, because they help to find topics to report on. As a recent example, she mentioned a youth study by the ZOIS Institute in Berlin, which gave Dornblüth some scientific background to do a radio feature about youth in Russia and doing her own interviews.

Canadian historian Ned Richardson-Little said that debates on social media, for example, Twitter, are becoming increasingly important for scholars and their research. He is dealing with GDR history and found it extremely helpful to find contacts and information via Twitter on certain historic events through the people who witnessed them.

PART IV: Developments in Science Communication

Lecture and discussion: Media change as a challenge for science communication

Patrick Donges, Professor for Communication at Leipzig University, spoke about internal and external science communication. From his point of view, it is still more important what you publish in scientific journals than in the media. Social media activities do not help an academic career, Donges said. It is still more relevant for a scholar in Germany to write studies and books than to be in the media.

Concerning external communication, Donges distinguished between communication which follows a specific interest and that which is primarily related to a certain content or topic. The transformation of media also plays an important role for scholars. Journalism has lost its function as the main gatekeeper and is losing its importance in society, Donges said. There is an increase of special interest publications and personalization plays a bigger role than it did some years ago. Certain fields in science find their way into media very easy; Donges mentioned History with *Spiegel Geschichte* or many historic documentaries on TV as examples. This is very different with other fields such as mathematics.

Donges warned that media often forget that scientific journalism does not follow the same rules as political journalism. When a journalist writes an article, he or she is often used to confronting different arguments in an equal way and giving different opinions. This does not work with scientific results, Donges said. He mentioned climate change as an example, where 97 percent of all scientists agree on global warming, while only around 3 percent deny those facts. Therefore, the media presents a “false balance” if they quote both positions as if they could be taken equally seriously. Donges demanded that there should be more investment into science communication.

Young researchers Forum: Using Social Media as Academic – Chances and Pitfalls

Using Social Media bears chances and pitfalls for researchers, especially young scholars who have not yet established their academic profile and position. Interesting finds can easily be tweeted, sharing stories and photos from field research in a blog or on a professional website promises more visibility, and the regular networking, uploading and updating on job and research platforms appears to be a “must do” for future career development.

Richardson-Little said that Social Media provides a lot of opportunities, especially to younger academics and people who are not high up in the hierarchy, to publish their work and thoughts. This communication also helps to overcome borders and develop networks and new contacts easily on an international level. A scholar can also ask direct questions to his or her audience and receive interesting answers which can be helpful for his or her research. As a researcher on the former GDR, Richardson-Little has developed very interesting contacts with very different groups dealing with the same topic, not only scholars, but also eyewitnesses, human-rightists or other interested people. Anne-Katrin Hutschenreuter, who has her own lifestyle blog based in Leipzig, recommended using easily comprehensible language to develop your own tone by using Social Media. She spoke about an important difference between being personal in your communication but not private.

The moderator Ulrike Butmailoiu asked whether there are dangers for academia in damaging their reputation by using Social Media. Richardson-Little said that it can be a very positive experience if you act as an academic, providing space for debate and direct questions. It is an opportunity to be transparent in your academic work. This can be useful to strengthen trust in science. Alexandra Athanasopoulou from the University of Leipzig said that it is also a question of generation regarding how active you are on Social Media. A young academic should use those tools. She had started a blog about the European Union in 2008. At that time, it was still difficult to find other people interested in this field and she could build up an interesting network of common interest. She said that Social Media are time-consuming and show an effect only after many years of engagement.

Best practice: Non-fiction books

Melanie Mienert is one of the coordinators of the Leibniz Science Campus (EEGA). She shared her experience about working on a non-fiction book for almost ten years. Firstly, she gave an overview of the difficult German book market which published about 82,000 new books in 2017. For an academic, publishing a book still offers the chance to reach out to a broader public. Working on a book gives the author the chance to publish parts of it in articles or to talk about it on the radio, TV or at public events. One of the challenges is to define the possible target group of a book. You also need to find a balance between academic standards and an interesting presentation and easy style, Mienert said. Time management is crucial, because a book takes a lot of time and concentration, which is more difficult if you need to combine it with a job and family. It is difficult to find a good publishing house. An author often needs to self-finance the book, Mienert said, because non-fiction books are very rarely bestsellers. Not every good academic is a good writer for a book. Before signing a contract, one should be well informed about the intellectual property rights of authors. In her case, it took about ten years to publish the book “*Baron der englischen Bücher. Der Leipziger Verlag Bernhard Tauchnitz*”, she wrote together with a group of colleagues.

Best practice: Broadcasting

Looking at current reporting about Eastern Europe, radio broadcasting is often underestimated in its importance and as an opportunity for academics to get into the public view, for example, by giving an expert interview or taking part in a debate. Bernd Großheim was the Moscow correspondent for the German radio broadcaster ARD from 2013 to 2016. He reported from Russia, the Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Armenia. He spoke in the talk about his experiences reporting for about 60 different programmes on the ARD. He was part of a team in the Moscow bureau together with two TV colleagues, three correspondents for radio, two technicians, two producers and a secretary. He was doing different formats, from a minute of news to long radio features of 30 minutes and live talks. He could propose ideas and his editors also asked for specific stories. Großheim often travelled in the region.

Großheim has worked as a news editor for ARD *aktuell* and the news show “*Tagesschau*” since February 2018. All radio station and TV offices work with a database of experts, who they ask for interviews, for example, or use for their research purposes. Those experts are very often the same people, because not every academic is capable of dealing with a short time on the air and a clear message. Großheim uses social media to find new experts: he once found a prominent vulcanist via Twitter. He sometimes gets to know people through Facebook or Twitter, finds them interesting and puts them into a programme. Experts are very often disappointed that they have only a very short time to say something, Großheim said, because a quotation of 20 to 30 seconds would be normal in an average radio piece of two minutes.

Forum: Future of Science Journalism

The journalist Nicola Kuhrt studied German literature, but she specialized in science journalism quite early in her career. She worked for the news magazine “*Spiegel*” from 2012, before going on to be the chief editor for the online edition of the “*Deutsche Apotheker Zeitung*” in 2017. Today, she is a freelancer specializing in medicine topics. She started a prominent start-up “*MedWatch*” and is a member of the press conference of science journalists (WPK). Looking back, she remembers well that in the 1990s a lot of German newspapers started to have a page on science. The Chernobyl disaster in 1986 had been something like a starting point to get science journalists organized in the WPK. After a certain “*Boom*”, there was a time of set-back until 2015 when a lot of journalists started a campaign called “*Society Needs Science*”. It is clear nowadays that a science journalist is important and needed, not a niche. However, the general media crisis also harmed a lot of colleagues who lost their permanent jobs.

The recent words of US President Donald Trump about “*alternative facts*” are a new challenge to scientific journalism, Kuhrt said. Polls show that the public believes in science. Therefore, there are a lot of chances for journalists to explain and to do good stories in this field. Kuhrt mentioned a lot of new projects which offer this service, such as her own watchdog. In the near future, Videos will play an even more important role than today.

In the Focus: “One Belt, One Road” Initiative

China has invested more than 25 billion US Dollars in infrastructure projects within the framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt in the last five years. Paul Joscha Kohlenberg, an expert of the German Think Tank Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), compared the Chinese activities with the “*Marshall Plan*” of the USA for destroyed Europe after the Second World War. While the term “*Silkroad Initiative*” is used mainly in Germany, the Chinese speak about “*One Belt, One Road*”. As Kohlenberg pointed out, journalists have played an important role in reporting from projects connected to this Chinese

programme, because they do research on the place and make it more transparent. For China, this project also means competing with the liberal world order, the expert said. However, in many countries, such as Sri Lanka or Pakistan, Chinese projects do not work well and problems occur. It is not clear in which way the project will develop. An interesting question will be how much influence the Chinese have on media in poorer states and how much it can influence media coverage in the future. Carrying out critical research and independent reporting on Chinese activities is currently already important in Berlin, Leipzig or Duisburg, because Chinese investors are involved.

Part V: Perspectives

Workshop: Exciting Ways of Telling Science

Ulrike Brandt-Bohne, the NaWik lecturer, explained to the participants the importance of storytelling in science. Stories activate parts of our brain and synchronize brain activity among storytellers and listeners. One should highlight the following aspects to structure our stories: setting the stage, challenge/obstacle, highlight, solution and message. The participants had the chance to exercise in groups how to tell a story about an academic field.

Lessons Learned – Perspectives in the Coverage of Eastern Europe

In the end, everybody agreed that it was a successful approach for the conference to involve three different groups: academics, journalists and communication officers, in a fruitful dialogue. The topic should not be seen only as important to the younger generation, but older academics should also become more involved in this debate. The organizers said that this Summer School has been a start and will have a follow-up in 2019.

(Gemma Pörzgen)