

Societal roles of online journalists in Slovenia and Serbia: Self-perceptions in relation to the audience and print journalists¹

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Abstract:

This paper investigates and compares how online journalists of the Slovenian print media Delo and those of the Serbian Novosti perceive the societal role of journalism and how they negotiate their perceptions with processes of audience involvement in the news, which have been intensified due to continuous articulations between newswork and technological innovations enforced in recent years. Despite the particularities of the normative development of Slovenian and Serbian journalism, as well as their rather distinctive empirical realities in the last two decades, there are surprisingly many similarities in online journalists' negotiation of societal roles at both print media organizations. Audience involvement at Delo and Novosti is mostly regarded as an indication what people are interested in, which implies that exchanges between newsrooms and members of the audience are foremost monologue in character. At the same time, Delo's online journalists indicate that online departments at respective print media organizations are underestimated in relation to print departments, and not regarded as equal. Novosti's online journalists, however, do not stress their subordination in relation to in-house print colleagues, but acknowledge that they perform as a rather isolated department. The study also shows that institutional power has been recently at least to a degree reorientated because of newsroom integration, which has been institutionally encouraged and brought occasional cooperation of print and online staffers, processes, and contents.

Keywords: online journalism, societal roles, audience involvement, convergence.

Introduction

In contemporary media and journalism studies, there are many theoretical and empirical investigations dealing with the role of journalism in the society (e.g. Splichal, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Gitlin, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009a; Christians et al, 2009) and how journalists perceive themselves as subjects of societal processes (e.g. Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Splichal and Sparks, 1994; Splichal, 2000; Zelizer, 2004; Deuze, 2005; Hallin, 2009). The authors of this essay agree that it is impossible to give an exhaustive definition of journalism and stress that there is not one, but many competing and overlapping roles of journalism, and that journalists' perceptions of their societal roles vary according to contexts in which they operate. At the same time, there are indications of international ideological commonalities, which are, however, articulated distinctively and negotiated within national traditions of journalism and democracy (e.g. Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Splichal, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Deuze, 2005; Hanitzsch et al., 2011). Namely, roles of journalism in the society and self-perceptions of journalists are a result of continuous articulations between prevailing normative models of media and democracy, on the one hand, and journalists' reproduction of political, economic, cultural and technological realities under conditions of newswork, on the other (cf. Zelizer, 2004; Splichal, 2005; Hardt, 2005; Deuze, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009a). Media and journalism scholars (e.g. Christians et al, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009b; Schudson, 2009) claim that what is journalism's role in the society and what it should be reflects the established relations between media and power, and indicate the ways how people connect to societal life, suggesting the continuous importance of these issues in research.

According to research it appears that difficulties in assessing roles of journalism in society and self-perceptions of journalists are even bigger in the age of the internet – particularly among online journalists from different countries (e.g. Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Hermida, 2011). These investigations suggest that online journalists do not understand themselves as “real” journalists and deprecate established newswork routines that according to them push central values of journalism, such as authenticity, accountability, and autonomy, to the margins. However, journalists of traditional media organizations are not the only news providers in the online world – there is an array of new actors that question the central position of journalists within people's ensemble of information as they try to eliminate the middleman (e.g. Splichal, 2005; Friend and Singer, 2007; Gitlin, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009b; Singer and Ashman, 2009; Robinson, 2010; Hermida, 2011). These studies suggest that borders between journalists and non-journalists have become blurred by the affordances of the internet and the web and with involvement of “the people formerly known as the audience” (Rosen, 2006) in the news experience. However, these works only partially offer insights into how online journalists perceive themselves as journalists in relation to the audience, on the one hand, and broadcast or print journalists on the other. Only rare exceptions have gone to superficially explore these issues, but their primarily research interests have been elsewhere (cf. Deuze and Dimoudi,

2002; Quandt et al., 2006; Singer et al., 2011; Meikele and Redden, 2011). Since the question of online journalists' societal roles and their self-perceptions remain more or less underexplored, Singer's (2003, p. 157) acknowledgement that if online journalism is to be incorporated within journalistic community, there will need to be either considerable accommodation in the self-perception of what a journalist does or considerable change in the way that online journalism is carried out still remains foremost speculative.

Therefore, the aim of the study, which evolved derivative with different focus is considered for publication in *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, is to reveal how online journalists in specific contexts perceive their roles as journalists in the society and how they negotiate normative predispositions of journalism within institutional news making settings and relations with print in-house journalists, on the one hand, and in relation to the members of the audience whose involvement in online news intensified in recent years, on the other. The research objective put in the context of Slovenian and Serbian journalism is interesting, because it aims to offer comparative insights into services online journalists provide to the people; to look into mutual relationship between the normative and the empirical in journalism; to establish online journalists' understandings of their role in connecting people to political life; and to reflect online journalists' position within journalistic community and their place in people's ensemble of information in specific contexts. In-depth interviews with online journalists of Slovenian print media organization Delo and those of Serbian newspaper Novosti are used in order to investigate perceptions of their roles as journalists in the society and compare how specific institutional settings and different modes of audience involvement in news making shape these perceptions.

Theoretical Background: Journalists' Societal Roles in Slovenia and Serbia

The literature review reveals competing, but overlapping, normative types of journalism in terms of the kind of service that journalists provide to their clients (e.g., Splichal and Sparks, 1994; Splichal, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Zelizer, 2004; Anderson, 2007; Christians et al., 2009; Schudson, 2009). Whether journalists perform as the impartial mediators of social reality, advocates of certain social groups, independent watchdogs of power-holders, infotainers of the masses or communitarians and deliberators is dependent on the actual social arrangement and "centrally impacts the tenor of the surrounding democratic world" (Zelizer, 2004, p. 158). These dynamics between the normative and the empirical in Slovenia resulted in the heterogeneity of journalists' societal roles, negotiated in a specific political, economic and cultural context (Vobič, 2009a); whereas in Serbia, journalists constantly (re)negotiate their societal roles based on the shifting conceptions of the notion of progress (Veljanovski, 2006). While the normative role of journalism under socialism was pedagogic and advocacy for the working class, with the establishment of the new Slovenian and Serbian states, the prevailing normative service of journalists has become the impartial mediation of reality (Luthar, 2004; Božinović, 2005; Spajić, 2005).

These changes are reflected in the first article of the first Slovenian code after the fall of socialism: "A journalist's fundamental obligation is to truly and genuinely inform the

public" (Code of Journalists of the Republic of Slovenia, 1991). According to Poler (1996), this provision, which has also been implied in codes adopted in 2002 and 2010, establishes Slovenian journalists as decision makers who are not committed to act on behalf of their homeland, nation and working class as they did during the socialist self-management, but to perform on behalf of the public. In Serbia, however, societal change was more turbulent; therefore, the shift toward the liberal conception of journalism was more a matter of 1989 momentum (Milivojević, 1993) than societal transformation in the decade of the Milošević regime after the fall of socialism. Despite the claims that the 2000s brought only minor changes (Veljanovski, 2006; Milivojević, 2006), it can be argued that the normative predispositions of Serbian journalism have become increasingly similar to those in Slovenia. Namely, the Serbian code adopted by the Independent Association of Journalists of Serbia similarly states in the second paragraph that "facts are obligatory, but opinions are free" and stresses in the third that "[t]he basic duty of a journalist is to accurately, exactly, objectively, fully and timely inform the public of the events of interest for the public" (Journalists' Code, 2006). These normative changes in Slovenia and Serbia imply a paradigmatic shift to high-modernism.

The high-modern or classical paradigm of journalism is based on liberal ideals about democracy, participation and citizenship (Dahlgren, 2009a; Hallin, 2009; Lee-Wright et al., 2012). Through its narratives, classical journalism claims to provide accurate renderings of reality that exist external to journalism and its contributions in defining the public agenda. "It is aimed at heterogeneous citizenry that basically shares the same public culture, and citizens use journalism as a resource for participation in societal life", writes Dahlgren (2009a, p. 147). Journalism in this mode serves as "an integrative force" and "a forum for debate" (ibid.). Despite stressing detachment, the separation of "facts" from "opinions" and the balancing of claim and counterclaim in the conquest for the public good, journalism research implies doubt in the realisation of the normatively grounded and codified conduct and roles of journalists (Poler Kovačič, 2005).

The literature review on Slovenia (e.g., Splichal, 1992; Erjavec and Poler Kovačič, 2004; Luthar, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2009; Vobič, 2009a) and Serbia (e.g., Božinović, 2005; Spajić, 2005; Široka, 2005; Veljanovski, 2006; Milivojević, 2006; Milivojević et al., 2011) shows that the processes of realisation of the normative ideals are not uniform and homogeneous, but rather fluid and heterogeneous. Splichal (1992, p. 78) writes that in the early 1990s, there was more appreciation for columnists, essayists and commentators than for reporters, and the prevailing practice of journalism in the post-socialist countries was still advocacy that supported the interests of the ruling elites despite the normative shift. Embedding journalism in the currents of the market economy, rearranging the political-economic relations and increasing journalism's responsibility to the media owners and power holders have surpassed the normatively defined responsibility to the public. On the one hand, the model of market-driven journalism has prevailed in Slovenian journalism (e.g., Erjavec and Poler Kovačič, 2004; Luthar, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2009), meaning that journalists do not offer what the public should know, but provide what the audience (allegedly) wants.

Namely, sensationalism, dramatisation, trivialisation and simplification have become common denominators of journalism, being foremost in service to the “public curiosity” of consumers rather than to the “public interest” of citizens (Poler Kovačič, 2005). On the other hand, Serbian journalism is burdened with the deep societal cleavages developed during the Milošević regime, which still correspond with the contingencies of contemporary social and media environment (e.g., Božinović, 2005; Spajić, 2005; Veljanovski, 2006; Milivojević, 2006). Namely, it appears that Serbian journalism is simultaneously shaped by lack of political autonomy and financial pressures since sensationalism and tabloidisation are the main problems in the eyes of journalists (Milojević and Ugrinić, 2011a), and political pressures remain a common denominator of the media sphere (Široko, 2005; Raković, 2007; Janković et al., 2009; Milojević and Ugrinić, 2011a). Observing it more broadly, the trends of tabloidisation are strongly undermining the credibility of the profession and its potential to stand against the political pressures.

These rather different articulations between the normative predispositions and empirical realities of Slovenian and Serbian journalism appear to be deciding factors in shaping the role of journalism in both societies. On the one hand, Slovenian journalists have taken up normatively diverse roles, which have degenerated as a result of journalism’s embeddedness in the political and economic system and its cultural subordination to ideas of technological progress. There are many indications of Slovenian journalists turning from the “objective” mediators of reality to the “infotainers”, who reduce structural problems to individual motivations by blending news and entertainment, and who neglect the factual and reliable daily accounts of matters relevant to political life (Luthar, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2005; Vobič, 2009a; Erjavec and Poler Kovačič, 2010). For instance, Poler Kovačič (2005, pp. 38–39) recognises the phenomenon of “quasi-investigative journalism” emerging as an outcome of the degenerated critical watchdog role, which does not aim to hold public personalities and institutions accountable for their conduct, but rather provide sensational presentations of the affairs and scandals regardless of their truthfulness. The commercialisation of the press brought about the trend of “investigative journalism at any price”, which implies that the representations of scandals do not necessary need to be truthful “as long as they bring profit” (Košir, 1994, p. 16). On the other hand, on the basis of the literature review (e.g., Božinović, 2005; Spajić, 2005; Široko, 2005; Veljanovski, 2006; Milivojević, 2006; Milojević and Ugrinić, 2011a), one cannot identify the heterogeneity of the role of Slovenian journalism in Serbia. The journalism of the 1990s is characterised as “Sony journalism” (Božinović, 2005), which refers to journalists as actors who assume the roles of observers of events and recorders of reality—but not journalists. Furthermore, Spajić (2005) stresses that the whole generation of journalists served at most as “recorders” or “microphone holders”. After the fall of the Milošević regime in 2000, it appears that the empirical realisation of normatively predisposed high-modernism in Serbian journalism depends on the character of the prevailing, but opposing, conceptions of the notion of progress, which shapes media and journalism as “progressive” or “retrograde” (Veljankovski, 2006). The latter refers to journalists who serve the power elites in support of

the status quo, and the former refers to journalists as the carriers of the political and cultural transformation and assigns them an almost revolutionary role. In any case, journalists perform as impartial mediators of reality taking particular ontological positions; therefore, journalism hardly serves as an integrative force and a forum for debate set in the high-modern paradigm of journalism.

However, research in Slovenia suggests that the news industry borrows bits and pieces from various normative frameworks, and investigations in Serbia show the prevailing ontological positions in particular societal and institutional contexts. In both cases, the results are similar: societal roles of journalists are degenerated by expanding institutional goals and downsizing journalistic ones. The literature review, therefore, calls for additional context-oriented studies of these issues. Therefore, the **first research question** is: *How do online journalists of Slovenian and Serbian print media perceive their roles as journalists in society?*

Online Journalists and their Roles in Relation to the Audience

In recent years, scholars (e.g., Deuze, 2009a; Hallin, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009a; Gitlin, 2009; Robinson 2011) have claimed that it has become increasingly difficult to answer the question of who a journalist is. The borders between journalism and non-journalism are blurred in an environment that is dominated by unpredictability and instability rather than control and uniformity. In a society that is defined by the concepts of fluidity, fragmentation and individualisation, the role of the traditional mode of journalism is reduced (cf. Deuze, 2007; Dahlgren, 2009a; Singer et al., 2011). In this environment, journalism's gradual loss of authority is taking effect in regard to its ability to maintain the fabric of society, bringing additional contingencies into the self-perceptions of journalists (Gitlin, 2009).

In this perspective, once clear borders between journalists and the audience have become blurred as "disintermediation", writes Deuze (2007, p. 156), questions the journalist as the traditional intermediary between public institutions – notably business and government – and the audience. Many media and journalism scholars (e.g. Platon and Deuze, 2003; Bowman and Willis, 2003; Pickard, 2006; Bruns, 2009; Rosenberry and St. John III, 2010; Nip, 2010; Singer et al., 2011a) have noted reorientation of power in journalism's relationship with the audience. These studies, namely, imply that audience's involvement in journalism has gained not only in recognition by traditional media organizations, but also in importance in news making – consequently shifting the role of journalists in the society. In this context, some new catchphrases have been coined, such as "produser" (Bruns, 2009) and "user-turned-producer" (Deuze, 2009b), indicating that the contemporary audiences "have more technological capacities at their disposal to avoid being traditional 'sitting ducks' of mass media communication" (Dahlgren, 2009a, p. 149) and that the modes of audience involvement in news have expanded (Nip, 2010, p. 135).

On the one hand, an important body of scholarly work on, how technologies in the new media environment provide opportunities for audience engagement, reopens the debate on public journalism as path toward revitalization of contemporary journalism (e.g.

Bowman and Willis, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Nip, 2006; Allan and Thorsen, 2009; Bruns, 2009; Rosenberry and St. John III, 2010; Singer et al., 2011). An array of competing and overlapping concepts occurred, such as “citizen journalism”, “participatory journalism” and “interactive journalism”, which vary according to the extent and form of participation of ordinary people in news making. Since many other phrases emerged – such as “networked journalism” (Bardoel and Deuze, 2001), “pro-am journalism” (Rosen, 2006), and “grassroots journalism” (Gillmor, 2004), more confusion, rather than theoretical clarification has been brought into the debate on communitarian approaches to journalism. What these studies have in common is a vision of journalists, not necessary working for traditional media organizations, who operate as catalysts between individuals and the community in order to identify problems and try to find solutions to these problems through deliberation (cf. Nip, 2006). According to empirical research there are indications that various ways of audience involvement into news making have done away with some traditional ideals in journalism, such as truthiness, principle of objectivity, and disinterest in shaping of political life, and have replaced them with alternatives, such as deliberation, multiperspectivity, and participation in politics (e.g. Platon and Deuze, 2003; Gillmor, 2004; Rosen, 2006; Bruns, 2009; Singer et al., 2011).

On the other hand, research has also found out that even with audience involvement in news making, journalists tend to retain control in it and at the same time enhance traditional principles and practices of news making (e.g. Nip, 2006, 2010; Hermida and Thurman, 2008; Domingo et al., 2008; Deuze, 2009a). In this light, Deuze et al. (2007, 335) suggest that communitarian ideals do not go well with notions that journalists should keep their distance, “notions that tend to exclude, rather than include”. Furthermore, Domingo et al. (2008) stress that traditional media organizations in Europe and United States are interpreting as an opportunity for readers to debate current events, whereas the principles and practices of news making remain unchanged. Traditional media organizations do not necessary engage non-press news providers on equal footing, because journalists involved are “universally convinced that the breakdown between users and producers of news provides society with better information” (Deuze 2009b, p. 261). In this manner, journalists self-legitimize their various established roles with more or less universal similarities in journalism which can be defined as a common occupational ideology (e.g. Deuze, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009a; Schudson, 2009a; McNair, 2009). In what appears as struggle for legitimacy among press and non-press news providers a clear commercial motive is often at work: the pursuit of additional sources of revenue, the potential to sell targeted advertising across online and offline media, and the winning back of otherwise non-reading newspaper audience (cf. Deuze et al., 2007; Deuze, 2009b; Dahlgren, 2009a).

In Slovenia and Serbia not much of the research has focused on the discussion of which journalists are in relation to the audience. Namely, in recent years Slovenian media and journalism scholars have also discussed communitarian ideals as a normative ground for possible revitalization of journalism’s diminished role in societal life, but they agree that journalism of traditional media have not started to considered doing it so (e.g. Oblak, 2005;

Vobič, 2010; Poler Kovačič and Erjavec, 2008; Radojković, 2010). Furthermore, research into “community media” (Pajnik, 2010), “communitarian journalism” (Vobič, 2010), and “citizen journalism” (Poler Kovačič and Erjavec, 2008; Radojković, 2010) reveals that despite technological possibilities the character of the non-press actors’ involvement in news making resembles political, economic, and cultural power relations of the mass media world. Namely, there are indications that journalism of Slovenian traditional media organizations is surpassing the initial ambivalence towards non-press news providers and is willing to embrace them in news making – not as equal counterparts though, but rather as additional ones (cf. Vobič, 2010). However, since these studies have placed the issue of journalists’ societal roles in relation to the audience as secondary the investigations are superficial and therefore call for more thorough exploration. Hence, the **second research question** of the study is: *How do online journalists of the Slovenian and Serbian print media negotiate their societal roles in relation to the audience?*

Online Journalists and their Roles in Relation to Print and Broadcast Journalists

Despite claims that the professional ideology of journalism is consolidated across a large part of the world (e.g., Deuze, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009a; Preston, 2009; Hanitzsch et al., 2011), research demonstrates contingencies in journalists’ self-perceptions, most notably among online journalists (Paterson and Domingo, 2008). The prevailing normative conception and its empirical negotiation “serve to continuously refine and reproduce a consensus about who counts as a ‘real’ journalist and what news providers can be considered to be examples of the ‘real’ journalism” (Deuze, 2007, p. 162). Research among online journalists from the different political, economic and cultural backgrounds shows that they often do not see themselves as the “real” journalists and deprecate their own newswork because of the institutional requirements to constantly make news and to consequently rely on information that has already been published by in-house print counterparts, news agencies and other media (e.g., Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Robinson, 2011).

In this light, Deuze (2007) ascertains that online departments have been traditionally organised separately from their print counterparts and tend to be populated by newcomers and less experienced journalists. Consequently, those departments produce their own “mini cultures” and online journalists, and often nurture specific values, practices and ideals. Despite trends of convergent reorganisation and restructuring of newsrooms, which have partly emerged due to the erosion of practices and identities of print, broadcast and online media (e.g., Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Quandt et al., 2006; Deuze, 2007; García and Carvajal, 2008), problems with journalists’ negotiations of roles, values and practices have arisen (e.g., Singer, 2003; Dupange and Garrison, 2006). By analysing newswork in newsrooms and conducting interviews with journalists, many authors identify self-deprecation among them, especially among online staffers (cf. Deuze and Paulussen, 2002;

Deuze, 2007; Quandt, 2008; García, 2008; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008). For instance, in Germany, they name themselves “secondhand journalists” (Quandt, 2008, p. 89); Argentinean online journalists see themselves as “half stupid” and the “minor brothers” of print journalists (García, 2008, p. 73); in the Netherlands and Belgium, online journalists consider their work to be “desktop” journalism (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002, p. 241); and British and Spanish online journalists identify their status as computer-bound “mouse monkeys” (Deuze, 2007, p. 142). However, this literature explores the self-perceptions of online journalists in relation to their newswork, but does not go into how this “special breed of journalists” (cf. Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008, p. 144) perceives its societal relevance.

Research into Slovenian online journalism explores this question superficially when dealing with other issues—online journalism’s position within the journalistic community (Oblak Črnič, 2007), larger implications of the newsroom convergence in print media organisations (Vobič, 2009b) and the credibility perception of online news among journalists (Poler Kovačič et al., 2010). The latter analysis reveals that those journalists who work for the news websites of the traditional media organisations negatively evaluate their own work, often naming it a “copy-paste” practice (ibid.). Also, in Serbia there has been no research conducted to investigate self-perceptions of online journalists; however, a recent study of Serbian journalists’ attitudes toward the changes in journalism (Milivojević et al., 2011) indicates that journalists on all media platforms do not find it necessary to renegotiate their societal roles in relation to the Internet and find themselves “capable of answering technological and professional challenges ahead of their media outlets in the near future”.

Furthermore, research in both countries suggests that Slovenian journalists, on the one hand, and their Serbian counterparts, on the other, are polarised when it comes to the relationship between journalism and the Internet. Namely, Oblak Črnič (2007) identifies “defenders” and “critics” of online journalism among Slovenian journalists, whereas online journalists are often not seen as “real” journalists, but as “assemblers of stories” since they primarily make news by reassembling already published news. Similarly, Milojević and Ugrinić (2011b) indicate the existence of a “digital gap” within the Serbian community as they identify the strong divisions between journalists who refuse to adapt to the new technological demands of the media environment and those whose newswork is based on the use of new technological tools and is mainly online oriented.

Hence, research in Slovenia, Serbia and elsewhere implies that the rise of the Internet has sparked a fierce debate among journalists and added a new dimension in negotiations of journalists’ societal roles. How online journalists understand their position and significance in societal processes in relation to their in-house print or broadcast journalistic colleagues still appears to be an under-researched area and calls for more empirical attention. In this context, the authors set the **third research question**: *How do online journalists of the Slovenian and Serbian print media negotiate their societal roles in relation to their in-house colleagues?*

Methodology

The goal of this study is to answer all research questions by first investigating what online journalists do—how they gather, assemble and share news—and second, how and why they do it in relation to the audience and their in-house print colleagues. This calls for case study research, which is bound to understand a specific case rather than seeking empirical generalisations beyond the case (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003; Mabry, 2008). Thus, the authors focus on the processes of articulation of normative groundings in specific institutional realities in the two print media organisations: Slovenian Delo and Serbian Novosti.

The case subjects are the online journalists at Delo and Novosti, which are the two leading print media organisations in Serbia and Slovenia in terms of the readership of their daily newspapers, the number of unique visitors to their news websites, the number of staff and the size of news production (cf. Milosavljević and Vobič, 2009; Radojković, 2009). Historically, Delo and Novosti were established as “societally owned” in the 1950s, but were privatised after the fall of socialism two decades ago, which has significantly reshaped their political, economic and cultural influence (Splichal, 1992). Since then, not only have the normative principles changed, but articulations between the social and the technological have shifted the processes of gathering, assembling and disseminating the news (Poler Kovačič et al., 2010; Milivojević et al., 2011). Delo and Novosti started their news websites in the late 1990s, and in the 2000s, they set up online departments that were separated from the print department in terms of space, processes and staff. Online departments are populated by less experienced, younger journalists with temporary employment status. Delo has 15 online journalists and Novosti has nine. In the last two years, both print media organisations started the process of integration of newswork environments and reconsideration of the role of online journalists and online news. Namely, Delo has already built a common newsroom for print and online journalists; at Novosti, they try to integrate the print and online processes and content without a common workspace. In order to focus on the aspects of specific cases and to deal with both research questions, the authors use the in-depth interview method.

In January and February of 2011, the authors conducted five in-depth interviews with Delo online journalists, and in July 2011, they interviewed four online Novosti journalists. These “conversations with a purpose” (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) enabled the author to explore journalists’ perspectives, and to find out various ways in which they give meaning to their work and relate these to larger societal processes. The dynamics in question often emerge as different and sometimes inconsistent ways in which journalists negotiate their conduct with the normative and empirical realities (Deuze, 2009a). Thereby, in-depth interviews are useful for investigating how journalists negotiate their identity with elements of structure (the context in which they work) and subjectivity (what they bring to their work) (ibid.). Interviews in this study had an average length of an hour and forty minutes and were held outside of the newsroom in a rather quiet public space, most often the cafeteria, in order to diminish the influences of the organisational setting. Interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed in full. By conducting in-depth interviews, the

authors did not hear interview responses simply as true or false reports on reality, but treated the conversation as a “display of perspectives and forms that draw upon available cultural resources” in specific social and technological contexts (Silverman, 1993/2006, p. 144). The analysis of collected interview data involved searching, comparing and interrogating the transcripts to establish analytical categories that address the research questions, thereby allowing the greatest amount of data to be coded without either forcing them into categories or having categories that were so sprawling as to be meaningful (Arksey and Knight, 1999, p. 162).

Results

Interviewed online journalists of Slovenian Delo and Serbian Novosti, similarly as shown in previous research done in Slovenia, primarily see their service to online readers as providing timely “objective” news on the basis of which members of the audience can make thoughtful decisions and actively participate in societal life. Paradoxically, interviewees from both print media organizations perceive themselves as not the “real” journalists, since they rarely make “original” news, but foremost shovel in-house print content onto the web, reassemble press agency news, and translate news of foreign media. The reasons behind such newswork routines at Delo and Novosti are according to the interviewees institutional demands to continuously publish timely news, change arrangement of items on the website, and follow up news stories. Furthermore, analysis of interview data suggests that newswork routines play a more decisive role in negotiating of their societal roles than manifestations of audience involvement in news at Delo and Novosti. Namely, interviewees parallel audience involvement predominantly with making use interactive features, such as commenting news items or online readers’ e-mailing to the newsroom, which according to interviewed online journalists hardly affect their work. Nevertheless, audience involvement at Delo and Novosti is mostly regarded as an indication what people are interested in, which implies that exchanges between newsrooms and members of the audience are foremost monologue in character. Study also indicates that online journalists hardly ever interact with the audience directly – only on rare occasions interactive features of respective news websites deliver “new or additional information” (Novosti Journalist B) and “explicate journalists’ mistakes” (Delo Journalist E), yet alone cooperating in participatory news making. At the same time, Delo online journalists indicate that online departments at respective print media organizations are “underestimated” in relation to print departments and “not regarded as equal” (Delo Journalist A). Novosti online journalists, however, do not stress their subordination in relation to in-house print colleagues, but acknowledge that they perform as a rather “isolated” department (Novosti Journalist C) and that print department is somehow “scared” “because they realize that the future is online” (Novosti Journalist A). However, results of the study show that institutional power has been recently at least to a degree reorientated because of newsroom integration, which has been institutionally encouraged and brought occasional cooperation of print and online staffers, processes, and contents.

“We provide impartial timely information”

Interviewed online journalists stress they provide impartial, unbiased and timely renderings of reality. “We provide timely information for the people to decide upon. They can get the news that affects their lives,” stresses Delo Journalist A. Similar acknowledgment is provided by Novosti Journalist C, “First, we deliver information that is needed by the people. Second, we try to help people by giving them specific information if they turn to us directly.” Not all interviewed journalists are certain that they help online readers by providing such news, but they are predominantly sure that news on websites is used as a resource for decision-making and understanding basic premises of societal life, indicating that they understand their societal roles in correspondence to the classical or high-modern paradigm of journalism. For instance Delo Journalist B states, “People can read on our website that ‘this-and-that’ happened and can make an informed opinion on this basis. We help the citizens not to turn into a flock of sheep.” Novosti online journalists expose the timely character of online news – for instance Novosti Journalist B explicates that they work “in the service of citizens”, “We need to show the people that they are some kind of link and that their life is transmitted through news. News is what they live.”

At the same time, analysis of interviews with online journalists reveals that they raise critical character of classical journalism as an ideal. In this sense, interviewees from Delo predominantly indicate that holding public personalities and institutions accountable should be the primary role of journalists in the society – regardless of the media platform. However, many say that established routines disable them to perform as “critical watchdogs” (Delo Journalist A) “I do not want to act as a lapdog, but I do,” stresses Delo Journalist A, who also says that she is encouraged to work as a critical journalist – but only in her spare time. Novosti online journalists, however, mostly stress that they “do not perform as investigative journalists” (Novosti Journalist A), “It makes me sick to work as a journalist taking into account so many personal interests of the powerful. /.../ Generally, we are in the service of politicians and others.” (ibid) Namely, online journalists are editorially required to continuously provide news and update already published items during their daily shift being unable to critically assess the news they deliver. Adopted highly routinized newswork, consequently, brings clear deprecation in their self-perceptions as journalists.

“We know what people want to read”

Journalists of online departments of Delo and Novosti parallel audience involvement with online readers’ activities in comment sections under news items and their e-mailings to online department’s members. At the same time, interviewees stress that they hardly ever interact with members of the audience as they have problems finding the time, since they are required to constantly make and publish news. According to interviewed journalists from both departments number of clicks, comments and e-mails on certain news items indicate “what people want to read” (Novosti Journalist A, B, C) and “gives us a feeling of

what is going to be clicked a lot” (Delo Journalist C), implying that interactive features and involvement of the audience at least to a degree influence their decision of news selection. At the same time, the interviews reveal online journalists’ ambivalence to the content provided by members of the audience – on the one hand, journalists say that they read them in order “to push the story” (Novosti Journalist C), and on the other hand, they stress that they predominantly do not interact with the audience – they “only laugh” at their comments (Novosti Journalist B), “try to ignore them” (Delo Journalist A), or “get nervous” (Novosti Journalist A).

However, there appears to be a considerable difference between Delo and Novosti online journalists regarding potentials of audience involvement in news for the quality of journalism. On the one hand, Novosti online journalists clearly expressed willingness “to help people to solve the problems they explicate” (Novosti Journalist C), but the established news making routines make it difficult for the journalists to respond. On the other hand, Delo online journalists do not see existing ways of audience involvement in news as a possible path toward journalism’s reconnection with the public – for instance, Delo Journalist B emphasizes that “it would be a nonsense to try to spur the debate” among members of the audience. Nevertheless, online journalists of both print media organizations stress that on rare occasions interactions with members of the are fruitful for news making, when online readers provide “new or additional information” (Novosti Journalist B), “explicate journalists’ mistakes” (Delo Journalist E), give “constructive criticism” (Delo Journalist B), or send “publishable photographs or videos” (Novosti Journalist C). Apart from that, Delo and Novosti journalists foremost do not see much use in most of the content provided by the audience as they regard them foremost as “vulgar” (Delo Journalist B) and “repulsive” (Novosti Journalist B).

“We are not ‘Real’ Journalists”

“What we do is not actually journalism. We sit, skim the web looking for information, and reassemble it,” says Delo Journalist B. This is one example of many suggesting that online journalists do not see themselves as the “real” journalists. Phrases such as “copy-pasters” (Delo Journalists A, B, D), “recyclers” (Delo Journalist E), “sitting job” (Novosti Journalist B) indicate what online journalists explicitly stress – they do not regard their work as intellectually challenging. “We are not cognitive workers. I get the news items, reassemble them, and publish them online. I sit in the newsroom and write about events that I didn’t experience,” acknowledges Delo Journalist C. When characterizing online newswork Delo Journalist A uses a metaphor of “assembly-line” and “factory” to imply that the work they do resembles monotony of manual computer-bound work. Novosti online journalists stress that their work mostly resembles “copy-paste journalism” (Novosti Journalist A, B, C) and that “there is almost no author’s work” (Novosti Journalist B). In this context, some said that they feel “alienated” from the story they write (Delo Journalist A) and “not in the service of the citizens” (Novosti Journalist B).

Namely, analysis of in-depth interviews shows that online journalists hardly provide “original” news on the basis of active information seeking, but predominantly shovel content of in-house print colleagues onto the website, reassemble or only copy-paste press agency news, and translate news of foreign media. The discourse of speed and the notion of timely news are predominantly emphasized by members of Delo and Novosti online departments. Online journalism is “non-stop” journalism, says Novosti Journalist C, stressing that her “main task is to provide news at once and now.” Furthermore, Delo Journalist B “the need for speed” often appears as “a minus” of online journalism, “Often we do things without thinking. We have to do everything almost immediately which often results in mistakes – from spelling to factual mistakes.” When asked if they verify the information they use in their items, nobody replied with an affirmative answer – they rely on accuracy of news items of other journalists, their primary information sources.

“Still a lot to be done”

Interviewees imply that reasons for rationalization of online newswork and demands for highly routinized editorial processes are based on the fact that Delo and Novosti do not know how to make profit online and that they are afraid to invest more resources in technological innovations, more experienced journalistic staff, and “original” online news making. Online journalists of both print media organizations see newsroom integration as a process that might strengthen the cognitive character of online newswork and put different perspective on audience involvement.

On the one hand, spatial reorganization of Delo newsroom is regarded as a turning point, while Delo online journalists still indicate that online department is “underestimated” in relation to the print department and “not regarded as equal” (Delo Journalist A). Recently Delo built a common newsroom for print, online and photo departments, as well as, the support offices with a goal of bringing online journalists “closer to the action” (Delo Journalist B). “At least print journalists started to be aware that we are there. We know each other now. They know what we do and the other way around. There is a small, but important improvement.” (Delo Journalist C) On the other hand, at the newspaper Novosti a formal process of building a common information engine grounded on collaboration and combination of staffers, technologies, spaces and contents has not started yet as online journalists perform as a rather “isolated” department (Novosti Journalist C). Moreover, there is still “a lot to be done” (Novosti Journalist A) in terms of collaboration between online and print journalists, yet alone in terms of participatory character news making, where members of the audience would have their share. In this perspective, according to interviewees of Delo and Novosti cooperation across departments has been primarily a result of individual interests and aspirations, and has not evolved in a newsroom routine in either of the newsrooms.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study shows that it is useful to consider journalists' relations to the audience and their in-house colleagues when researching negotiations of the normative predispositions of journalism within the institutional realities of journalism—particularly if research is comparative. Namely, conducting interviews with online journalists at Slovenian Delo and Serbian Novosti, and comparing the results gave the authors the opportunity to reconstruct the two cases in relation to the larger societal and historical contexts. Combining the narrations of those involved in the online news projects reveals similar complexities and paradoxes at work when it comes to journalists' societal roles negotiations as in Slovenian only – that is, inside their newswork environment in relations to print journalists, and outside their organizational setting in relations to the audience. In any case, these “internal” and “external” relations are importantly define by the established strategies, processes, constraints and perceptions that shape the online departments under study, as well as, larger trends of online communication reflecting tensions between the universalistic and particularistic in the global.

The article confirms the results of previous studies in Slovenia and elsewhere, which revealed that online journalists of the respective print media organisations do not feel like “real” journalists (e.g., Oblak Črnič, 2007; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008); that online newswork, which is institutionally enforced, is not regarded by online journalists as being journalistic (e.g., Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Deuze, 2007); and that online staffers' work in flexible labour relations negatively affects their motivation to produce “better” journalism (e.g., Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007). Additionally, this study shows that online journalists perceive their roles in society in accordance with the normative grounding of Slovenian and Serbian journalism, but have difficulties performing those roles in contingent and uneasy institutional environments. Simultaneously, the paper indicates that the newswork routines and institutional contingencies do not constitute a proper environment in which journalists of Slovenian print media organisations can offer some of the services that they desire. According to Delo online journalists, they cannot perform as watchdogs; and interviewees from Novosti indicate that they are disabled in regard to serving as a forum for debate or as an integrative force in society. In both cases, communitarian ideals to journalism are hardly ever evident in interviewees' narrations, which implies online journalists try to keep the distance in relation to the audience and retain the authority in news making developed in the mass media world – that is, gathering, assessing and providing news. In this perspective, interactive ways of involving the audience in news have a minor role in shaping Delo and Novosti online journalists' self-perceptions of themselves as journalists and their roles in the society, which was similarly indicated in previous studies from different countries (Deuze et al., 2007; Domingo et al., 2008; Meikele and Redden, 2011; Singer et al., 2011).

Despite the particularities of the normative development of Slovenian and Serbian journalism, as well as their rather distinctive empirical realities in the last two decades, there are surprisingly many similarities in online journalists' negotiation of societal roles, identified in previous research in Slovenia. This implies cross-national commonalities in

online journalism and, more precisely, in online newswork and online journalists' perceptions, deriving from similar dynamics between the global and the local.

First, the online journalists of the print media organisations imply that the service they provide to the people at least partly corresponds to the high-modern or classical paradigm of journalism, which has emerged after the fall of socialism two decades ago. Namely, interviewees say that they make and disseminate timely "objective" news on the basis of which people make decisions and participate in public debate. Simultaneously, they regard the critical normative role of journalists—that is, holding public personalities and institutions accountable for their conduct—as an ideal. Such perception and consequential performance might bring larger implications for societal processes. Such journalism places the emphasis on the people's ability to judge their own self-interests and assumes that people have the potential to respond. This kind of journalism sees citizens "as reactive rather than proactive" (Anderson, 2007, p. 47), and implies a "competitive model of democracy", in which political-economic power holders "act", whereas citizens "react" (Strömbäck, 2005, p. 334). Moreover, Anderson (2007) and Strömbäck (2005) write that news is like a mark in the marketplace of goods, where political alternatives offer their services and products to voters who are then supposed to act as customers and buy the product that pleases them most by voting. In this context, journalists should provide information that people can trust and act upon, as well as use to monitor the power holders. Delo online journalists feel that they are not able to hold the powerful responsible due to the industrial character of their work, and they regard the watchdog role as an unrealised ideal; and Novosti online journalists feel unable to stimulate public debate and integrate citizens into it.

Second, online journalists indicate that they try to retain the role of the traditional gatekeeper, where they solely decide what is going to be published on the website and how it is going to be done. Manifestations of audience involvement appear as a parallel monologue as participatory tools have been adopted more as "listening devices than as devices for a dialogue between journalists and audiences" (Hermida, 2011, p. 181). Hence, the study suggests that the ideas of "interactive journalism" (Nip, 2006), yet alone "participatory journalism" (Singer et al., 2011) have not yet been culturally incorporated in online journalists' news making practices or mindsets. In this perspective, members of the audience are foremost regarded in the fashion of the mass media world, where they act more as passive consumers than active citizens. Since the most important input of online readers in the eyes of the interviewees are clicks and visits, the online departments appear to be thorn between spurring the audience involvement in news through interactive features, on the one side, and protecting their authority in news delivery.

Third, this study further implies that the inability to look beyond established visions of journalistic conduct rests on consolidated editorial processes and newswork routines enforced by news management. Not only does such institutional constraint of online newswork preclude the heterogeneity of the societal roles performed by contemporary online journalists, it might also question how self-perceived roles are realised. Common

online newswork routines at different media organisations—computer-bound shoveling of print content to the web, reassembling press agency news and translating foreign media news—are often accompanied by “an expansion of mimicry” (Boczkowski, 2009), and “the new paradox of journalism is more outlets covering fewer stories” (State of the Media, 2006). Such a narrowing focus on the societal dynamics might be devastating for the character of people’s interconnection within the late-modern contingencies and complexities of “multi-epistemic order” (Dahlgren, 2009), where it becomes generally accepted that all storytelling is situated and all perspectives are contingent. Hence, if mimicry within high-modern journalism persists and expands, problems of participation and democracy will be deep indeed—not only online.

Fourth, this study also indicates that a greater online journalists’ connection with the audience, on the one hand, and print journalists, on the other, might result in a cross-departmental newsroom culture and the erosion of the institutional deprecation of online journalists – however, at Delo, results are more explicit than at Novosti. In this context, some authors suggest that newsroom integration could lead to larger transformations—the strengthening of news as a business and the revitalisation of journalism as a societal institution (Erbsen et al., 2008). However, the processes of newsroom integration affect negotiations of journalists’ roles in society, and the ways in which they perceive them is a different matter that deserves further theoretical and empirical attention. It is too early to argue that the integration processes in newsrooms worldwide can automatically lead to “better” journalism, as argued in previous studies (e.g., Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Vobič, 2009b).

Hence, the study confirms some already revealed implications and accepted theses in Slovenian research. It also shows the connections between the self-perceived societal roles of online journalists and newswork routines, newsroom organizations and institutional mindsets shaped by specific contexts. Since, as several authors suggest in Paterson and Domingo (2008), a particular case study does not allow for generalizations across the news industry, it is hard to argue whether findings from Delo and Novosti are representative in a trans-local perspective of the role of journalism in society. Yet, analysis of the local results point toward tensions between the particularistic and the common, where universal (globalising) and particular (domesticating) elements reciprocally coexist among different actors and perform in transactions of a social, political, economic and cultural nature across locales. In this sense, this study indicates similarities and differences that may be worth pursuing in further empirical research.

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Note:

¹ The authors would like to note that this comparative study, in part, derived from the Slovenian case study published in Vobič, Igor, 'Društvene vloge novinarstva u dobu interneta i digitalne televizije: slovenski online novinarji i njihova samopercepcija' (Societal Roles of Journalism in the Age of the Internet and Digital Television: Slovenian Online Journalists and their Self-Perceptions), *Medijska istraživanja*, 17 (1-2), 2011, pp. 53-74.