

# Learning global journalism: A course on journalism on developing countries in Africa and the Finnish freelance journalism market

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A group of Finnish journalism students travelled to Zambia, Africa in November 2007. The field trip was a culmination for a course in journalism on developing countries. The starting points reflected the practices and models of the research-based approach to learning. The role of the students was two-fold: they were students as well as journalists. The aims were, to deepen the students' understanding of current issues in developing countries, their visibility and treatment in the media and of actors in development cooperation and to produce journalism on developing countries for the domestic media. In this article, first, the students' views on what they consider as good journalism on developing countries, based on the observations they made during their trip, is analysed. Secondly, the students' experiences on what they learned about journalism practices on developing countries during their writing processes are analysed, and also their observations on the ideals and practices of freelance journalism when selling their own stories. The data analysed includes participant-observation from the field trip in Zambia and qualitative research interviews conducted with the students after the trip. The article highlights the importance of students' own role in directing their field work, involving goal setting, questioning and self-evaluation of the knowledge gained. It also sheds light on how research and experience-based learning in a developing country and an unfamiliar culture can contribute to a comprehensive way of learning. In this case alternative ideas how issues about developing countries could be evaluated and represented in western local and national media.

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*That is the question. For whom do you really write those stories [on developing countries]? Do you only write them for the small minority who knows about these things, or should every old lady in every remote Finnish village know why the raping of widows in Zambia is a problem?*

The above quotation is an extract from one of the interviews I conducted in April 2008 with journalism students at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. In the extract, the student describes her experiences related to writing news stories on developing countries. I interviewed the students approximately four months after their field trip to Zambia, Africa – a field trip that was a culmination for a course in journalism on developing countries which the students had started in Finland. During this trip, six journalism students, aged 22–30, first spent a week in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, and then two weeks on the Zambian countryside, acquainting themselves with the lives of the local people as well as different development cooperation projects. The aim of the field trip and the course as a whole was for the course participants to write stories and sell them for publication in the Finnish media.

According to the curriculum, the aim of the course on journalism on developing countries was, firstly, to deepen one's understanding of current issues in developing countries, their visibility and treatment in the media and of actors in development cooperation and, secondly, to produce journalism on developing countries for the domestic media. The course, on offer since the year 2000, has included lectures and assignments in Jyväskylä, and a fieldtrip to a developing country. The role of the students in the course was twofold: they were students as well as journalists. They were given the chance as well as the responsibility for choosing the places they wanted to visit on their trip to Zambia. The topics they covered in their stories included HIV and AIDS, the disabled, the position of women and widows, development aid and policy and climate change and its effects, for instance, on agriculture in Zambia. Before the trip, the course participants were in touch with potential local contacts by email and phone. Thus, the course kept the students busy before, during and after the trip.

The trip and tasks described above reflect the aims and character of the course and the assumed approach to learning. Both the starting points and the aims of the course reflected the practices and models of the so-called research-based approach to learning. This approach high-

lights the learner's active role as well as the influence of cooperation in directing research, involving goal setting, questioning and self-evaluation of the knowledge gained, i.e. evaluation of what one already knows and what one still needs to find out. Scientific research as such is a perfect example of research-based learning, but journalists also have to apply research-based practices in their work when facing new and complicated problems. Solving these problems often requires research involving vast amounts of data, for instance statute books and disquisitions, as well as background literature or interviews with experts. Successful research on a phenomenon leads to a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon and the meanings attached to it, and does not simply produce knowledge but is also experiential (Hakkarainen et al. 2005, 29–30).

The course was specifically about doing research in a developing country and in an unfamiliar culture, as this also enables and contributes to a comprehensive way of learning. As Kivimäki (2009) argues in her article, the most remarkable international learning outcomes are not necessarily bound to learning individual subjects, but to using a foreign language and being faced with new environments. Studying abroad can thus be a comprehensive experience where contacts with others are essential.

After the trip, the students spent the spring, summer and autumn 2008 trying to sell the stories they had produced to different Finnish media, with varying success. Most of their stories have now been published in daily and weekly newspapers (e.g. *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*, *Keskisuomalainen*, *Maaseudun Tulevaisuus*, *Uutispäivä Demari*) and student union papers (*Jyväskylän ylioppilaslehti*). Also *IT* and *Kotona* magazines (published by the Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities and the Sato Corporation, respectively) as well as *Tiedonjyvä*, the University of Jyväskylä internal bulletin, have published these stories. However, some of the students' productions still remain unsold and unpublished, and the students had difficulties in selling their stories, particularly to magazines.

In the interviews that I conducted with the students regarding their experiences on their field trip, there was not any correct or easy answer to emerge to the questions I asked them concerning journalism. In fact, the number of unsolved questions they had was quite considerable. Why is it difficult to sell stories dealing with developing countries? Why does a producer or a news editor of a newspaper reject a story because it lacks a

local point of view? Why and how should a journalist be able to incorporate a local point of view in a story on the lives of Zambian women – ‘local’ referring here, for instance, to a Savonlinna point of view, i.e. that of a small Finnish town. Do the media have global responsibility, and if they do, then what does or should that mean in practice?

The trip improved the students’ skills in the acquisition of information, interviewing and working in a different culture – the kinds of skills that they will be able to make use of in the future. For instance, they now have experience of arriving in a village where they did not share a common language with the local people who also had never before worked with journalists. Consequently, the local people did not know who exactly they were talking to. Furthermore, the course and the trip helped the students form new ideas and points of view on journalism on developing countries, particularly on how journalism should be developed and both the willingness and the possibilities that journalism has in solving global problems.

In this article, I will first analyse the students’ views on what they consider as good journalism on developing countries. I will pay specific attention to the ways in which they justify their views on Zambian people, life and practices based on the observations they made during their trip. Secondly, I will examine the processes of producing and selling their stories, which turned out to be an interesting phase in their study of journalistic practices. Finally, I will analyse the students’ experiences on what they learned about journalism on developing countries during their writing processes and also their observations on the ideals and practices of free-lance journalism on developing countries when selling their own stories.

I collected the data as a participant-observer during the trip to Zambia where I accompanied the students to their visits to the countryside. For the most part I avoided disturbing the students’ work. However, during a couple of visits to a village in the Chipata area, I did exchange a few words with the students on the acquisition of information, i.e. on how they should organise their personal interviews on intimate topics with the women in the village. Moreover, for some of the interviews they conducted I added a few questions to those the students had prepared themselves.

The visits (including the travelling) ranged from a couple of hours to a whole day. I photographed the students while they were working on

their stories, and made notes on the interviews they made and our conversations. In addition to this observational data, I also use the informal discussions I had with the students during the trip, the students' written reports on their trip as well as the thematic interviews I conducted with them after our return to Finland. The present article is primarily based on these interviews.

## **Good journalism on developing countries and its challenges**

The discrepancy between media representation and 'reality' has often been highlighted in research on journalism on developing countries. Research has shown that the Western media offer a simplified and distorted picture of developing countries and their populations. Furthermore, the media have been criticised for marginalising developing countries by having very strict criteria on what counts as newsworthy and by focusing on negative stories. Usually developing countries appear in the news when something surprising, unusual or negative happens, and even interesting stories will have to fight not only for space and broadcasting time, but also for the attention of audiences. Partly as a consequence of this, topics such as the large number of people being diagnosed with AIDS or the number of deaths are suitable for breaking news (Mäkelä 2002, 2, 37; Raunio 2006, 24). However, the ongoing debate on globalization has changed news reporting by putting the fairness of development and the effects of the global economy on the welfare of developing countries on the media's agenda. Despite this, news reporting still focuses predominantly on crises and is characterized by exoticism. Moreover, women's magazines in particular often publish travel accounts – another typical feature of reporting on developing countries. People in developing countries and their everyday life, on the other hand, is rarely covered by news, although some cracks in the practices of Finnish mainstream journalism are visible: from time to time one hears people from developing countries speak in their own voices (Hurskainen 2002, 31).

Several of the notions presented above easily apply to journalism on Africa, which has been portrayed as a place with despotic civilizations, which do not have any legacy of those democratic principles that have been dear to the self-image of the West. Accordingly, the Africa that we

know or hear about is, essentially, a European-made Africa (Mengara 2001, 1). Mengara states Africa “is a world almost totally manufactured in image, moulded into postcolonial chaos and dependence, and conditioned to be permanently perceived as a continent where nothing works because of the inherently chaotic, despotic and uncivilized nature of its peoples” (Mengara 2001, 8). Some researchers have tried to offer more optimistic explanations for the prevalent helpless representations of developing countries: the stories aim to invoke sympathy for the poor, which leads to the presentation of the people as helpless (Maasilta 2002, 29).

What kind of thoughts did fieldwork invoke in the students as regards media representations, journalistic practices and needs for developing them? The data does not provide one straightforward answer to this question, particularly because it conveys not only one, but rather several African and Zambian realities. The data illustrates both the extreme poverty of the people and their positive attitude to life, and both these aspects of Zambian life are strongly present in the student interviews. Although the sights of poverty, suffering, hungry and sick children living in slums did not come as a surprise to the students, the experience was oppressive and unforgettable for many of them. At the same time, however, there were surprising aspects to the lives of the locals: their positivity and friendliness, joy of life, pride, self-respect and self-sufficiency and the signs of development. The students paid at least as much attention to these latter, more positive aspects of Zambian life which seemed to contradict the bleak picture of developing countries presented in the media, with which they had become familiar.

Some of the students visited a children’s home and a school for children with HIV. One of them described the joy of life and self-respect apparent there:

*It was kind of unbelievable to see the children’s joy of life and enthusiasm over everything, although they were aware of their own situation. (...) We felt like all confused for they had such a strong self-respect and they had been discriminated against throughout their lives because they had HIV.*

Mirroring these observations, several of the interviews featured calls for a broadening of horizons and the presentation of more positive news stories on developing countries in Finnish and Western journalism on the basis it should be possible to better convey the joy of life and the positive developments. Why, then, should this be done? While the students may

simply consider positive stories are easier to read, they also considered it important for the Western media to give more visibility to the positive aspects of developing countries. Media coverage of opportunities, good ideas and the liveliness of people in developing countries generates belief not only in the meaningfulness of aid and cooperation, but also in the potential for change. Furthermore, unlike stories focusing on crises and problems – which paralyse people into believing that the conditions in these countries cannot be improved – more positive stories might also help support the economic and social development in poorer countries.

In the students' view, the presentation of the often slow but positive developments should not mean sacrificing the fundamental ideal of journalism, objectivity. Nor do they think this would be the case. Rather, such news coverage would present a more truthful, honest and multidimensional picture with more contextualising background information, as journalism on aid, crises and states of emergency is often superficial and lacks a valid analysis of causes and effects for events and phenomena. The demand for journalism to focus on the causes and effects is well justified. The effects of colonial history, the global economy and supranational economic mechanisms on the economic situation in developing countries are typically ignored in journalism, and poverty is implicitly suggested to be a natural state of affairs. Moreover, in news reporting, economic, political and international news are dealt with in separate sections. Consequently, an economic point of view is avoided in political and international news, although economic aspects would often be essential in thoroughly explaining political events abroad (Kivimäki 2005, 104–107).

In practice, however, contextualising and explaining events is far from easy. Journalists may either be unwilling or incapable of reflecting on the effects of economic causes on wars in developing countries; this would also possibly entail interpretation, which is seen as alien to the ideals of objective journalism (Kivimäki 2005, 104–107). Furthermore, journalists producing stories on international issues do so in a hurry to meet deadlines and have to resort to the background material that is available, which limits their possibilities to search for further information and new and unorthodox sources or points of view. In practice this means that in putting together stories, journalists rely on material provided by news agencies instead of searching for interviewees. National news agencies

may not have the financial resources or the willingness to send their journalists abroad or maintain extensive networks of foreign correspondents. A corollary of this is the development of crisis journalism and parachute journalism: when a crisis takes place, journalists arrive in droves and a massive flow of news is ready to begin (Mäkilä 2002, 26–29).

In addition to paying more attention to the positive aspects and the contexts of events and phenomena, some of the students expressed their wish to strive for offering more humane news coverage from developing countries; ‘people’s stories’. First, this demand may be related to the fact that people in the third world are often presented as groups rather than individuals. This is apparent in captions, where people in developing countries often remain anonymous. A possible interpretation for this is that news representations of people who live amidst war, or are the victims of terrorism or natural catastrophes, strip them of their identities (Tarvainen 2005, 74). Second, the demand for a more humane approach can be seen to echo the current ideals for journalistic work in the Finnish media – offering human interest stories, stories on everyday life and stories with a human aspect. Third, it can be seen as indicative of the difficulty of doing this in practice. For instance, as some of the students acquainted themselves with several development aid projects funded by Finland and other countries, they learned the hard way how easy it is to focus one’s attention on the project itself while the most interesting questions perhaps remain unasked.

Observations on intercultural journalistic interviews with people unaccustomed to media illustrate that, throughout the whole interaction, it is important to keep the situation as close to a normal social intercourse as possible. If the topic dealt with is a negative or difficult one, it is particularly important to make sure that the interviewee is not afraid of losing their face, or does not feel insulted either during or after the interview (Huilaja 2007, 47–48). Despite the fact that the people in the Zambian villages were hospitable and some even recounted their experiences to the journalist very openly and the students were aware of these notions, it was not easy to access the ingredients needed for a more humane story. From the students’ point of view, asking questions both personal and dealing with difficult issues requires the journalist and the interviewee to have the ability and the courage to discuss the issues. In addition, the interviewees will have to have the need to make public their private lives and issues.



*It was really difficult to get individual people or targets for aid outside the project to discuss things. If you managed to do that then it was very very challenging to find an icebreaker. (...) At the beginning it was maybe about your own courage, that you should just have raised those issues and to take your time in the situation, and not necessarily follow the normal pattern for visits. The other thing was that people seemed a bit sceptical.*

*Then we had a lot of topics on AIDS and the disabled, and I don't have that much experience on interviewing or approaching things like this for instance the disabled. So that could bring a little extra to it. Maybe a certain cautiousness, because people did want to talk about their problems and issues a lot, but then maybe a Finn does not dare so easily to go and ask about AIDS orphans, malaria deaths and things like that. And another thing could be that people liked to talk about certain themes, but to connect them with everyday life and a specific point of view, what is what we want as journalists, that again was not at all self-evident for them. Maybe you want to keep your family out of the public eye although you want to make the issue public.*

A further complicating aspect in this equation is that, in a country such as Zambia, it is difficult to get to the villages and talk to people without planning everything in advance and contacting people in leading or intermediary roles. In practice, this means making contacts with people such as community leaders, teachers or representatives from development cooperation projects who then provide assistance in practical matters and often act as interpreters and drivers. At best, these people help the journalist to build a confidential relationship with the local people and consequently have them talk about their personal lives. The students considered the antithesis to conforming to these practices was that the prearranged meetings may seem artificial and PR-like, making it difficult to gain access to people's genuine experiences or critical knowledge:

*A top journalist probably wouldn't resort to a prearranged PR-event where everyone's present and prepared for the presence of journalists there and they give speeches and present the best side of their own project, and they have been working on it for months (...) But on the other hand, if you went there without preparation and just said that I want information on this and that, then that could be really difficult. (...) You have to take the attitude that of course there they say that everything has been going very well, but then you have to get the real information from somewhere else.*

As this extract suggests, some students felt that in some cases people working on projects tried to give a more polished and uncritical picture of the project and its results than the actual reality, because with the ensuing good publicity they might be able to ensure additional funding for themselves. Consequently, they did not necessarily let the local people present their own opinions on the issues, as the following extract shows. The context for the extract is a situation in which contact persons have taken the students to acquaint themselves with a school for children with HIV. Some pupils and parents had been invited there for the interview:

*We were allowed to ask questions from the young people in the classroom. The situation was far from real and relaxed, because these young people did not speak a lot of English but their tribal languages, and this man, who was the contact person for the project, was translating what they were saying. (...) For instance in relation to girls' and women's position I asked if they feel that they receive as much attention in the classroom as the boys do. One of the girls raised her hand up and stood up. And there was such an angry flood of words from her. You could see that it's criticism, that it's really genuine criticism. This guy poker-faced translates it for us, that there is no problem, that we do get proper attention. This is what he said, and you could see that that is not the truth.*

## **Experiences from the market – selling the stories**

For the students participating in the course, writing and selling their stories turned out to be important opportunities in terms of both learning and challenging journalistic practices. Here, I will focus specifically on the experiences the students had while selling their own stories, especially regarding the ideals and practices of Finnish journalism on Zambia, Africa and developing countries in general.

Contacts established prior to the course assisted the students in selling their stories to news editors, and many of them sold their stories to daily or weekly papers where they had had summer jobs. Research on news reporting on developing countries suggests that the stories do not have market value, but they are categorised as serious and tragic. According to Tarvainen (2005, 16), stories on developing countries only become newsworthy when there is nothing else to write about, i.e. they are “of secondary importance”. Although the majority of the students’ stories have

been sold, the group strongly felt that the number of stories dealing with topics related to developing countries published in the Finnish media is “disappointingly low”. Unsurprisingly, the students found selling their stories “quite difficult”, “difficult”, “surprisingly difficult” or “absurdly difficult”. Most of the news editors they contacted were “surprisingly unwilling” to buy their stories and some of the students’ offers had indeed been “torpedoed”.

The students themselves were not altogether happy with their stories, and thought that in the future it would be important, for instance, to focus on broad thematic entities instead of single development cooperation projects or only positive topics and perspectives. The specific foci chosen for stories, or the possible shortcomings and problems in them, do not, however, explain the difficulties in selling the stories, as sometimes they were not even accepted for review. A student who discussed her stories with several news editors said:

*Surprisingly unwilling many of them [news editors] have been. Straight away, once you have presented the topic, they [have stated that] this is not our thing.*

Disillusioned, the students made the observation that stories are often lumped together as ‘stuff on Africa’ regardless of the country they are about, and the topic can be viewed as dealt with already if it has been covered during the last year. It has to be remembered, of course, that the papers’ own reporters write stories about developing countries and there is also work by freelance journalists available. However, the students on the course felt that news editors had only a small annual quota for buying and publishing stories on developing countries, and the topic most certainly does not seem to be one of the ‘sexy’ ones. In fact, the student interviews illustrate the somewhat negative attitude of those making decisions concerning the selection of stories towards the offers the students made – “we’ve seen and heard all this”, “we are not going start publishing them again”, “the same nonsense”:

*Depressingly few stories related to this theme are accepted. As was discussed in our group, many different media, newspapers, magazines, gave the same reply that we just had a story related to Africa eight months ago, that maybe we will not have this same thing again. Even though the issue might be completely different, the angle, I mean everything might be different, a different country, still it is seen as the same stuff even Africa. That*

*they are all the same nonsense, that we are not going start publishing them again. It was a very prevalent view. It made it difficult to sell the stories. Someone who was selling a story related to developing countries had been just frankly told that our quota for stories on developing countries for this year is already full, that we've already had ten stories this year, that that's our quota. It's horrible, that you have quotas like that. So there should be (...) a big change.*

Some students thought that the perceived unwillingness to publish stories on developing countries indicates that those making decisions concerning the content of papers are not interested in the theme. While negotiating with executive news editors of daily papers, some came across the requirement that the stories should have a local or regional point of view, to be interesting and topical, which was viewed by the students as “extremely strange”.

*I have talked to quite many news editors about selling these [stories]. On many occasions it's been about where is the point of view of our region on this issue. It's not enough that they're projects funded by us. It's not in a way enough, you should have some kind of a regional connection, which is an extremely strange thing to bring up in relation to such an issue. And it's not in my view in any way related to journalism on developing countries that you should sell it specifically to some certain region. It's a problem that they're not necessarily that interesting, deal with topical regional issues.*

The demand for a local or national point of view in journalism is an old one, as closeness is a fundamental criterion for news. A manifestation of this demand in Western news coverage is that the problems in developing countries only become visible once they become a threat to the West (Raunio 2006, 24; Tarvainen 2005, 16). Furthermore, a point of view readily assumed is that of ‘us abroad’. For instance, in the Finnish media, stories on the sequel of an international crisis become stories about ‘Finns abroad’ if Finnish peacekeepers are sent to the country or region in question (Mäkilä 2002, 35). In the context of this article, it is interesting to observe the persistence of the criterion of closeness, and how the current generation of journalists has difficulty in viewing it as a valid and functional way of evaluating the news value of events in the globalised world.

The requirement for a local perspective in the stories was justified to the students with the assumed interest of the readers: they were not believed to be interested in what were seen as distant topics concerning

developing countries. The students, however, did not consider the lack of the readers' interest as an appropriate criterion for the news. Many Finns have, for instance, travelled in Africa and there certainly are audiences interested in these stories. Moreover, the students thought that by writing about developing countries the papers would increase Finnish readers' – 'the old ladies in remote Finnish villages' and their grandchildren's – interest towards developing countries and news related to them.

*Yes it was noticeable in selling the stories that issues related to developing countries are not of any interest, for those who make decisions concerning the content of the papers, particularly because they're of no interest to the readers. But what if they decided that this is something that's really written a lot about and seriously make sure that these issues become familiar, then yes that could make a big difference. I think it's a poor justification for not accepting some stories and not writing about something that the readers are not interested. I think that it's horrible to hear because yes it, if you wrote about it you could also create that, create more interest in it. So it is quite base.*

One of the stories that got rejected several times deals with women's position in Zambia, which the writer of the story considers a very important theme. However, she also thinks that the theme is the exact reason why the story has not been published.

*I wanted to make a story about women's position, and I am still not going to back away one inch, that it's about women's position, because the issue came up in every single project, in every single place and with every single person. I wanted to write a story about it, but no one has wanted to buy it, because it's about women's position. I must have offered it to twenty Finnish papers, which I won't start listing here, but there are both big and small papers among them.*

Those buying stories for newspapers and magazines have justified their decision to reject the story by stating, for instance, that the topic is too difficult for their audience. The student's own view is that women from the third world are seen as too unfamiliar to be discussed in the Finnish media, the topic is not 'fashionable' enough and does not have 'sex appeal' in the media, and rather than being a topical theme has to do with long-term developments. Furthermore, what makes the rejections even more difficult to understand is that, according to the student, the story after all takes a positive point of view to women's activism and em-

powerment, which could be conceived as an aspect facilitating the publication of the story.

*I thought that I would be able to sell it for it does take a different point of view to the topic in the sense that it highlights women's activism and their ability to make a difference in their society and even create small centres of power, to create their own networks, their own small associations, which can really have a strong effect on lives in their own village. So I tried to highlight women's empowerment and I thought that that would make it interesting, that it takes a slightly different point of view, and not simply that of women's oppression.*

Six months after her first attempts at selling the story, the student started to offer her story to more marginal and thematic publications. After the trip to Zambia, while studying as an exchange student in an Australian university, she participated in a course on Women and Development where she recounted the reception of her story in the Finnish media. Interestingly, as can be seen from the extract below, the participants in the course explained the student's experiences as being indicative of the gendered practices of journalism, and the fact that women are less likely to be considered newsworthy. The students' explanation is supported by at least the practices observed in Finnish image journalism: very few women and children appear in images from developing countries (Tarvainen 2005, 17, 74–77).

*They [the students on the course] were just as shocked. The reactions were like no, I don't want to swear, but it can't be true that all other topics get published (...) and that women don't have sex appeal in the media when it's about women in the third world. The teacher there (...) said that if I translated it into English it would certainly be published somewhere in Australia. But I said that the main goal of the course was that the stories will be published in the Finnish media.*

What, then, according to the students' experiences, would be sellable on the freelance market of Finnish journalism on developing countries? Magazines in particular were looking for dramatic life stories. The interviews suggest that an important ingredient in these stories is a person with an exceptional and miserable life who has, nevertheless, survived against all odds. This requirement for positivity was also highlighted as the students reflected on the practices of daily papers and the readability of stories. However, the students themselves seemed to believe that,

in the end, startling one's readers is the way to draw their attention to stories and themes related to developing countries. Hence, it can be suggested that the students' own criteria for news on developing countries corresponds with the criteria papers have for buying stories. Essentially, however, the criteria for news seem to be different if one considers ideals in journalism on developing countries and practices of news production more generally on the one hand, and selling and sale value of stories on the other hand.

## **Sadness and joy, crying and laughter**

All the students on the course expressed their willingness to work as journalists on topics related to developing countries in the future. But how do the students view the future of (Finnish) journalism on developing countries? At present, news coverage seems distorted: on the one hand, the news practices direct the attention to sudden and dramatic crises and situations. Slow change, on the other hand, is an outcome of a longer process and thus does not seem newsworthy. Accordingly, many important issues get no visibility and stay out of the public eye.

Is it possible to change the practices, and did this learning experience lead the students to consider this? The value that local and national media attach to different types of news is of major importance: they influence the choices made and the practices learned by students entering the field, as well as those of freelance journalists. The selling of the stories did after all illustrate that a journalist will have to find a balance between two different goals. On the one hand, there was the attempt to present a more diverse public image of developing countries. On the other hand, the students learned that, to be able to publish a story, one has to evaluate the topic, applying the criteria of saleability and interest. Moreover, if one wanted to publish a story in major print or electronic media, one also had to incorporate a local or national point of view into the story (cf. Maasilta 2002, 28).

Despite the critical views, the students' appraisals of the position of journalism on developing countries in the Finnish news media are not altogether gloomy. Practices can be changed, and perhaps the change is inevitable. The students believe that if one manages to get to a leading position on an editorial staff, then one will be able to change the prac-

tices and criteria in news production. This desire for change can also be seen as significant in terms of studying and learning through research in another culture. In other words, personally witnessing and experiencing the everyday life in a developing country might be one tool in changing the values and practices of journalism, as it is difficult to understand the reality behind the news without seeing it (see also Mäkilä 2002, 96).

As regards the local and national media, there seems to be a need for a re-evaluation of the news value with which a topic is judged to be either close or distant for audiences, particularly as the current news criterion seems to be that of geographical closeness. The course participants considered views on what counts as a good life as being often similar across geographical borders: as one of the students put it, “I would like to bring people in developing countries closer to us, we’re all human and we share the same planet”.

Although the importance of covering the everyday-life aspect has been highlighted in the Finnish media in recent years, the interviews illustrated that it is, nevertheless, difficult to pursue and sell stories dealing with it. This can be seen as related to the fact that in news practices, the cores and significance of local, national and international economy and politics become intertwined, while the definitions of what exactly is everyday life and how it could be accurately and validly described in journalism still remain unclear. If the everyday life of people in developing countries had more news value, women’s position and problems, for instance, would perhaps be considered more newsworthy by mainstream media.

How should events and people’s everyday life in developing countries be represented? The interviews, on the one hand, illustrate that in putting together a story, the journalist should have sensitivity and understanding for the interests, knowledge and tastes of the domestic audience: include a dose of sadness and joy, of unhappiness and happiness, and of crying and laughter – in exactly the right proportions. This also applies to the genres and ingredients of the stories: human interest material should be combined with in-depth analysis and background information. On the other hand, the data discussed here illustrates an interesting difference in the views of the students and those of the news editors, who justify their rejection of ‘stuff on Africa’ by stating that the audience is not interested in it. The students, in contrast, would like to use their stories to build up



interest in the topic and view ‘important’ stories as having more news value than ‘interesting’ ones.

The issues of news practices and criteria for newsworthiness are connected to the ethics and responsibilities of media and increasingly to the question of what counts as good journalism on a global level: To what extent should and could even locally oriented journalism strive to strengthen global communality, citizenship and responsibility? Critical voices claim that although ethics is favoured and demanded for journalism, a discrepancy between theory and practice is apparent. According to Kunczik (1999, 247), there is either state restriction or manipulation of the media, or the media is anchored in a capitalist business, which prevents ethically driven journalism because profit maximisation is the dominant motivation. In light of the data analysed, there are, however, signs and possibilities of a more globally oriented and responsible journalism. Even though locality would still be viewed as a central criterion for news, global questions, such as climate change and poverty, are more important and less geographically bounded than ever before, and are likely to change the practices and agendas of Western media.

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## **Mokantis globalios žurnalistikos: studijos apie Afrikos besivystančių šalių aktualijas ir laisvai samdomų žurnalistų rinką Suomijoje**

### **Santrauka**

2007 m. lapkričio mėn. grupė žurnalistikos studentų iš Suomijos lankėsi Zambijoje. Jiems tai buvo baigiamasis žurnalistikos kurso apie besivystančias šalis etapas. Šiuo kursu buvo siekiama pagilinti studentų žinias apie besivystančių šalių aktualijas, jų nušvietimą žiniasklaidoje, taip pat parengti naujių reportažus apie besivystančias šalis Suomijos auditorijai. Šiame straipsnyje pristatomi studentų požiūriai, kokia turėtų būti žurnalistika apie besivystančias šalis, taip pat jų refleksijos apie tai, ką reiškia būti laisvai samdomu žurnalistu,

kadangi studentai parengę reportažus turėjo juos pasiūlyti įvairioms žiniasklaidos priemonėms. Straipsnyje analizuojami dalyvaujančio stebėjimo Zambijoje ir interviu su studentais būdu surinkti duomenys. Akcentuojamas studentų savarankiškumas, planuojant savo darbą, numatant tikslus ir vertinant įgytas žinias. Straipsnyje taip pat pabrėžiama patirtinio mokymosi svetimoje šalyje ir nepažįstamoje kultūroje svarba visapusiškam pažinimui, kitaip tariant alternatyvių idėjų apie besivystančių šalių reprezentacijas Vakarų žiniasklaidoje suvokimui.

**Raktiniai žodžiai:** žurnalistika, besivystančios šalys, žurnalistikos studijos, lauko tyrimas, tyrimais grįstas mokymasis, Suomija, Zambija.