Societal Roles of Journalism in the Age of the Internet and Digital Television: Slovenian Online Journalists and their Self-Perceptions

Igor Vobič[*]

SUMMARY

This paper builds on previous international media and journalism scholarly work on societal roles of journalism, presents analysis of Slovenian online journalists' self-perceptions and, unlike previous studies in this area, offers insights into how online journalists understand themselves through the prism of journalism's roles in society and how they negotiate them in specific social, national and institutional contexts. In-depth interviews with online journalists of two Slovenian print media organizations, Delo and Dnevnik, are used in order to understand how they see their position in people's ensemble of information and in their decision making. To explain the answers and to explore negotiations of normative principles of journalism in the context of specific cases, newsroom participant observation is employed. The study reveals that Delo and Dnevnik online journalists perceive their roles in society in accordance with a high-modern or classical paradigm of journalism, which emerged as a normative grounding of Slovenian journalism after the fall of socialism two decades ago. Additionally, ethnographic study indicates that online journalists under investigation have common difficulties in performing those roles in contingent institutional environments and self-deprecate themselves as news providers. Namely, online journalists cannot perform the desired critical watchdog role that they perceive as important, institutionally enforced online newswork – computer-bound shoveling of print content to the web, reassembling press agency news and translating news of foreign media – and is not regarded as journalistic by

---

[*] Igor Vobič, Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Social Sciences (University of Ljubljana), Slovenia. E-mail: igor.vobic@fdv.uni-lj.si.

online journalists, and their print counterparts and online staffers work in flex-ible labor relations, which negatively affect their motivation to make "better" journalism.

Introduction

In contemporary media and journalism studies, there are many theoretical and em-pirical investigations that have been looking for answers to the questions as to the role of journalism in society (e.g. Splichal, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2005; Gitlin, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Christians et al, 2009) and how jour-nalists perceive themselves as subjects of societal processes (e.g. Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Splichal and Sparks, 1994; Splichal, 2000; Poler Kovačič, 2004; Zeliz-er, 2004; Deuze, 2005; Hallin, 2009). These authors more or less 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 tradi-tions of journalism and democracy (e.g. Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Splichal, 2000; Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Deuze, 2005). Namely, roles of journalism in 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 jour-nalists' reproduction of political, economic, cultural and technological realities un-der conditions of newswork on the other (cf. Zelizer, 2004; Splichal, 2005; Hardt, 2005; Deuze, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009). Media and journalism scholars (e.g. Chris-tians et al, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Schudson, 2009) claim that journalism's role in society and what it should be reflects the established relations between media and power, and indicate the ways in which people connect to societal life, suggesting the continuous importance of these issues in research.

Furthermore, according to research, it appears that difficulties in assessing roles of journalism in society and self-perceptions of journalists are even greater in the age of the internet and digital television – 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). These investi-

gations 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, these works do not offer insights into how online journalists perceive themselves through the prism of journalism's roles in society and how they negotiate them in specific national, social and institutional contexts; only rare exceptions have gone to superficially explore these issues, but their primary research interests have been elsewhere (cf. Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Quandt et al, 2006). Since the question of online journalists' societal roles and their self-perceptions remain more or less underexplored, Singer's (2003, 157) acknowledgement that if online journalism is to be incorporated into the 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 will remain speculative.

Therefore, this study's aim is to reveal how online journalists in specific contexts perceive their roles as journalists in society and how they negotiate normative predispositions of journalism within institutional conditions of newswork. The research objective put in the context of Slovenian journalism is relevant, because it aims to offer insights into services online journalists provide to the people; to look into the 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 the journalistic community and their place in people's ensemble of information in specific contexts. In-depth interviews with online journalists of two Slovenian print media organizations, Delo and Dnevnik, are used in order to investigate perceptions of their roles as journalists in society. To explain their answers and to explore negotiation of normative principles of journalism in the institutional context of specific cases, participant observation in the online departments of both print media organizations is employed.

Theoretical background: online journalists and self-perceptions

In recent years scholars (e.g. Deuze, 2009; McNair, 2009; Hallin, 2009; Dahlgren, 2009; Gitlin, 2009) claim that it has become increasingly difficult to answer who is and who is not a journalist. They stress that borders between journalism and non-journalism are blurred in an environment that is dominated by unpredictability and instability rather than control and order, and in society that is defined by the con-

cepts of fluidity, fragmentation and individualization, which reduce the role of the traditional mode of journalism – outside journalism and within it (Singer, 2003). On the one hand, journalists of traditional media organizations are not the only news providers around – there is an array of new actors that question the central position of journalists within people's ensemble of information and try to "eliminate the middleman" (Dahlgren, 2009: 148–150). On the other hand, decline in newspaper readership and the fall of television news viewing have resulted in traditional media organizations being keen to embrace technological innovations, which have resulted in porous borders between practices and identities of journalists in print, broadcast and online (Deuze, 2008; Thurman and Lupton, 2008; Dahlgren, 2009). In this environment, journalism's gradual loss of authority is taking effect in its ability to maintain the fabric of society, bringing additional contingencies into self-perceptions of journalists (Gitlin, 2009).

Despite claims that the professional ideology of journalism is consolidated across a large part of the world (e.g. Deuze, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009; Preston, 2009), research demonstrates contingencies in journalists' self-perceptions – most notably among online journalists (Paterson and Domingo, 2008). For instance, longitudinal research within the Project for Excellence in Journalism shows that online journalists are concerned about the future of journalism and democracy. According to a 2009 report, more than half of interviewed American online journalists believe that journalism is "headed in the wrong direction" and, at the same time, a solid majority of them stress that the internet is "changing the values of journalism" (State of the Media, 2009). This is only one example of how prevailing normative conception and its empirical negotiation "serves 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 'real' journalism" (Deuze, 2007: 162). Research among online journalists from different political, economic and cultural backgrounds shows that they often do not see themselves as "real" journalists and deprecate their own newswork due to the fact that there are institutionally required to constantly make news and consequently rely on already published information by in-house print counterparts, news agencies and other media when making news (e.g. Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008).

In this light, Deuze (2008) ascertains that as online departments have been traditionally organized separately from their print counterparts and tend to be populated by newcomers and less experienced journalists, these departments grew their own "mini cultures" with online journalists, often nurturing specific values, practices and ideals. Despite global trends of convergent reorganizing and restructuring

newsrooms, which have partly emerged due to the erosion of practices and identities of print, broadcast and online journalists and departments (e.g. Deuze and Dimoudi, 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). On the one side, less than a handful of studies compared online journalists' role perceptions with those of other media, and the analyses have not yielded significant differences (cf. Deuze and Dimoudi, 2002; Qaundt et al, 2006). It seems that the focus is a combination of the "traditional disseminator/interpreter role" and a desire to provide a platform for discussion and pluralistic analysis of the issues (ibid). On the other side, by analyzing 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; State of the Media 2009). For instance, in Germany, they name themselves "secondhand journalists" (Quandt, 2008: 89); Argentinean online journalists see themselves as "half stupid" and "minor brothers" of print journalists (García, 2008: 73); in the Netherlands and Belgium, online journalists consider their work as "desktop" journalism (Deuze and Paulussen, 2002: 241); British and Spanish online journalists identify their status as computer-bound "mouse monkeys" (Deuze, 2007: 142). However, this literature explores self-perceptions of online journalists in relation to newswork, but do not go into investigating how this "special breed of journalists" (Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008) perceives their societal relevance.

Research in 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 newsroom convergence in print media organizations (Vobič, 2009a) and credibility perception of online news among journalists (Poler Kovačič et al, 2010). Namely, the analysis of Poler Kovačič et al (2010) reveals that those journalists who work for the news websites of the traditional media organizations negatively evaluate their own work, often naming it a "copy-paste" practice. Furthermore, Oblak Črnič (2007), on the basis of a survey among print and online journalists, implies that inside the Slovenian journalistic community journalists are polarized into "defenders" and "critics" of online journalism, whereas online journalists are often not seen as "real" journalists, but as "assemblers of stories" since they primarily make news by reassembling already published information. Namely, in the last decade, Slovenian print media organizations established rather small online departments, who make news mainly by reassembling in-house print outputs, content of news agencies and other media (Vobič, 2011). News websites are therefore regarded as "mere extensions" of print

edition, and online departments are often named as a group of "copying clerks" (Vobič, 2009a). Hence, research in Slovenia and elsewhere implies that self-deprecation can be regarded as a common denominator of online journalists' self-perceptions. However, how these journalists understand their position and significance in societal processes, which reflect and significantly shape the character of societal life, is under-researched and calls for more precise empirical attention. Therefore, the first research question is *How do online journalists of Slovenian print media perceive their roles as journalists in society?*

Heterogeneity of journalism's societal roles: case of Slovenia

The literature review reveals competing, but overlapping normative types of journalism in terms of the kind of service 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 impartial mediators of social reality, advocates of certain social groups, independent watchdogs of power-holders, infotainers of the masses or communitarians and deliberators is specific to an actual social arrangement and "centrally impacts the tenor of the surrounding democratic world" (Zelizer, 2004: 158). In Slovenia, these dynamics between the normative and the empirical result in heterogeneity of journalists' societal roles, negotiated in a specific political, economic and cultural context (Vobič, 2009b).

While the normative role of journalism in socialism was pedagogic and advocacy, with the establishment of the new Slovenian state, the prevailing normative service of journalists has become impartial mediation of reality (Luthar, 2004). These changes are reflected in the first article of the first code after the fall of socialism: "A journalist's fundamental obligation is true and genuine informing of the public" (Code of Journalists of the Republic of Slovenia, 1991). According to Poler (1996: 109), this provision, which has been also implied in the 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 during the socialist self-management, but to perform on behalf of the public. This implies a paradigmatic shift to high-modernism.

The high-modern or classical paradigm of journalism is based on traditional liberal ideals about democracy, participation and citizenship (Erjavec, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2005; Dahlgren, 2009; Hallin, 2009). 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 (2009, 147). Despite stressing disinterest and detachment, the separation of "facts" from "opinions", the balancing of claim and counterclaim in their conquest for the public good, journalism research implies doubt in realization of normatively grounded and codified conduct and roles of journalists (Poler Kovačič, 2004: 108).

Namely, the literature review (e.g. Splichal, 1992; Erjavec and Poler Kovačič, 2004; Luthar, 2004; Poler Kovačič, 2005, 2009; Poler Kovačič and Erjavec, 2008; Vobič, 2009b) shows that the processes of realization of normative ideals are not uniform and homogeneous, but rather fluid and heterogeneous. In the early 1990s, there was more appreciation for columnists, essayists and commentators than reporters, and the prevailing practice of journalism was still advocacy that supported the interests of the ruling elites despite the normative shift, writes Splichal (1992: 78, 85–86). However, at the same time, there was a clear tendency to develop both commercial and critical journalism. While the first was fully compliant with privatization efforts, another was much more controversial; it was generally associated with investigative journalism critical to the holders of political, economic and cultural power (ibid: 79). By embedding journalism in the currents of the market economy, rearranging the political-economic relations and increasing routinization of journalism responsibility to media owners and power-holders have surpassed normatively defined responsibility to the public (e.g. Košir, 2003; Poler Kovačič, 2004, 2009; Poler Kovačič and Erjavec, 2004; Luthar, 2004). In this context, Poler Kovačič (2004: 96) points out that the model of market-driven journalism has prevailed in Slovenian journalism, meaning that journalists do not offer what the public should know, but provide what the audience (allegedly) wants. Namely, sensationalism, dramatization, trivialization and simplification have become common denominators of Slovenian journalism, being foremost in service to the "public curiosity" of consumers rather than the "public interest" of citizens (ibid).

In this context, journalists have taken up normatively various roles, which have been degenerated as a result of journalism's embeddedness into political and economic system and its cultural subordination to ideas of technological progress. There are many indications of Slovenian journalists turning from "objective" mediators of reality to "infotainers", who reduce structural problems to individual motivations by blending news and entertainment, and who neglect factual and reliable daily accounts of matters relevant to political life (Luthar, 2004: 664; Poler Kovačič, 2004: 103–105; Košir, 2003: 119; Vobič, 2009b: 31). Recent research indicates that mixing advertising with editorial content has emerged as "advertorial production",

which despite being illegal remains unpunished by the authorities (Erjavec and Poler Kovačič, 2010). Furthermore, Poler Kovačič (2005, 38–39) recognizes 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 affairs and scandals regardless of their truthfulness. Commercialization of the press brought about the trend of "investigative journalism for any price", which implies that representations of scandals are not necessary truthful – "as long as they bring profit" (Košir, 1994: 16). Recently, Poler Kovačič (2009) identifies "semi-investigative journalism", which cannot be dismissed as sensationalistic, since it made positive contributions to the public good, but can still be regarded as "semi-investigative" due to economic and political influences as well as organizational limitations within media and established newswork routines. In addition, Poler Kovačič and Erjavec (2008) identify another example of the degenerated societal role of Slovenian journalists – "quasi-citizen journalism". The latter stands for the abuse of the term "citizen journalism" and exploitation of interactive and communitarian character of new media technologies for commercial purposes.

Hence, it is not easy to identify prevailing societal roles of Slovenian journalists, since services they provide to their clients are heterogeneous. On the one hand, journalists normatively operate within the high-modern paradigm of journalism resting on liberal concepts of democracy, citizenship and participation, and allegedly serve as an integrative force and a common forum for debate. On the other hand, research suggests that the news industry borrows bits and pieces from various normative frameworks and degenerates corresponding societal roles of journalists – by expanding institutional goals and downsizing journalistic ones. The literature review, therefore, calls for additional context-oriented studies of these issues. Thus, the second research question of this study is *How do online journalists of Slovenian print media negotiate normative predispositions of journalism within societal and institutional conditions of newswork?*

Methodology

The goal of this study is to answer both research questions by first investigating what online journalists do – basically, gathering, assembling and sharing news and information, which is also done by other actors online – and, secondly, by focusing on how and why they do it. This calls for case study research, which refers to an empirical inquiry that investigates the phenomenon within its contextual set-

tings and has been previously used to explore how journalists do their work and why they do it (e.g. Dupange and Garrison, 2006; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008). Methodological case study research is inherently qualitative, because it is bound to understand a specific case rather than seeking empirical generalizations beyond the case (Stake, 2000; Yin, 2003; Marby, 2008). In this research, the author focuses on the processes of articulations of normative groundings in specific institutional realities at two Slovenian print media organizations: Delo and Dnevnik.

Case subjects of this ethnographic research were online journalists Delo[1] and Dnevnik[2], two of the biggest Slovenian print media organizations in terms of readership of their dailies (NRB, 2011); number of unique visitors to their news websites (MOSS, 2011) and number of staff and the size of news production (Vobič, 2011). Historically, Delo and Dnevnik were established as "societally owned" in the 1950s, but were privatized after the fall of socialism in Slovenia two decades ago, which has significantly reshaped their political, economic and cultural influence (Splichal, 1992). Since then, not only have normative principles changed, but articulations between the social and the technological have shifted the ways and reasons for gathering, assembling and disseminating news (Poler Kovačič et al, 2010). Delo and Dnevnik started their news websites and set up online departments in 2000s – separated from print department in terms of space, processes and staff (Vobič, 2009b). Online departments are populated by less experienced, younger journalists with temporary employment status; Delo has 15 online journalists and Dnevnik has 10. In the last two years, both print media organizations started the process of integration of newswork environments and to reconsider the role of online journalists and online news (Vobič, 2011). Namely, Delo has already built a common workspace for print and online journalists; Dnevnik plans to build their own "integrated newsroom", but for the time being they try to integrate staff and processes of print and online departments, whereas the online department is spatially separated, which is not the case at Delo anymore (ibid). In order to focus on the aspects of the specific cases and to deal with two research questions, the author uses two ethnographic methods: in-depth interviews and participant observation.

In January and February 2011, the author conducted 10 in-depth interviews with online journalists Delo and Dnevnik and investigated how respective journalists perceive their roles as journalists in society. These "conversations with a purpose" (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003) enabled the author to explore journalists' perspectives, find out various ways in which they give meaning to their work and relate them to larger societal processes. The dynamics in question often emerge as different and sometimes in inconsistent ways in which journalists negotiate their conduct with the normative and empirical realities (Deuze, 2009). Thereby, in-depth interviews

are useful to investigate how journalists constantly negotiate their identity with elements of structure (the context in which they work) and subjectivity (what they bring to their work) (ibid). The interviews conducted were characterized with three criteria (cf. Flick, 2006: 161): "problem centering", that is, the researcher's orientation to a relevant problem(s) (i.e. self-perceptions of societal roles among online journalists); "object orientation", that is, developing or modifying interviews with respect to an object of research (i.e. institutional specifics of respective print media organizations); and "process orientation", that is, understanding of the object of the research (i.e. normative grounding of journalism in Slovenia and dynamics of its empirical negotiation). 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 influences of the organizational setting. Interviews were voice-recorded and later transcribed in full.

In autumn 2010, the author acted as a participant observer in the online departments at Delo (from late September to early November) and Dnevnik (from early November to late December) in order to approach the second research question of how online journalists of respective print media organizations negotiate their perceptions with institutional realities. Participant observation as a strategy was previously used to accomplish the goal of gaining an insider's look into small-scale newsroom settings and processes of identity negotiations among journalists (e.g. Singer, 2003; Boczkowski, 2004; Dupange and Garrison, 2006; Colson and Heinderyckx, 2008; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008). Literature on participant observations commonly distinguishes between four "master roles" of researchers in the field based on the degree of participation (cf. Gold, 1958; Lindlof, 1995; Hansen et al, 1998). The author played two roles and switched between them: first, that of participant-as-observer, who has an intimate vantage point, but one that may also be constrained by having to carry out some work and, thus, be less flexible in respective research interests; second, the role of observer-as-participant, who remains an outsider in a professional group throughout the field research and, thus, may lose some of the insider's look, but on the other hand have more autonomy in accomplishing the goals.

Results

Interviewed online journalists of Delo and Dnevnik primarily see their service to online readers as providing timely "objective" news on the basis of which readers can make thoughtful decisions and actively participate in societal life. Paradoxi-

cally, interviewees perceive themselves as "not the real journalists" (Dnevnik Journalist A), since they rarely make "original" news, but mainly shovel in-house print content onto the web, reassemble press agency news and translate news of foreign media. In addition to the answers of interviewed journalists, participant observation also confirms the existence of such newswork routines at Delo and at Dnevnik, due to institutional demands to continuously publish timely news, change arrangement of items on the website and follow up news stories. At the same time, 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). However, results of the ethnographic study show that institutional power has been recently, at least to a degree, reoriented because of newsroom integration, which has been institutionally encouraged and brought occasional cooperation and combination of previously separated print and online staffers, processes and contents. The results of the study are presented in the next four sections, where data gathered using the two methods is situated in order, which "not only helps guard against seeing what is not there, a potential bias of any single-method approach, but also facilitates seeing what is there by enabling the researcher to go back and forth between distinct but complementary data sets" (Singer, 2008: 166).

Online Journalists: "We Provide Timely Information for People to Decide Upon"

Interviewed online journalists of Delo and Dnevnik agree that they provide impartial, unbiased and timely renderings of reality. "We report news of the day – timely and all the time. Our online news makes it easier for the readers to decide how to vote on the next elections, for instance," says Dnevnik Journalist B. A similar role is emphasized by Delo Journalist A: "We provide timely information for the people to decide upon. They can get the news that affects their lives." Not all interviewed journalists are certain that they help online readers by providing such news, but they are predominantly sure that news on websites of Delo and Dnevnik is used as a resource for decision making and participation, 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." Furthermore, Dnevnik Journalist C – as well as some others – exposes the timely character of online news: "Online journalists mediate news in an instance, so the citizens can make instantaneous decisions."

At the same time, analysis of interviews with online journalists reveals that they raise the critical character of classical journalism as an ideal. Interviewees predominantly indicated that holding public personalities and institutions accountable should be the primary role of journalists in society – regardless of the media platform. However, many say that established routines disable them from performing as "critical watchdogs" (Delo Journalist A) and "supervisors of the powerful" (Dnevnik Journalist C). "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. Similarly, Dnevnik Journalist D acknowledges, "Nobody would be against it if I performed as a watchdog, when I finish my daily shift in the online department. The question is – would I get paid?" Namely, online journalists are editorially required to continuously provide news and update already published items during their daily shift. Highly routinized newswork, consequently, brings clear deprecation in their self-perceptions as journalists.

Online Newswork: "We are not Cognitive Workers"

"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 of Delo and Dnevnik do not see themselves as the "real" journalists. Phrases such as "copy-pasters" (Delo Journalists A, B, D; Dnevnik Journalist A, B), "translators" (Dnevnik Journalist C), "journalists in quotation marks" (Dnevnik Journalist D) and "recyclers" (Delo Journalist E) 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 and Dnevnik Journalist A use a metaphor of "assembly-line" and "factory" to imply that the work they do resembles the monotony of manual work. In this context, some said that they feel "alienated" from the story they write (Delo Journalist A) and "distanced" from the people in stories (Dnevnik Journalist C).

Participant observation confirms that online journalists of Delo and Dnevnik 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. When asked if they verify the information they use in their items, nobody replied with an affirmative answer. "This would take a lot of time. Too much time would be needed

to do that. Most of the information is already verified by the media that published it," says Dnevnik Journalist D. Similarly, Dnevnik Journalist A notes, "I do not even doubt the reliability of news published on CNN or BBC or some other media. I just translate it." A telling detail of the industrial character of online newswork is that some Delo and Dnevnik online journalists use tools like Google Translate to work faster. "It is just a tool – I do not copy-paste it from the translating tool; I go through and correct the mistakes" (Dnevnik Journalist B).

Online Department: "We are Underestimated and Mistreated"

At least to a degree, self-deprecation of interviewed journalists derives from weak institutional status in terms of power relations. Interviewees acknowledge that they as an online department feel unequal in relation to print departments. "Bunch of students" (Delo Journalist c), "copying clerks" (Dnevnik Journalist C), "secondary journalists" (Dnevnik Journalist A), "pendants" (Delo Journalist C) and "backup journalists" (Delo Journalist A) are only some phrases used by online journalists to describe the print journalists' perception of online departments. According to inter-viewees, there are three reasons for online departments' deprived institutional sta-tus. First, the industrial character of online newswork is not regarded as journalistic by print counterparts. For instance, "They look down on us. The first reason for this is definitely the way we report news – we provide only secondary news, which is not regarded as proper journalistic output" (Dnevnik Journalist B). Second, there is a prevailing conservative mindset within print departments toward technological innovation and new economic models. For example, "Some print journalists are sublime. They regard us as a bunch of students. It is constantly implied that 'old-school' print journalism is the real thing. Nothing will change till online journal-ists become older" (Delo Journalist C). Third, print journalists fear that a stronger online department could threaten their jobs and the existence of print newspaper. "Print readership is falling considerably and online readership is rising. They are afraid of a stronger online department. That is also the reason for their resistance" (Dnevnik Journalist C).

Interviews indicate that online journalists believe that online departments' shortage of institutional power lies in a lack of vision as to how to develop journalism online and in the absence of a consolidated economic model for the internet, which results small revenue online department and minor financial investments in staff and tech-nology. Interviewees say that the online department has "marginal importance" in the eyes of management at Dnevnik (Dnevnik Journalist B), and is "forgotten" by the print editor-in-chief at Delo (Delo Journalist A). "If the editor-in-chief passes

by without even saying 'hello', then why would print journalists act differently? We are mistreated" (Delo Journalist A). However, negligence cannot be ascribed to the fact that none of the online journalists at Delo and Dnevnik are employed on a permanent basis. Since they all have risk-filled, temporary and open employment status, even working without contracts, many admit that they have personal financial difficulties. "I do not have a contract. I am aware that this is a violation of the legislature, but what can I do. I need money to live. But in five years from now I do not picture myself copy-pasting agency news and working in such labor relations," acknowledges Dnevnik Journalist D. Similarly, Delo Journalist A stresses, explicating what others imply: "We are not paid enough, we are not motivated enough. Why would I work differently, why would I spend my free time to be a better journalist. I just finish my daily shift of copy-pasting and reassembling of already published news and go home."

Newsroom Integration: "At least we know each other now"

Interviewees imply that reasons for rationalization of online newswork and demands for highly routinized editorial processes are based on the fact that Delo and Dnevnik 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. However, there seems to be a consensus among the interviewed that the institutional status of online departments in relation to print departments slightly improved with the projects of newsroom integration. Despite the fact, say interviewees, that the goal of integration, that is, building a common information engine grounded in collaboration and combination of staffers, technologies, spaces and contents, is far from realization, they agree that many things have improved. Spatial reorganizations of Delo and Dnevnik newsrooms are regarded as turning points. 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). Last year, Dnevnik's online department moved from the fifth to the third floor in a separate office by the central desk of the newspaper. "On the fifth floor, we were completely cut off. Now it is much better – they see us. We cooperate more, not enough though. We are still not treated as equal" (Dnevnik Journalist B). Participant observation confirms that both groups of online journalists occasionally make news for the printed publications; online news is regularly reassembled for

newspapers and their supplements and vice versa, and online and print journalists collaborate in covering a story for both platforms. However, according to data gathered by both ethnographic methods, cross-departmental cooperation has been primarily a result of collaboration grounded in the occasionally common interests of individuals, and has not brought a larger cultural change in either of the newsrooms – not yet.

Discussion and conclusion

The study shows that it is useful to consider newswork routines, newsroom organization and relations among journalists and departments involved in making news outlets for different platforms when researching negotiations of normative predispositions of journalism with institutional realities of news making. Namely, triangulating participant observation and in-depth interviewing gives the author the possibility to reconstruct the two cases in relation to larger societal and historical contexts by combining the narrations of those involved in the online news projects and the conflicts surfacing in the newswork routines in order to empirically rebuild the complexity of strategies, processes, constraints and perceptions that shape the online departments under study.

The paper confirms previous studies that online journalists of respective print media organizations 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 as journalistic by online journalists (e.g. Deuze and Paulussen, 2002; Deuze, 2007; State of the Media, 2009) and that online staffers work in flexible labor relations that negatively affect their motivation to make "better" journalism (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2008; Vobič, 2009a). This study additionally shows that Delo and Dnevnik online journalists perceive their roles in society in accordance with the normative grounding of Slovenian journalism, but have difficulties performing those roles in contingent and uneasy institutional environments. Simultaneously, the paper indicates that newswork routines and institutional contingencies disable online journalists of Slovenian print media organizations to offer some of the services they desire – according to them they cannot perform as watchdogs. The study also reveals the following features of negotiating the societal roles of online journalists, which can have larger implications for societal life and journalism's position in it.

First, online journalists of respective print media organizations 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. At the same time, 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. Namely, journalism with such meaning places the emphasis on people's ability to judge their own self-interests and assumes that the people have the potential to respond. This kind of journalism sees citizens "as reactive rather than proactive" (Anderson, 2007: 47), and implies the "competitive model of democracy", in which it is political-economic power-holders who "act", whereas citizens "react" (Strömbäck, 2005: 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 through their votes buy the product that pleases them most. In this context, journalists should provide information that people can trust and act upon, as well as monitor the power-holders. As Delo and Dnevnik online journalists feel that they are not able to hold the powerful responsible due to the industrial character of their work and regard the watchdog role as an unrealized ideal, this study implies that the operation of democracy in its competitive feature is fierce indeed, which can bring a negative effect to societal mechanisms and processes.

Second, it is rather surprising that in the era of the internet and digital television the interviewed Slovenian online journalists do not relate to the ideas of communitarianism, which in journalism presupposes greater cooperation between journalists and the audience in news making (Nip, 2010), and might, according to some, revitalize journalism by reestablishing concepts such as public, community and civic journalism (Nip, 2006). The ideas of communitarian approaches to journalism, namely, imply that journalists act as catalysts between individuals and the community, and act to identify and resolve existing problems of the community. This study shows that transformative communitarism is not regarded as an ideal among Delo and Dnevnik online journalists, let alone a principle of online newswork. With this absence, it can be argued that by nurturing and realizing the principle of objectivity within, Slovenian online journalists reproduce paradoxes of classical journalism, which by "objectively" mediating reality reproduces established power relations in society and brings "partiality" instead of the promised "impartiality" in its representations (Splichal, 1999: 299–300).

Third, participant observation at Delo and Dnevnik implies that the inability to fulfill the desired societal role of watchdogs or look beyond established visions of

journalistic conduct rests on consolidated editorial processes and newswork routines enforced by news management. Not only does such institutional constraining of online newswork preclude the heterogeneity of societal roles performed by contemporary online journalists, it might also question how self-perceived roles are realized. Namely, common online newswork routines at different media organizations – computer-bound shoveling of print content to the web, reassembling press agency news and translating news of foreign media – are often accompanied with a "risk-averse editorial decision-making culture of journalists" and "an expansion of mimicry" (Boczkowski, 2009), and that "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 late-modern contingencies and complexities of "multi-epistemic order" (Dahlgren, 2009), where it becomes generally accepted that all storytelling is situated, all perspectives are contingent, and "cultural chaos" (McNair, 2009), when the information environment is dominated by unpredictability and instability rather than control and order. Hence, if mimicry within high-modern journalism persists and expands, dilemmas of participation and democracy will be deep indeed – not only online.

Fourth, ethnographic study indicates greater connection between print and online journalists, which might result in a cross-departmental newsroom culture and erosion of institutional deprecation of online journalists. In this context, some authors suggest that newsroom integration could lead to larger transformations – the strengthening of news as a business and the revitalization of journalism as a societal institution (Erbsen et al, 2008). Nevertheless, how processes of newsroom integration, which have often brought downsizing, lay-offs and having to do more with less staff, budget and resources (State of the Media, 2008), affect negotiations of journalists' roles in society and how they perceive them is a different matter that deserves further theoretical and empirical attention. Clearly, in the massive transitions underway, it is, therefore, too early to argue that integration processes in newsrooms worldwide, idealizing of greater cooperation and the combination of technologies, staffers, spaces and contents can automatically lead to "better" journalism, as argued in previous studies (e.g. Boczkowski, 2004; Deuze, 2007; García, 2008; Quandt, 2008; Paterson and Domingo, 2008; Vobič, 2009b).

Hence, the study confirms some already revealed implications and accepted theses. It also shows the connections between self-perceived societal roles of online journalists, and not only the normative framework of journalism, but also newswork routines, newsroom organization and relations between print and online journalists in 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 are specific for Slovenian journalism or journalism in a trans-local perspective. Nevertheless, the respective study gives indications of similarities and differences that may be worth pursuing in further empirical research. Hence, the features discussed above in negotiating societal roles of Slovenian online journalists cannot be generalized to all journalists or departments providing news for different media platforms, journalists of other Slovenian media organizations, let alone journalists in other countries. Therefore, context-oriented tests of some of the findings are very much needed in future explorations of online journalists' societal roles, particularly comparative analyses of other Slovenian media organizations with those active on an international scale.

ENDNOTES

[1] According to a survey, Nacionalna raziskava branosti (NRB 2011), the serious daily Delo has 130 thousand readers each day; the Sunday edition of Delo, named Nedelo, has a readership of 157 thousand; the tabloid daily newspaper *Slovenske novice* has the biggest readership among Slovenian dailies: 318 thousand daily readers. According to a survey, Merjenje obiskanosti spletnih strani (MOSS 2011), the online newspaper Delo.si had a reach of more than 249 thousand unique visitors in March 2011.

[2] According to a survey, Nacionalna raziskava branosti (NRB 2011), the serious daily Dnevnik has 118 thousand readers each day; the weekly Nedeljski dnevnik is the most read printed news periodical with a readership of 355 thousand. According to a survey, Merjenje obiskanosti spletnih strani (MOSS 2011), the online newspaper Dnevnik.si had a reach of more than 256 thousand distinct users in March 2011.

REFERENCES

Anderson, P. J. (2007) "Competing Models of Journalism and Democracy", pp. 39–51. In: P. J. Anderson and G. Ward (Eds.): *The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies*. Hampshire: Ashgate.

Boczkowski, P. J. (2004) *Digitizing the News*. Cambridge, London: MIT Press.

Boczkowski, P. J. (2009) "Materiality and Mimicry in Journalism Field", pp. 56–67. In: B. Zelizer (Ed.): *The Changing Faces of Journalism: Tabloidization, Technology and Truthiness*. London: Routledge.

Christians, C. G., Glasser, T. L., McQuail, D., Nordenstreng, K., White R. A. (2009) *Normative Theories of Media: Journalism in Democratic Societies*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Colson, V., Heinderyckx, F. (2008) "Do Online Journalists Belong in the Newsroom? A Belgian Case of Convergence", pp. 143–156. In: Paterson, C., Domin-

go, D. (Eds.): *Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production*. New York: Peter Lang.

Dahlgren, P. (2009) "Troubling Evolution of Journalism", pp. 146–161. In: B. Zelizer (Ed.): *The Changing Faces of Journalism: Tabloidization, Technology and Truthiness*. London: Routledge.

Deuze, M. (2005) "What is Journalism? Professional Identity and Ideology of Journalists Reconsidered", *Journalism*, 6 (4), 442–464.

Deuze, M. (2007) *Media Work*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Deuze, M. (2008) "The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism and Monitorial Citizenship", *International Journal of Communication,* 2 (5), 848–845.

Deuze, M. (2009) "Journalism, Citizenship, and Digital Culture", pp. 15–28. In: Z. Papacharissi (Ed.): *Journalism and Citizenship: New Agendas and Communication*. New York: Routledge.

Deuze, M., Paulussen, S. (2002) "Online Journalism in the Low Countries: Basic, Occupational, and Professional Characteristics of Online Journalists in Flanders and the Netherlands", *European Journal* of Communication, 17 (2), 237–245.

Donsbach, W., Klett, B. (1993) "Subjective Objectivity. How Journalists in Four Countries Define a Key Term of their Profession", *Gazette*, 51, 53–83.

Dupagne, M., Garrison, B. (2006) "The Meaning and Influence of Convergence: A qualitative case study of newsroom work at the Tampa News Center", *Journalism Studies*, 7 (2), 237–255.

Erbsen, C. E., Giner, J. A., Torres, M. (2008) *Innovations in Newspapers: 2008 World Report*. Pamplona: Innovation.

Erjavec, K. (2004) "Sodobno novinarstvo in teorija demokracije", pp. 113–138. In: M. Poler Kovačič, M. Kalin Golob (Eds.): *Poti slovenskega novinarstva – danes in jutri*. Ljubljana: Založba FDV.

Erjavec, K., Poler Kovačič, M. (2004) "Rutinizacija slovenskega novinarstva u razdoblju društvene tranzicije", *Medijska istraživanja,* 10 (1), 5–21.

Erjavec, K., Poler Kovačič, M. (2010) "Relations with the media: Who are the main actors in an advertorial production process in Slovenia?", *Journalism*, 11 (1), 91–109.

Flick, U. (2006) *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage.

García, E. P. (2008) "Print and Online Newsrooms in Argentinean Media: Autonomy and Professional Identity", pp. 45–60. In: Paterson, C., Domingo, D. (Eds.): *Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production*. New York: Peter Lang.

Gitlin, T. (2009) "Journalism's Many Crises", *Journalism in Crisis Conference*, London: Westminster University, 19–21 May.

Gold, R. L. (1958) "Roles in Sociological Field Observations", *Social Forces* 36 (1), 217–223.

Hallin, D. C. (2009) "Not the End of Journalism History", *Journalism*, 10 (3), 332–334.

Hallin, D. C., Mancini P. (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Hardt, H. (2005) "The Industrialization of News: The American Experience", pp. 227–237. In: S. Høyer, H. Pöttker (Eds.): *Diffusion of the News Paradigm, 1850–2000.* Göteborg: Nordicom.

Hansen, A., Cottle, S., Negrine, R., Newbold, C. (1998). *Mass Communication Research Methods*. London: MacMillan Press.

Code of Journalists of Republic of Slovenia [Kodeks novinarjev Republike Slovenije] (1991), Gozd Martuljek: Društvo novinarjev Slovenije.

Code of Journalists of Slovenia [Kodeks novinarjev Slovenije] (2002), Ankaran: Društvo novinarjev Slovenije.

Code of Journalists of Slovenia [Kodeks novinarjev Slovenije] (2010), Ljubljana: Društvo novinarjev Slovenije.

Košir, M. (1994) "Razkriti prikrito in napisati zgodbo", pp. 9–17. In: M. Šuen: Preiskovalno novinarstvo. Ljubljana: Založba FDV.

Košir, M. (2003) *Surovi čas medijev*. Ljubljana: Založba FDV.

Lindlof, T. R. (1995) *Qualitative Communiation Research Methods*. Thousand Oaks, London, New Delhi: Sage.

Luthar, B. (2004) "Ljudstvo: uporaba anket javnega mnenja v novinarstvu", *Teorija in praksa* 41 (3/4), 663–677.

Mabry, L. (2008) "Case Study in Social Research", pp. 214–227. In: P. Alsuutari, J. Brannen (Eds.): *The Sage Handbook of Social Research Methods*. London: Sage.

McNair, B. (2009) "Journalism in the 21st Century – Evolution, not Extinction", *Journalism*, 10 (3), 343–346.

MOSS (2011) "Merjenje obiskanosti spletnih strani: Marec 2011", *Slovenska oglaševalska zbornica*, http://www.moss-soz.si/si/rezultati_moss/obdobje/default.html, 15 May, 2011.

NRB (2011) "Nacionalna raziskava branosti 2010", *Slovenska oglaševalska zbornica*, http://www.nrb.info/podatki/index.html, 15 May, 2011.

Nip, J. (2006) "Exploring the Second Phase of Public Journalism", *Journalism Studies*, 7 (2), 212–236.

Nip, J. (2010) "Routinization of Charisma: Institutionalization of Public Journalism Online", pp. 135–148. J. Rosenberry, B. St. John III (Eds.): Public Journalism 2.0. London: Routledge.

Oblak Črnič, T. (2007) "Spletno novinarstvo skozi optiko novinarjev", *Družboslovne razprave,* 23 (54), 43–64.

Paterson, C., Domingo, D. (Eds.) (2008) *Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production*. New York: Peter Lang.

Poler, M. (1996) "Ethics and Professionalization of Slovene Journalism", *Javnost/ The Public,* 3 (4), 107–121.

Poler Kovačič (2004) "Podobe (slovenskega) novinarstva: o krizi novinarske identitete", pp. 85–112. In: M. Poler Kovačič, M. Kalin Golob (Eds.): *Poti slovenskega novinarstva – danes in jutri*. Ljubljana: Založba FDV.

Poler Kovačič, M. (2005) *Kriza novinarske odgovornosti.* Ljubljana: Založba FDV.

Poler Kovačič, M. (2009) "Semi-Investigative Journalism in Slovenia: Research of Scandals Coverage in Daily Newspaper Dnevnik", Medijska istraživanja, 15 (1), 95–119.

Poler Kovačič, M., Erjavec, K. (2008) "Mobi Journalism in Slovenia: Is This Really Citizen Journalism?", *Journalism Studies,* 9 (6), 874–890.

Poler Kovačič, M., Erjavec, K., Štular, K. (2010) "Credibility of Traditional vs. Online News Media: A Historical Change in Journalists' Perceptions?", *Medijska istraživanja*, 16 (1), 113–130.

Preston, P. (2009) *Making the News: Journalism and News Cultures in Europe.* London: Routledge.

Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice*. London: Sage.

Quandt, T. (2008) "News Tuning and Content Management: An Observation Study of Onld and New Routines in German Online Newsrooms", pp. 77–98. In: Paterson, C., Domingo, D. (Eds.): *Making Online News: The Ethnography of New Media Production*. New York: Peter Lang.

Quandt, T., Löffelholz, M., Weaver, D. H., Hanitzsch, T, Altmeppen, K.-D. (2006) "American and German Online Journalists at the Beginning of the 21st Century", *Journalism Studies*, 7 (2), 171–186.

Schudson, M. (2009) "The Years Backwards and Forwards", *Journalism*, 10 (3), 368–370.

Singer, J. B. (2003) "Who are these Guys: The Online Challenge in the Notion of Journalistic Professionalism", *Journalism*, 4 (2), 139–163.