

# The logic of mercantilism, the current basis of university studies. A reflection on the Bachelor's Degree in Journalism

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## Abstract

*We set out to show how the neoliberal discourse of the World Bank achieved, since the end of the last century, that the operation and purposes of universities were guided to a great extent by the logic of the market. Universities internalized its discourse, its instruments and its utilitarian reason. Both teaching and research have been traversed by the logic of competition, profitability and accounting. The curricula have been reduced and fragmented, and the fundamental is dissolved in the novelty. At the same time, the how is more deprived than the what. These tendencies increase in professional degrees, as is the case of journalism, which can also easily fall into technocentrism.*

## Keywords

*University, teaching, journalism, neoliberalism, market, subjectivities, research.*

## Resum

*Ens plantegem mostrar com el discurs neoliberal impulsat pel Banc Mundial des de finals del segle passat va aconseguir que el funcionament i les finalitats de les universitats es guessin en gran manera per la lògica del mercat. Les universitats en van interioritzar el discurs, els instruments i la raó utilitarista. Tant la docència com la recerca han estat travessades per les lògiques de la competència, de la rendibilitat i la seva comptabilitat. Els plans d'estudis s'han reduït i fragmentat, i el que és fonamental es dissol en el que és nou. Al mateix temps, a la docència hi preval el com, per damunt del què. Aquestes tendències són visibles especialment en els graus professionalistes, com és el cas de Periodisme, que, a més, pot caure amb facilitat en el tecnocentrisme.*

## Paraules clau

*Universitat, docència, periodisme, neoliberalisme, mercat, subjectivitats, recerca.*

## 1. Introduction

With this writing I wish to explain, with a certain calm and distance, the processes and foundations of teaching in the current university, focusing on journalism studies. As Remedios Zafra wrote (2022: 36-37), “there can be no reflection without ‘time to reflect’”. And adds: “It is worth noting then that the preconceived ideas on which algorithmic logic usually relies will always be the ones that best tolerate the hyperproductive and fast world of things today, because they were already in us, and they barely require our attention or further study”. We are dealing here with a topic crossed by subjectivities, one of the pillars that supports how, why and for what of teaching. Although these are not usually taken into account—perhaps because they seem unscholarly—, in these pages their mention is inevitable and, furthermore, even though I can now write from a distance, they continue to affect the author of these

lines. Your experiences always run through you and you end up drawing upon it.

As the reader may have already noticed, this article is not the result of any empirical work, it is an essay that is based on a certain bibliographic review. The reflections that we will present are based mainly on previous research and analysis, which since the end of the 20th century had been warning us of the neoliberal drift of our universities and the consequences that this would end up having on their functioning (now called *governance*), on research, on teaching, amongst faculty and amongst students (who even then began to call themselves users).

In this article we maintain that this assumption of neoliberal principles by universities, and we think, above all, of public ones, since private ones are already born under that umbrella, materialises in the fact that the rules that govern the market condition the university itself and, therefore, what the university

does: teach, research, disseminate and transfer. It is then when productive logic, productivism and utilitarianism appear as the aim of university activity. Teaching, let's not fool ourselves, is also influenced by productivism. Study plans are nothing more than the embodiment of this logic and, for that reason, they must be seen as a mediation, just like the statutes of universities, evaluation agencies, university rankings or the ecosystem of scientific publications.

Now, in addition to approaching subjectivities, we will also focus on how journalism is now thought of and, especially, its relationship with technology. In addition, we will dedicate a space to the corporate and bureaucratic logics that, by determining a way of focusing the study plans, prevent them from being any other way. It is as if subjectivities, coercion, accommodation and productive logic make it impossible for us to think of other options.

## 2. Neoliberalism reaches the university, the influence of the World Bank

It is known that the word was at the origin, in the case at hand the words of the World Bank experts.<sup>1</sup> Starting in the seventies of the last century, a discourse began to gain strength that defended that both health and education—two of the pillars of the so-called *welfare state*—should be more effective and efficient. And, to make that possible, they told us how to apply the effectiveness and efficiency of private companies, governed by market values. According to the World Bank, it was about overcoming or subverting the ineffectiveness of public management, both formal and organisational aspects and in relation to the purposes.

Critical voices emerged from those who detected the risk that all of this would lead to the privatisation of health and education. But, from our point of view, what was not so correctly perceived is the way in which these principles would end up permeating the management and purpose of said public services. In reality, it was not necessary to privatise for the public system to behave like the private one: the ideological component of the World Bank's discourse had its effect. This is what happened in the so-called tertiary sector of education, the university, of which the public university would be a subsector.

As Gómez and Saxe (2010) tell us, for the World Bank, the university is a public company that must operate in the market, whether national or global. But legal harmonisation is required for this. Gómez and Saxe (2010: 2) they state that the World Bank “has developed strategies to promote both the rise of the private university and the privatisation of the public university”, and they remind us that this approach is economic and techno-bureaucratising (instrumental rationality). The World Bank recommendations advocate that “the duration and content of the curricula must be in accordance with market opportunities and globalisation” (Gómez and Saxe, 2010: 10) and this, together with the policies of “innovation and curricular

flexibility” (Gómez and Saxe, 2010: 10), has led to the quarterisation of courses in most universities and the reduction of the duration of degrees and postgraduate degrees.

Moreover, the World Bank, by talking about basic competences for the first university cycle (degrees) and through the need for ‘lifelong learning’, extends the offer of specialisation studies (masters or own degrees) ‘for life’. The educational market, far from contracting, no longer has an end. For their part, universities have believed they have found funding in this market that they are always short of, creating an *educational bubble* with an uncertain future. The mega offer becomes, in many cases, an extreme specialisation, although passing fads can also be observed in the journalistic ecosystem, whether as a result of a technological innovation, an ideological positioning that gains strength or a new business proposition. This training offer is considered strategic by universities, who seem to experience crises as temporary or passing moments. And, from the perspective of the teaching teams involved, each proposal is defended as something essential and they consider it outside of commercial interests.

This way of understanding the university managed to gain a foothold globally and in just a few years. As an example, the words of Betancourt (2004: 7), who points out that the “Latin America's university panorama at the beginning of the 21st century would be difficult to recognise for an observer from just twenty years ago” and adds: “I would note that institutions are evaluated by governments, and frequently receive additional resources according to their adaptation to politically established criteria and their results. You would probably notice that your teachers receive disparate and variable remunerations, even when their academic backgrounds are similar, and that they guide their activities according to an externally set menu of priorities. At the same time, I would notice the presence of a multiplicity of new state agencies destined to direct and regulate the sector”. Or, as Broncano (2023: § 10) states, “the liberalisation of higher education in the agreements of the General Agreement on Trade in Services (within the World Trade Organization) (...) implied global regulation to homogenise the university systems, which went from training or education to educational services”. Words count and Broncano emphasises: “In Europe, the Bologna system of homogenisation was one of the stages of that liberalisation”.<sup>2</sup>

In short, the market has ended up dictating to the university through interposed organisations and it, permeated by neoliberal ideology, has defined what its purpose is, what is useful and what processes lead to that necessary usefulness (what studies, what study plans). This drift causes some people to abandon it, as is the case of Jordi Llovet, who left the University of Barcelona and did so by publishing a bold, wise and responsive book: *Adeu a la Universitat: L'eclipsi de les humanitats* (2011).

Now, what was coming to the university was already being experienced in other educational stages, as Pérez Gómez explains in *La cultura escolar en la sociedad neoliberal* (1998), a work published numerous times, although unknown to the

vast majority of university planners. Generally, the university has thought and thinks that it is a unit in itself and that it has little to do (complaints aside) with basic and secondary education. In our view, it is wrong.

### 3. The direct effects of neoliberalism in the university

Borja Hermoso (2023: § 6) tells us that, in the acceptance of the honorary doctorate from the Pontifical University of Comillas, Nuccio Ordine, recently deceased, “delivered a vibrant pamphlet in defence of true education (SIC) (...)”. Hermoso (2023) highlights some phrases from his speech: “the entire educational chain has been placed at the service of so-called economic growth, the demands of the market and companies”; “young people are made to believe that it is necessary to study to learn a trade and that success is measured by the bank account”; “teachers cannot be managers or business promoters”; “Schools and universities cannot be companies that sell diplomas. Students cannot be customers”. Going against the current, Nuncio Ordine came to enumerate the effects of neoliberalism on the university. “It was not what is commonly known as a kind and diplomatic intervention” (Hermoso, 2023: § 6)

Irene Lanzas (2021: § 3), in an informative article whose title is eloquent: *La idea de la universidad de Wendy Brown. Una crítica a la racionalidad neoliberal*, she begins her writing by quoting the American philosopher and political scientist: “I join Michel Foucault and others in a conception of neoliberalism as an order of normative reason that, when in ascendancy, takes the form of a governing rationality that extends a specific formulation of values, practices and measurements of the economy to each dimension of the life”. But, when citing Foucault, we cannot help but remember that any university, because it is one, is a normative reason. Now, as Wendy Brown points out, neoliberalism transforms the human being into *homo economicus*, at the same time “that the human being takes the form of human capital to favour its competitiveness and its value is appreciated as a figure of exchange” (Lanzas, 2021: § 5). On the other hand, “your life decisions have to do with improving the future value of yourself, whether through education, training or leisure” (Lanzas, 2021: § 9). And, precisely, although the author refers to a whole, those words tell us about the actions and feelings of the university professor and researcher and their students.

Lanzas (2021: § 11), following Wendy Brown, reminds us that there are four effects of neoliberalism in higher education: “the notion of public goods disappears (...), democracy itself is transformed, requiring human capital with technical skills and not educated participants in public life, (...) subjects are configured as self-investment human capital (...) and knowledge and thought are valued almost exclusively by their contribution to capital improvement.” For the thinker, neoliberalism has brought with it the deterioration of humanist education, but it does not do so by reclaiming the battered humanities but rather

what it aims to do, above all, is to show us that it has put an end to the way in which the university was conceived: “The university is rebuilt following the demands of the market and promoting technical skills” (Lanzas, 2021: § 11). We are not only talking, then, about usefulness (of its value or putting it into value), but we are referring to values that have little or nothing to do with what democratic citizenship expects and allows for autonomous thinking. We are told that without journalism there can be no democracy, but what kinds of journalists are we training in this framework?

University is fast-paced and, apparently, slowing down is understood and experienced as a ‘waste of time’. It’s about producing more in less time. And this happens both in teaching and in research. That is, more graduates (even failures and drop-outs are considered the exclusive responsibility of the teacher), more ‘papers’ (scientific articles) and more transfer (which is sometimes confused with the achievement of patents and the offer of own degrees). We have gone from a university that lived outside of time to a university that lacks time: to settle, to reflect, to dialogue. Zafra (2022: 34) asks “why are these logics of bureaucratisation enemies of culture and knowledge?” and she answers herself: “because they appropriate the old times of life that are not work and swallow up the possibility of creating and researching from the availability of ‘time’ and ‘concentration’, a valuable but scarce good, leading to people’s self-exploitation”.

Furthermore, the more the degrees are devalued in the market, we refer to the loss of value of the degree as proof of knowledge, since, if it is measured, it is by the economic cost of obtaining it, the more the offer of double degrees increase or the range of master’s degrees and degrees grows. In parallel, there is an increase in drop-outs from university studies, which generates economic concern.

#### 3.1 Management language: new administrative and organisational expressions

For Peters Roberts (2017: § 4) “neoliberal ideas found administrative and organisational expression through philosophy and managerialism” and made the language of performance prevail, which implies that everything has to be measured and turns teachers into “products” and students in “results”. And all too often on their own initiative.

Faced with this ideology, based on the fact that knowledge is equal to merchandise, Roberts (2017) vindicates Paulo Freire, who maintained that education can never be neutral, no matter how much the managerialist technobureaucracy denies it and presents its proposal as the only reasonable thing: “In teaching, we cannot help but favour some ways of understanding human beings and the world, some cultural practices, some ways of social life, over others” (Roberts, 2017: § 14)

As can be expected, this management language entails practices that give more importance to the functioning of the organisation than to its purposes. This leads, for example, to the activity of a faculty depending on its operating costs and,

for this reason, the option of attending at night has practically disappeared.

And, on the other hand, the current educational system creates an overwhelming bureaucracy (of mistrust), both in time and effort dedicated. It is not about accountability, but rather tangled forms of standards to be met have to be filled out under the pretext of their usefulness for the organisation, the teachers and the students when, in reality, they are tools for evaluating the teacher's work. or from the centre. Here, we also include the development of teaching guides, which would be just as useful, but more readable, if the teacher could get rid of technicalities and pedagogical idiolect. And, if we think about research (as you know, competitive), the issue is even more complex. In this case, the bases of the calls change from edition and edition, or, even, within the framework of the same call there may be rectifications in response to ambiguous paragraphs, and the calendars and deadlines are short and may coincide with periods of non-working days.

In short, much of the time that should be dedicated to research or teaching is used to justify them. These tools end up being a mere expedient to fulfil, so that their purpose, normally based on the search for quality teaching and research, is nullified. How does the teacher respond to this situation? With anger and resignation. The important thing is to deliver it within the assigned period and, above all, ensure that the application does not detect any errors in any box and allows you to save the document to be sent.

It must be taken into account that, in this framework, teachers do not have the possibility of having support personnel. The university invests centrally in the administrative system that requires this bureaucratisation, since that is where the data that determines the university's location in the sector rankings is produced.

### 3.2 Research, teaching and subjectivities

We return here to talk about research and teaching, but we do so from a less common perspective, one that takes subjectivities into account. We will start with the investigation. We share with Gómez, Bravo and Jódar (2015: 1738) that "research activity is conceived as a continuous process of self-valuation that requires planning and application of business principles: production, investment, cost calculation. (...) Economics becomes a personal discipline". Gómez, Bravo and Jódar (2015: 1738) add: "Research practice is transformed into an investment in the curriculum itself, which brings the researcher subjective and/or material benefits while hindering processes of collective thinking and reflection, which, when they do occur, run the risk of being capitalised by the logic of individual authorship".

Like Zafra (2022), Gómez, Bravo and Jódar (2015: 1739) make us see that, in this case, "evaluative practices allow individuals to govern themselves under the pressure of competition". Which means, de facto, assuming individualism as the aim and only sharing what strategically benefits the personal curriculum. Thus, science, more than a purpose, is

the procedure to achieve a work goal, only that "the production of knowledge is valued according to an unattainable horizon that involves hyperactivity and constant efforts, none of them completely satisfactory or definitive, but which, however, it forces us to always be in motion, permanently on course and to demonstrate the necessary flexibility to digest increasing amounts of demands" (Gómez, Bravo and Jódar, 2015: 1739).

The same thing happens with the teaching task: teaching does not only mean preparing content. You also have to justify what and how it is done, configure entertaining classes, 'dictate' them, encourage the prevailing morality (remember, for example, the imperative of entrepreneurs), be aware of new technologies (which, in the case of journalism, goes beyond teaching technology and includes all the news that has to do with professional practice), plan the calendar of activities based on the resources and spaces available, tutor internships and final degree projects<sup>3</sup> attend teacher training courses, apply new pedagogical methods and respond quickly to the requirements made by students through the virtual campus or email. Outside of this list, there is only the task of evaluating, but, given the limited time remaining, only the test exam is possible, the evaluation of which is also automated. These exams with lists of closed questions are a medium-term investment: initially formulating the questions takes time, but once a pool of questions has been accumulated, it only has to be updated. In addition, this not only frees up correction time, but also from claims for the grades obtained.

Certainly, how the evaluation tasks are carried out would allow a specific article to be written. Here, we will only add that in supervised projects (we are thinking above all of final degree project, but also of master thesis) the teacher directly involved in the process participates in the evaluation. And, of course, we cannot forget that the teaching teams are also evaluated by the students, although, above the results, sometimes more importance is given to the percentages of participation in this type of surveys, since a low index presupposes a bad evaluation (implicit) for the teacher.

### 4. From subjectivities, an evaluation of teaching and research activities

We have been told, and we continue to be reminded often, that the main function of a university professor is to transmit knowledge to students. However, in practice, we know that research is more profitable for the personal resume and, therefore, for the prestige of professors and universities. We will now stop at some derivatives of what we have just written.

First, since research is more productive for professional development, it stands to reason that teachers would dedicate more effort to it. In many cases, the professor, in addition to arriving exhausted to the classroom, to teaching, assumes this task as a 'sine qua non' to be able to work at the university. It is therefore logical to think that the quality of teaching could



be reduced or called into question. Secondly, it is known that good performance in the field of research entails teaching fewer classes, a kind of reward that makes some people think that a professor with a lot of teaching 'load' is presumably a bad researcher. Thirdly, there is the paradox that those who dedicate the least time to teaching have the most capacity to decide about it, since to advance professionally one cannot stop researching and that promotion can lead to decision-making positions. And, fourthly, research has gone from specialisation to hyper-specialisation, which, at least in social sciences, is not good news. Hyper-specialised knowledge leads to precisely the opposite of what is required in most teaching-learning processes. In social phenomena, the factors involved are multiple.

The neoliberal response to the above has been manifesting for years in the university, but now it is more evident through this phenomenon: there are those who only dedicate themselves to teaching, those who only research, and even those who only manage (and professionals who only manage, under the double pretext of specialisation and having a non-unionist perspective - apparently they are not corporatist). An example of corporatism in which the interests of managers, teachers and students come together is the possibility that each subject only occupies one day of the weekly planning, even if this implies theoretical classes of up to 3 hours in duration.

#### 4.1. Subjective proletarianisation

To think about everything raised here, we cannot forget proletarianisation in the university, which Jordi Llovet (2012) already talked about years ago. Unfortunately, apparently, this is already one of the foundations of these institutions, increasingly based on labour exploitation, that is, on excessive work, poorly paid and without a future. How can teaching not suffer?

We must also add that, thinking about both teaching and research, universities develop moral codes that act as legitimising or ethical discourses.

“our inwardness is shaped by legitimising or ethical discourses (excellence, entrepreneurship, employability, innovation); practices (evaluation, accountability, strategic planning); objectives (rankings, reports, reports); patterns of judgement (continuous and unlimited optimisation of our performance); modes of relationship with oneself (self-regulation, self-control); ideals (self-realisation) and legislative changes. Subjectivation is a process of unification, of relative stabilisation of all these heterogeneous elements”.

(Gómez, Bravo and Jódar, 2015: 1744).

We are talking, therefore, about a stressful and highly vulnerable work situation in which it is easy to feel frustration and helplessness, if not a feeling of failure. It is not in vain that the university is one of the workplaces where the mental health of its workers is the worst. Zafra (2022: 37) clarifies: “For capitalism it is easy to make this ‘enthusiasm’ profitable in a framework of immaterial production, maintaining the rhythms of the productive machinery and the speed and competitive

anxiety. It is like this under the enthusiastic lure of symbolic capital, vanity and the anticipation that, as long as it is born from a vocation, “it will be done anyway”.

#### 5. Bologna Plan and teaching innovation

After the Bologna Plan was firmly defended by the institutions, with a majority of student protest, its development is periodically questioned. The thesis that has been repeated is simple, but not simplistic: the proposal is good, but its application has failed, largely due to poor funding and a reactive, not to say selfish, attitude on the part of many professors. Although it is true that there have been criticisms that have gone beyond the usual arguments, such as that of Pello Salaburu (2014: § 16), who maintains that “the *previous fatigue*, the *lack of information* and, above all, the *bureaucratic pressure* from ANECA have contributed in a special way to the fact that Spanish university students have not felt special sympathy for something as necessary in Europe as the reforms that Bologna demands.”

Let's take it in steps. It is unquestionable that the Spanish public university is poorly financed, but it was already so at the time of the application of the so-called Bologna Plan, therefore, our leaders knew from the beginning that said plan required money that did not exist, so they erred on the side of negligence if not also hypocrisy. Regarding the words of Pello Salaburu (2014), which we share, these deserve certain comments: when he talks about lack of information (to teachers) we think that he should excess of propaganda; the bureaucratic pressure of the ANECA (undeniable) is inherent, as we have been writing, to the commercialisation of university studies, since these require agencies that evaluate, mediate and guide teaching and research, which, in the end, curtail the university autonomy; finally, we do not deny the previous fatigue of the teachers, but, then, we ask ourselves how we should qualify what we are experiencing now with the application and development of Bologna.

On the other hand, when talking about the application of Bologna, the increase in the cost of studies is not usually taken into account; Furthermore, given the organisation of teaching, which requires attending class regularly to monitor continuous evaluation, it is not easy to combine studies and work. Nor is the effect it has had on the way of working in classrooms usually underlined. For example, greater fragmentation of knowledge and reduction of content; greater concern for how, with a high presence of technology in the classroom, than for content; high teacher-student ratio; decrease in the demands to pass a subject or infantilisation of the campuses, by overprotecting and not treating students as autonomous adults responsible for their actions.

All of this clearly has negative consequences on the construction of critical thinking, which is impossible. The content of classes is usually subject to fashion, so reflection is impossible. The teacher's objective is for students to develop skills as if they did

not require knowledge: detecting social problems that require solutions is something more complex than working in a group or organising time. You may think that this is where the university was already heading before the Bologna Plan, but this is only a presumption and, on the other hand, the application of the Bologna Plan is a reality.

From a distance, the Bologna Plan can be seen as the instrument that was needed to commercialise the university, although this idea has not taken root. It is still paradoxical that an institution that prejudices itself as the guarantor of the critical spirit is so uncritical of its deep functioning. Going beyond subjectivities, we should delve into the objective reasons that have led to this situation. And, although this objective cannot be developed in this article, we do want to highlight here that it is a mistake to interpret criticism of the Bologna Plan as a direct rejection for fear of facing changes.

Marina Garcés (2022: 11), when dealing with the question of alternative teachings, tells us: “We already know that capitalism recovers everything and turns it into a commodity. The problem is one of confusion. Nowadays the truth is fought with confusion”. And he emphasises: “The elements of this strategy of confusion are many, but they are specified, I believe, between three axes of issues: management models, the relationship between learning and knowledge and the meaning of pedagogical change” (Garcés, 2022: 12).

The author also points to the problem of the prevalence of how over what: “The current pedagogical shift promotes an idea of learning that is empty of content. These have ceased to matter because, being available in real time through technology, the only important thing is to learn to move agilely and with judgement in that new environment. It is a fallacious idea that contrasts procedures (how) with content (what), as if they could be separated, and even more serious, as if we could learn without knowing anything. It is obvious: learning is learning *something* and only by knowing *something* can we learn more” (Garcés, 2022: 14). It is a pedagogical shift that focuses on the emotional and procedural where teaching innovation “becomes an end in itself, without considering the question of why and, above all, for whom. Pedagogical renewal stops being a social practice and becomes a commercial and mercantile activity” (Marina Garcés, 2022: 14).

For Jaume Carbonell (cited by Pérez Rueda, 2022: 25-26), the so-called pedagogical innovation “is a polysemic concept that lends itself to multiple readings depending on who uses it, in what context it takes place and to what purposes it serves”. According to Carbonell, “innovation is frequently associated with the development or adaptation of the capitalist system; a novelty or seasonal product; to modernity and educational updating; to cosmetic changes or simple partial improvements”. And it ends up linking with what we maintained paragraphs ago, the “how we do it” ends up prevailing over the meaning, the “why”. There is no doubt that this way of understanding teaching innovation is at the service of a conception of a certain university model.

## 6. The journalism studies market

Nuncio Ordine states that “when this idea of useful knowledge arises, of professionalising the school, of looking only at the market, it means that we have totally lost the idea of the importance of knowledge as an experience in itself: studying to be better” (Loreana, 2023: § 8). We think that this point of view does not apply either to the vast majority of students who choose a degree or to the majority of tertiary academic offerings. In fact, statements of this nature, if not contextualised and carefully developed, can exude classism. Now, as we have been writing, when commercial utilitarianism governs the meaning of studies, they become at the service of the purpose (and logic) of the market, which, by the way, is anything but democratic.

In general terms, we must not forget that studying at university is usually understood as a ‘value’ in which you invest to obtain a return: getting a better-paid type of job with greater social prestige. In a society like Spain, in which the discredit of so-called ‘vocational training’ is more than notable, this ‘university utilitarianism’ grows in two ways: with a disproportionate increase in university students and with the constant incorporation into the university offer of professional studies that claim to be part of the university offering.

When we look at degrees such as journalism, we see that this is conceived as the training requirement for a profession. Therefore, there is no doubt that its useful meaning easily changes into utilitarianism, and defines the good professional that the market needs at all times. From what has been written, it is easy to deduce that it is very difficult for a study plan to counteract, or even diminish, those objective and subjective forces that we have been talking about.

At the same time, we find a hyper-supply of journalism degrees: there is still a great demand and, currently, they are cheaper to organise (due to the reduction in the price of technology and the parallel increase in domestic technology). In other words, they seem increasingly profitable for universities in a double sense: they provide income and silence complaints about lack of places. In this way, the logic of obtaining income prevails over the logic of the demand for jobs, with the result already known for decades: there is no job for so many graduates. And this reality is so palpable that it causes many students to abandon their studies or continue in them disillusioned and, therefore, demotivated.

But, even seeing that the most reasonable thing would be to reduce the offer of degrees and places, there would be other forces that would prevent it, as a result of the dynamics of university departments, which are also producers of ‘goods’, and that operate in continuous competition with other departments. These assets are the teachers: once the staff is stabilised, or in the process of being stabilised, it is impossible to make changes that imply its reduction. In fact, this is also a contributing factor to the increase of the catalogue of increasingly specialised studies in order to achieve a distinctive character to counteract the lack

of autonomy that universities have to develop distinguishable study plans.

In the field of journalism, this breakdown into degrees with which universities seek to differentiate themselves helps to increasingly blur the line between journalism and content. There is no doubt that journalism is content, but it is also undeniable that not all content, the majority, is journalism. And we are supposedly in a journalism degree, aren't we? But we must also warn that students come to the classroom with very different references from those of years ago and the ways of doing journalism often seem outdated or knowledge that they can do without to find a job.

On this question, Laurent Beccaria and Patrick de Saint-Exupéry (2020: § 15) indicate: "In each season, miraculous solutions emerge that are never the same and that is when disappointments follow disappointments. Since, invariably, another question arises: adapt to what?" And they add: "A journalist who spends his time rewriting press releases deserves to be replaced by a computer, estimates the founder of *Journalistic*". The recent closure of *BuzzFeed*'s journalism division and *Vice*'s bankruptcy filing are also market signals.

The market makes mistakes and constantly corrects itself. Shouldn't this be taken into account in journalism degrees? For example, basing teaching discourse on content traffic should mean cutting out more than one teaching guide, cutting out information about journalistic practice. Not having a critical and observant view of the market ends up confusing the fundamental with the peremptory, when it is assumed that a degree like journalism has to be articulated around this differentiation and, therefore, delve into the fundamental. If the fundamentals are not established, we turn journalism into a profession in which skills prevail but one is incapable of discernment, which leads to the journalist being a dispensable mediator.

We agree with Serón (2023: § 12) when he warns us that "study plans must be downloaded with lots of 'specialist details' that, although it may not seem like it, are always easy for a graduate to learn when he/she needs them, if he/she needs them". According to Serón (2023: § 13), the emphasis must be placed on "expanding the student's cognitive field so that they better understand the world in which they live and in which they will develop their professional activity". World, let us not forget, that conditions and in which that professional activity is inserted.

Finally, we must emphasise that technology, thinking about both its use and its understanding, for example, a distinction should be made between technology and technological tools, is necessary in these study plans. But we must be careful not to fall into technocentrism, "the risk of ignoring the teaching of basic knowledge, such as those based on professional deontology, or failing to focus on the development of elementary capabilities, both hard and soft, to professional practice, from writing texts to analysing current events or critical consumption of all types of media" (Rojas Torrijos in Álvaro Luizzi (2023: §. 4). That is, knowledge about technology should always be complementary.

Marina Garcés (2022: 17) states that "one of the many definitions of 'learning' could be, today, the acquisition of that knowledge and skills that allow us, above all, to undo confusion regarding some relevant issue". A statement that seems fundamental to us in the journalism degree: If you don't understand how are you going to explain?

## 7. As a final reflection

When we talk about the commercialisation of the university, we are not referring to a collaboration with private companies, but rather to the fact that the logic of the market has ended up dictating the functioning, governance, functions, priorities, objectives and evaluation devices of universities. Since the end of the 20th century, neoliberalism has been working with this purpose, managing to transform the being of universities and, furthermore, with little opposition from its members.

Within this logic, teaching, the supposed priority of the university, is undervalued in relation to research, and in both cases they move towards hyperspecialisation. Knowledge is fragmented, content decreases, the superfluous is confused with the fundamental, how (it is explained) matters more than what (it is explained) and knowledge is replaced by skills. To create a global market for tertiary education, in what has come to be called 'mobility', commercial logic has required homogenising content and structures of study plans, curtailing university autonomy. In the European Union, this homogenisation is known as the Bologna Plan.

In other words, what has taken precedence is utilitarianism and this is greater the more professional the degree is, something inherent to journalism studies. In our opinion, they are currently guilty of technocentrism and of falling into the obsolescence of content by confusing what is fundamental with what is superfluous. At the same time, utilitarianism is manifested in the growing discredit of theoretical content and in the accommodation of study plans to what is interpreted as the needs of the market. Even in the journalism degrees themselves, content is confused with journalism, thus stimulating a progressive replacement of "informational references" with "productive references" from the perspective of the students.

We are told, and we believe it, that democracy needs journalism. But for this purpose to come to fruition, and even more so in an increasingly complex society, we should carefully take care of the training of future journalists so that they are able to inform and explain with criteria the what and why of what happens. A journalist must train throughout his or her professional career, even specialising, but the degree provides, neither more nor less, the space to build the foundations of future professional practice. Along with the specific knowledge of journalism and communication studies, which must not be distorted by practical utilitarianism, it seems increasingly important to us to have a greater general culture and, on the other hand, the assumption of values inherent to journalism and

citizenship in order to act in accordance with the common good, since that and nothing else is information.

## Notes

1. To delve deeper into these issues, see World Bank (1995) and Lavarde, M. (2003).
2. Similar arguments are supported by Catanzaro, G. (2020), Alves, A. (2019), Giroux, HA (2018) and Lora, J., & Recéndez, C. (2003).
3. The dynamics of final degree projects is a good example of how costs can distort the purpose. Firstly, the actual teaching load of this task takes up many more hours than those officially considered, that is, the cost of the teacher is reduced and they are forced to do more work. But, in response to complaints, the weight of the final degree project in the student's file has been reduced by reducing credits which, in turn, implies a reduction in demands.

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