

# Commitment to an Ethical and Culturally Diverse Journalism

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The Socially-Spirited Journalism task force of the Catalan Association of Journalists has been working for almost twenty-five years to improve the approach to multiculturalism in the media. Thus, in collaboration with NGOs and other organisations, many initiatives have been developed aimed at eradicating any trace of xenophobia, racism and discrimination in the media. Thanks to the good practices promoted by this task force, journalism can decisively encourage people to regard migrants from an inclusive perspective of respect and dialogue rather than influenced by alarmist and sensationalist discourses. Migrants enrich and bring value to societies, and at the Catalan Association of Journalism, through the Socially-Spirited Journalism task force, great progress has been made in this respect to commit to an ethical and culturally diverse journalism.

In 1993, a group of journalists concerned about the portrayal of immigration in the media began reflecting on how the approach to multiculturalism could be improved and, in 1995, the Media and Ethnic Minorities task force of the Catalan Association of Journalists was set up, later renamed Socially-Spirited Journalism.

Since then, this group has focused its work on the relation between the practice of journalism, the portrayal of interculturalism in our society and the visibility of the work of NGOs in issues related to peace, human rights and development cooperation.

Thus, over these years, several meetings to exchange views have been held with groups of migrants and journalists, as well as work sessions on the approach of the media to issues such as racism and xenophobia, training courses and workshops, and a series of debates,

which seek to reflect on those issues that usually are not covered by the media or whose approach is far from what we think is appropriate. In 2019, the motto of the series of debates will be “New Challenges of Communication”, and we are already preparing the first lecture entitled “Rumours, Hate Speech and Xenophobia in the Media”. This event will be held with the support of the Communication Committee of the Xarxa Barcelona Antirumors.

## Ethical Code

The 2nd Congress of Catalan Journalists, held in 1992, approved the deontological code, a tool that expressed the will to advocate free and responsible media outlets in the framework of a plural and democratic society. This

code, pioneering in Spain, was a declaration of principles, based on twelve criteria, norms and values that must govern journalism.

Four years later, in 1996, the Catalan Association of Journalists promoted the creation of a body to ensure the fulfilment of this code and that receives complaints from citizens if they believe some of its principles have been infringed. This board, the Information Council of Catalonia (CIC), is made up by a group of female and male jurists, sociologists, professors of ethics, deontology or communication, directors of civic organisations, journalists, and so on, who must rule on these alleged infringements of the deontological code. So far 797 complaints have been processed.

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With technological progress and, especially, with the development of Internet, we saw the need to revise and update the code, which was approved in the framework of the 6th Congress of Catalan Journalists, held in 2016.

Undoubtedly, the fact of having provided ourselves with these two tools, the code and the Council, helps ensure that journalism based on two main principles – social responsibility and veracity – enables a free and responsible press to be developed in the framework of a plural and democratic society.

## **Socially-Spirited Journalism Projects**

The 2nd Congress of Catalan Journalists approved the allocation of 0.7% of the ordinary budget of the Catalan Association of Journal-

ists to support communication projects related to cooperation and solidarity. The Cooperation Projects Tender was called for the first time in 1993 and cancelled in 2012, due to budgetary constraints. This 0.7% of the budget is framed within the work that the Socially-Spirited Journalism task force is developing to foster a kind of journalism in which sensitivity towards the least favoured social sectors and territories and countries is gradually enhanced. A kind of journalism, in short, that guarantees that the right to information, of which we journalists are the depositaries, is free from stereotypes and avoids any type of social exclusion.

With the aim of increasing the economic endowment of the prize, in its last editions it was called every two years and, among other projects, support was provided to many community and indigenous radio stations in Central America, Mexico and Venezuela. The last editions with 0.7% were for the Basic training cycle in journalism and audiovisual communication in the refugee camps of Tinduf (Algeria), for the Association of Friends of the Saharawi Television (2010) and for the creation of the Online platform for capacity-building on violence in the media, submitted by the agency SEMLAC (Servicio de Noticias de la Mujer de Latinoamérica y del Caribe), an organisation founded in 1978. This project also involved the creation of an online library on the issue that provides coverage to eighteen Latin American and Caribbean countries, which was implemented in 2013.

## **The Diverscat Website**

Most of our work in the task force has undoubtedly involved our endeavours to influence the approach to cultural diversity in the media. As a result of the debate and reflection with different actors, we published the *Manual d'estil sobre minories ètniques* [Style Manual on Eth-

nic Minorities], approved by the 1996 Congress of Journalists and updated in 2010 with the publication of the *Guia sobre el tractament de la diversitat cultural en els mitjans de comunicació* [Guide to the Approach to Cultural Diversity in the Media]. In 2002 we published the *Agenda de la multiculturalitat de Barcelona* [Barcelona Multiculturalism Agenda], with which we wanted to promote the plurality of news sources to give a voice to groups that usually lack it or are portrayed from a perspective distorted by our andro-ethnocentric viewpoint. In 2007 we expanded the agenda to the province of Barcelona and, finally, in 2010, we presented the website Diverscat, which covered the whole of Catalonia. This website ([www.diverscat.cat](http://www.diverscat.cat)) is being renewed to improve interactivity between the organisations and media to become a benchmark of the profession to achieve truly inclusive journalism. To do so, it provides journalists, the media and citizens with a range of resources that help establish routines to eradicate stereotypes and prejudices, create synergies between different groups and professionals dealing with cultural diversity, and expand the universe of sources consulted.

An important tool on this website is the “Qui és qui” section, a directory of experts, private companies, journalists, media outlets, research groups and public institutions linked to diversity. It is a meeting point to get to know and promote diversity in Catalonia. Moreover, Diverscat includes the section “L’altaveu”, where organisations can publish events, news and agendas they organise on diversity or migration issues.

### Support for NGOs in the Fields of Peace, Development, Human Rights and Social Work Volunteering

In 2008 a cooperation agreement was signed with the four NGO federations in their re-

spective fields of action (peace, development, human rights, and social work volunteering). This agreement sought to achieve three objectives: first, the creation of the Journalism Advice Service (SAP), free for organisations that lack sufficient resources for communication. Second, to enhance two-directional training; in other words, empowering NGOs in matters of communication and journalists in issues of peace, development and human rights. Finally, we wanted to have an effect on the media by fostering agreements to achieve a greater and, above all, more effective presence of NGOs in the media.

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In the context of the crisis that began in 2008, we were unable to start and monitor each of the objectives we had set ourselves. Therefore, the project was at a standstill until, in 2015, the European Network of Women Journalists put forward a proposal to provide the Journalism Advice Service (SAP) free for NGOs and linked to the job bank of the Catalan Association of Journalists. Thus, the service is free for organisations but paid for journalists who carry out the different activities.

The SAP first had the support of the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation, and later of the Global Justice and International Cooperation Department at Barcelona City Council. Until December 2018 and free of charge, support was provided to thirty-four organisations on issues such as disseminating events, preparing a communication plan, creating a website, and training on social networks. The demands have

been highly diverse, all of them dealt with by journalists from the job bank at the Association of Journalists, and prioritising unemployed or self-employed journalists.

The project has been well received by NGOs and the journalism profession, and has enabled areas of cooperation and reflection to be created that, through communication, help transform society and build social justice.

## Recommendations and Good Practices

Unquestionably, work in the media responds to production routines and habits that are part and parcel of the professional practice. Therefore, great efforts are made by professional organisations such as associations and unions, as well as other kinds of organisations that defend the rights of minorities, to eradicate any trace of xenophobia, racism and discrimination from these routines and habits.

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The main challenge is to create discursive dynamics that respect cultural diversity and have a gender perspective. A voice must be given to the protagonists, especially women, who are often made invisible by the media’s limited and narrow viewpoint.

Migrants must be portrayed as the protagonists of their own story and not simply as migrants. In other words, showing migration positively, rather than through alarmist and sensationalist discourses. Broadcasters and journalists must be trained in these issues to

foster an inclusive perspective of reality that will improve and democratise the news. In this spirit, we want to highlight the initiative of the European Network of Women Journalists, which holds workshops on communicative empowerment for women and migrants. We must also promote meeting and contact points with the different groups of migrants.

Moreover, we must encourage good practices in the media through the creation of outlets to shed light on migration based on its richness and, of course, promote the recruitment of journalists of diverse cultural origins, which will broaden the media. We have to learn to listen to and embrace other voices, as recognising and valuing difference will help us deconstruct the prejudices we all have and make us better professionals.

## By Way of an Epilogue

Our image of the world is formed, to a great extent, through the media, which as well as informing and entertaining us, also “constructs” the reality around us. Thus, the media plays a very important role in the creation of public opinion, as it shapes values, attitudes and judgements concerning our social, cultural and political environment.

In 2020, the Socially-Spirited Journalism task force will be twenty years old and our commitment is as relevant as it was on the first day: for an ethical and culturally diverse journalism. Over these years many aspects have improved but we still have much to do, for example, to expand diversity in our editorial offices so that migrants, from their own perspective, can contribute more to debates that do not necessarily concern migration.