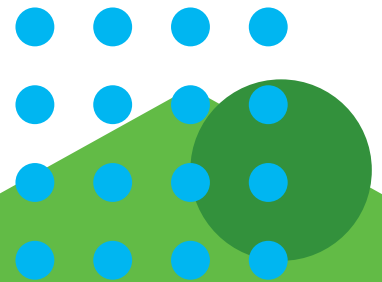


DISCUSSION PAPER

Pushing for change

Laying the groundwork for
tomorrow's journalism today



Author: Erik Albrecht

While media outlets around the world seek solutions to the challenges posed by digital transformation, providers of Media and Journalism Education (MJE) face an even greater struggle. At the same time, their role in navigating our media ecosystems through the current disruptions is vital.

We need to think about and deliver MJE in new ways to ensure it can fulfill its intended function: laying the groundwork for tomorrow's journalism today. This discussion paper aims to start a conversation on what a holistic approach to MJE can and should look like.

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DW Akademie's Media and Journalism Education (MJE) concept

Strengthening training providers structurally

Shrinking budgets and a lack of viable business models, click-bait journalism and a general disenchantment of society with journalism and the media: In many media ecologies around the world, public interest media find themselves under increasing pressure.

Their role in society has changed: Today, journalists do not only have to compete with politicians, activists, and social media users for attention, but also with disseminators of disinformation that undermine reliable reporting.

In times of digital change, one of the main questions for media development is how to enable MJE to not only keep up with the sector's current demands, but to prepare professionals who can master future challenges as well. Therefore, media development needs a holistic approach that looks beyond the training content and curricula of journalism courses. Media and Journalism Education is about forging a coalition of actors and stakeholders from within the media community and beyond, who are committed to developing MJE further and thus lay the groundwork for the journalism of the future. In short: MJE is much more than training.

MJE structures can take very different shapes

Universities offer degree courses or mid-career specialization, journalism schools, film schools or training centers set up by media houses conduct hands-on workshops, media associations or other networks build capacity for their members.

“ We at DW Akademie aim to strengthen the viability of MJE providers structurally.

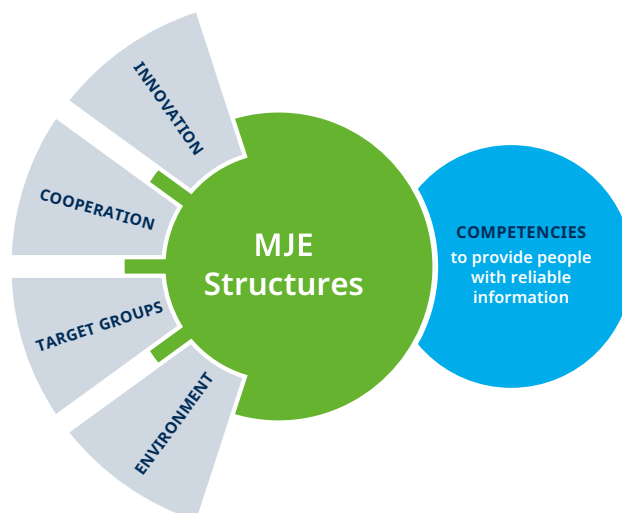
In our vision, MJE providers support media practitioners in actively shaping the future of our media ecosystems. We want to offer a space where journalists can engage with new trends or develop new products and solutions for a journalism in the service of the public. In this way, MJE takes a leading role in moving the profession forward. MJE providers train media practitioners able to thrive in the digital age. They are at the forefront of innovation that benefits both the public and the media that these practitioners work for.

An innovative MJE tailors its programs to the media ecosystem in which it operates and enables media practitioners to shape it. To play its part in making public interest media viable, MJE needs to assume ownership of the challenges media ecosystems worldwide face.

“ Its purpose is to train agents of change for media under pressure.

In order to put MJE providers in a position to do so, a structural approach to MJE must take six dimensions into account.

- **Structures:** MJE providers need **viable structures** to train media practitioners in innovative competencies, fostering long-term success.
- **Innovation:** MJE has to position itself as an incubator for **innovative** media practices.
- **Cooperation:** A **broad cooperation** with the media community and civil society, but also the tech sector and others is crucial to develop a vision of journalism for the benefit of all.
- **Target groups:** MJE has to address **diverse target groups** to build a professional community that is as diverse as society and foster a more inclusive public dialogue.
- **Enabling environment:** An **enabling environment** that supports MJE and provides the framework for it to evolve.
- **Competencies:** And finally, the very reason for the existence of MJE, providing **competencies** to shape the media practices of the future.



MJE structures

Strengthening media ecosystems long-term needs viable MJE providers that look beyond their core task of training media practitioners and assume responsibility for the sector as a whole.

Be it a journalism faculty at a university or a training hub for community media—whatever form these viable MJE structures take, they provide a space for educators to develop curricula for the digital age, putting the informational needs of the public at its center.

Similar to [the viability concept for media outlets](#), MJE's viability means more than just the money to finance a training program. It requires training providers to be deeply rooted in the media community and the society the media serve (**cooperation and environment**), as well as connected with the media's **target groups**. This is vital for determining training needs, for access to professional trainers, job placements for alumni and not least for the reputation of MJE programs.

Innovation

In DW Akademie's vision of MJE, training providers evolve into innovation hubs for the media ecosystem they serve. This way, they compensate for the lack of resources of media outlets and other actors to experiment with new media practices and products. MJE at its best provides a space in which media practitioners can rethink the future of journalism outside the limitations of commercial or political interests. Innovative content and interactive training approaches allow journalists to experiment with new formats beyond the pressure of daily production cycles. Working at the forefront of innovation, MJE can provide vital impulses to the ecosystem as a whole.

Cooperation

If MJE is to become a catalyst for innovation and bridging the gap between theory and practice, it needs a broad cooperation of stakeholders supporting and informing its efforts. "Broad" is the key word: Media outlets, civil society and activists, tech specialists and sectors such as the gaming industry need to form a diverse coalition to develop future media practices and introduce them into the media ecosystem.

Target groups

Newly emerging media practices pose a challenge to students, seasoned journalists, and top-level media managers alike. Modular training programs provide opportunities for media professionals at all stages of their careers to acquire

new skills, rethink work routines or develop new formats—for a media and journalism education that helps keep up with digital change.

MJE is key in providing freedom of speech and access to information to all groups of society. Article 19 of the UN Convention on Human Rights means not only that media have to report on all parts of society, but also that media practitioners from all parts of society need to be able to do the reporting. Making media and journalism education accessible to all parts of society is vital to bringing more voices into the public sphere. DW Akademie's human rights centered approach puts a special focus on those parts of society with limited freedom of expression and access to information. By building a professional community as diverse as society, media and journalism education makes our public dialogue more inclusive.

Enabling environment

The quality of media and journalism education depends on the environment MJE operates in. Developing competencies for public interest journalism needs an enabling environment in which such journalism can thrive. This means:

- A **political and legal framework** that guarantees freedom of speech and access to information.
- **Independence for training providers** to determine their curricula.
- Mechanisms certifying the quality of MJE programs.
- A **media industry** that takes **ownership** of MJE and supports young journalists in finding their way into the profession.
- An **openness within the media industry** for employees to apply their new competencies in their daily work.

All these aspects are not self-evident. This is where advocacy activities can help strengthen MJE's impact.

Competencies

Looking at the challenges our media ecosystems face today, one can identify five clusters of competencies that MJE has to teach for media practitioners to be able to shape their sector in times of constant change. Most of them are not new, but they are ever-more urgent as public interest media struggle to adapt.

Even if the specific skills are continually evolving—and might differ from media ecosystem to media ecosystem, five clusters of competencies remain crucial for media practitioners to provide their audiences with reliable information:

- **Journalistic basics:** Teaching the necessary skills for public interest journalism.

- **Ethics and the media:** Reflecting upon the media's role in society.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Digital skills and rethinking media practices in the service of the public.
- **Entrepreneurial journalism:** To develop new formats with a view to the informational needs of the audience.
- **A thematic focus:** For insightful reporting on complex issues.

How to lay the groundwork for tomorrow's journalism today

So how can media development support MJE best within this framework? In the following we would like to set out some thoughts for discussion on how media and journalism education needs to evolve in order to fulfill its mission: Laying the ground for tomorrow's journalism today.

1. MJE providers must take responsibility for their media ecosystem

MJE's purpose is not only to train journalists. It is to help the media ecosystem shape digital change. Far too often, we in media development help train journalists (and we do that well!) only to find that there is no place in the respective media ecosystem for the kind of public-interest journalism we have trained them in.

We need to connect the fields of media viability and media and journalism education conceptually much more closely. In a sense, MJE's reason for being is not that journalists need training. Its purpose is to help the media ecosystem tackle its challenges and shape its future. MJE's contribution to this is capacity development of media practitioners.

Many journalism educators share the frustration of giving their best to train journalists, only to see their alumni's idealism being ground down in the day-to-day business of a struggling industry. In times when digital change has put many media outlets under severe economic pressure, simply training journalists is no longer enough. High-quality MJE addresses its media ecosystem's needs.

Instead of training a "traditional canon" of journalistic competencies, training providers need to design curricula that help media outlets weather digital change. This perspective gives educators a new form of agency. Looking at the general

challenges of the sector, they can train change agents: media practitioners who shape the change instead of laboring on the industry's conveyor belts.

(For further details on how to develop an innovative curriculum check out our ↗ [Mapping out curriculum development](#)).

2. Strengthening the viability of training providers is key to a successful MJE

MJE providers need to become key actors within their media ecosystems. Universities, training centers or journalism and film schools are institutions where different people from the sector come together. As such, they are well placed to become forums for discussions on the future public interest media.

We need to invest much more attention and resources to help MJE providers become viable organizations that are set up to play this role for their media ecosystem. This means consultancy on aspects of organizational development. It also includes ways of experimenting with agile structures and methods that might serve as examples of best-practice for other media organizations.

3. MJE needs to look beyond traditional journalists

At the same time, MJE has to look beyond the traditional understanding and function of journalists. Many in media development speak of public interest media, defined as being inclusive of all types of media that serve the public rather than particular interests, regardless of ownership or distribution channels. People who provide information for public dialogue might not call themselves journalists. They might, however, do better journalism than legacy media. If we define journalism as "the activity of gathering, assessing, creating, and presenting news and information" as well as "the product of these activities"¹ and fostering public debate, many of those doing journalism in one aspect or the other might not even consider themselves journalists.

Independent content creators might not work in legacy media outlets, but run YouTube channels or spread information via Instagram or X (formerly Twitter). Filmmakers often bring the issues of marginalized groups of society into the focus of public debate. Game designers can offer alternative feminist narratives to teenagers. All these actors and potentially many more are crucial in providing citizens with access to information and freedom of expression.

¹ <https://www.americanpressinstitute.org/journalism-essentials/what-is-journalism>

MJE programs need to target independent content creators, filmmakers or other actors experimenting with new ways of doing journalism and providing access to information beyond the legacy media, as well as media managers, film-producers or other (social) media practitioners.

It is no longer the question whether somebody considers themselves a journalist or not (a doubtful criteria in the first place given the fact that in many countries, pro-government state media outlets claim to do journalism). Selection criteria have to be about whether they aim to contribute to the greater objective of public interest journalism: Providing trusted information so that citizens can engage in a dialogue on issues relevant for society and hold those in power to account.

4. MJE needs to put a special focus on disadvantaged groups

A special focus in DW Akademie's work is making advanced MJE accessible to disadvantaged groups. One challenge is how these communities can participate in the technological progress journalism faces in times of digital change. On the one hand, community media might lack the resources and the capacity to adopt new technologies; on the other hand, their audiences might not be able to afford the gadgets necessary to consume the media products, or the infrastructure—be it internet or electricity—will not allow for it.

In **Burkina Faso**, we work together with community radio stations to train local correspondents. Reporting on issues important to rural areas and internally displaced persons, they give these communities a voice in the public sphere.



Radio Vénégré: Giving rural society a voice.

In **Bolivia**, digital learning platforms offer state-of-the-art journalism training to rural community reporters and journalists, using blended learning concepts and fully virtual classes. Collaborative innovation labs work together with media professionals and civil society to support participatory journalism.

5. In times of shrinking budgets, MJE has to position itself as an incubator for new media practices

Training providers as an incubator for new media practices? To some this might sound like wishful thinking. In our fast-changing media ecosystems, it becomes increasingly difficult for educators to stay up to date in order to remain relevant at all for the sector. Many educators find it challenging enough to keep up with the current developments in the sector. The often-deplored gap between journalism practice and journalism education risks becoming unbridgeable. At the same time, public interest media need professionals trained in future and current practices more than ever.

For MJE providers, the role of leading their media ecosystems into the future could potentially be a natural one. They are often well-connected within the sector, which enables them to monitor training needs as well as scout for innovative solutions and expertise. Trainers need to be by default first among their peers in terms of expertise. And education is by its very definition a bet on the future: Developing MJE training programs means considering future needs.

So how can MJE programs become more innovative? In the context of media development, this can happen via two paths:

1. by introducing new journalistic practices into a media ecosystem through capacity development and exchange—be it South-to-South, from capital to regions, or between media outlets.

In the **Ukrainian Journalism Teachers Academy JTA**, journalism university lecturers mainly from the capital Kyiv train lecturers at regional Ukrainian universities—a transfer of knowledge from the center to the regions. In other programs, experts from other countries might help introduce new media practices into a media ecosystem.



© Roman Danilenkov
Bringing together management skills and journalism innovation.

2. by creating new media practices through agile innovation and human-centered design with a diverse group of stakeholders.

In **Southern Africa**, DW Akademie supports a regional network of media professionals and learning institutions. Together, we are driving digital innovation in journalism training forward. Innovation happens within the project—often through idea labs. We develop hands-on curricula that enable journalists to adapt to the digital age and to provide reliable and balanced information. Cooperation between different training providers help spread innovative media practices such as reporting for TikTok throughout the region.



© NamibiaMediaTrust
Advancing digital innovation in journalism training.

Universities in **Lebanon** use human-centered design to develop innovative journalism education. Some modules use gamification to teach complex issues such as digital security to journalism students in a playful way.

6. MJE cannot do it alone — its success depends on building broad coalitions

In times of digital change, we need a public discourse on how journalism can evolve for the benefit of a more inclusive and informed society. MJE providers need to build a community of stakeholders that join forces to help our media ecosystems weather the change they undergo. These coalitions are the very core of the viability of MJE providers. Training institutions are only as strong as the ties to their stakeholders. It needs a joint effort to be at the forefront of innovation.

Collaboration with civil society and the media community make sure future informational needs of society are being incorporated into MJE. Strong networks with the **media community** enable MJE to react to the challenges of digital change through joint efforts and exchange. This ensures educators train media practitioners in the state of the art skills they will need going forward. At the same time, these networks help graduates gain a foot in the door on the job market. Where training happens in university settings, academics can support public interest media through applied academic research, offering valuable insights into audiences or markets.

By joining forces with **civil society**, MJE plays a crucial role in defending the human rights of freedom of expression and access to information, as educators often have the authority necessary to stand up for digital rights. Activists and human-rights defenders can bring the perspective of marginalized groups into a needs assessment or advise on launching training programs for these groups. Ecologists can consult on programs on reporting about climate change, such as the one DW Akademie supports in Lebanon.

A close cooperation with the **technology sector and other related ones** ensures that MJE is at the forefront of media innovation. Tech specialists can point to new technologies or a possible application of artificial intelligence. In other contexts, game designers can help develop new formats for interactive storytelling.

Finally, cooperation with **government structures** is needed to certify media and journalism education programs and ensure diverse target groups have access.

One core task of media development is to strengthen these kinds of networks around MJE providers.

Together with its partners, DW Akademie hosts jointly a regional conference on *“The Future of Journalism Education in Southern Africa.”* The event has evolved into a forum for exchange between media professionals, media managers, academics, and educators. In the course of three days, they discuss the future of journalism and how MJE can react to the challenges. In October 2023, Artificial Intelligence in Journalism was in the focus: *“Empowering African AI — Enhancing Journalism Excellence in the Digital Era”*.

7. Training journalists without engaging with their editors is unsustainable

As the purpose of media and journalism education is to train media practitioners that help shape our media ecosystems for the better, training providers have to go beyond training. For new competencies to unfold their impact within the sector, media managers, film producers and other actors at the management level need to value them and adapt workflows within newsrooms accordingly.

It is not self-evident that every media outlet understands what benefits an employee can bring who knows how to use—for example—virtual reality to do journalism. Training providers need to engage with the decision makers of the sector on how to make products more innovative and how to best employ MJE alumni. Often this will not mean training media managers but consulting their outlets or engaging with them through lunch talks or other exchange formats.

In Ukraine, DW Akademie helped establish the country's first traineeship program for editors that combines management skills with journalistic innovation.

At the same time, this kind of cooperation helps ground training providers in the community and tailor their programs to the needs of the sector. Thus, MJE can combine playing the role of incubator for new journalism practices and ensure the employability of their trainees.

8. We need a constant conversation on (meta-)competencies

MJE is more than training—while training, of course, remains at the core of MJE. We need a constant conversation on which competencies media practitioners need in order to be able to shape the future of their professions. Increasingly, meta competencies are gaining importance alongside innovative media practices. It is not just about innovation, but **how** to make

innovation happen within a media outlet. Most importantly, **journalistic basics** still remain the basis for public interest media. If anything, checking the facts, asking inconvenient questions, selecting relevant information, and presenting it to the public in a compelling way have become more important. Amid an abundance of information, trustworthy information relevant to the audience's lives is—in many settings—still hard to come by. Media practitioners have to master these basics in order to fulfill their function of providing access to information and freedom of expression, and to foster a meaningful public dialog. They also need to reflect on how these journalistic basics can be kept alive under changing circumstances. This includes questions such as what doing research means in the age of artificial intelligence.

Like journalistic basics, **ethics and reflection upon the media's role in society** are not new competencies the digital age has made necessary. However, in times where public interest media have lost their gate-keeping function, their relationship with their audiences and the public as a whole are subject to redefinition. Media and journalism education can provide a space for these kinds of reflections so that media practitioners find their place in the cacophony of different voices in the public sphere, and are able to build closer connections to their target groups.

Innovation and technology have become buzz words not only in the media sphere. However, for innovation not to become a goal in itself, media practitioners have to use it to strengthen their public service remit. MJE can not only provide them with the necessary digital skills, but also create a space in which they can rethink their way of working to cater even better to the informational needs of their audiences. These competencies will help them to develop future innovation and provide them with a strong vision of how to translate technology into media products for the benefit of public interest media.

Public interest media has always been the strongest where it is led by the informational needs of its audience while being financially independent. As various segments of society have become more vocal in demanding equal representation in the media, media practitioners need to gain new competencies to build closer relationships with their audiences. Community reporters play a crucial role in making public dialogue more inclusive. Therefore, the competency cluster of **entrepreneurial journalism** goes beyond monetization. Media practitioners need to be able to find a “market,” meaning an audience for their products. That includes developing new formats, tailoring them to a certain segment of the audience and determining why these products are relevant to it. To a large extent, this requires a shift in perspective. As new media grant much vaster opportunities to develop new formats and products, human-centered design-based product development becomes an important skill as it can help find the right format, focus and distribution channel for the right audience.

Finally, the challenges societies are facing are becoming increasingly complex. Media practitioners cannot adequately prepare for reporting on issues like climate change, the coronavirus pandemic or power structures in the internet economy through quick online research alone. These beats need constant reporting with a strong thematic focus to ensure meaningful information on them becomes part of the public discourse and prevent these issues falling victim to the agendas of lobby groups. MJE has to offer programs that help develop a **thematic focus**—be it through providing trainees with the skills necessary to cultivate such a focus, or through training on certain beats such as economic or climate reporting or reporting on digital rights.

Impact: Why is MJE crucial?

So what is MJE's contribution to the sector of media development? Media and Journalism Education cannot solve the crisis of media viability. But it can lay the groundwork for possible solutions to be implemented. Viable MJE tailors its programs to the media ecosystem it operates in and enables media practitioners to shape it for the future. By experimenting with new forms of journalism, MJE pushes for change and shows media practitioners how quality journalism for the benefit of the public also strengthens the viability of their media organizations.

As a result, we at DW Akademie learned that we have to intertwine our efforts on media viability and media and journalism education much more. Capacity development of public interest media staff needs to go hand in hand with the strengthening of their outlets' viability.

With *viable structures*, a *broad cooperation* and a *conducive, enabling environment*, MJE providers can develop *innovative media practices* and enhance the *competencies* with their *target groups*. It is this holistic approach with its six dimensions that makes the difference. This is what we at DW Akademie are convinced of.

“A viable MJE needs to be deeply rooted in its media ecosystem so it is able to generate innovation and train its target groups in these competencies.

But this can only be the first step. MJE needs close links with the media sector for these innovative practices to be implemented in everyday journalism.

In the end, MJE helps public interest media to stand their ground in the competition with other, often less trustworthy, sources of information, and to provide a voice to all parts of society. This assigns Media and Journalism Education a huge responsibility to maintain and develop? The democratic future of our media

ecosystems and the basic human rights of freedom of expression and access to information. With MJE strengthening public interest media, citizens can rely on them to provide trusted information and fight disinformation. As a result, the public can engage in a dialogue on issues relevant for society and hold those in power to account.

Thus, MJE contributes to a constructive dialogue and a more inclusive society. In concert with DW Akademie's other fields of action, it enhances:

- The quality and reliability of information available to citizens
- The viability of media outlets
- Innovation within the media sector
- Resilience in the face of (self-)censorship and media safety

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DW Akademie is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in approximately 70 developing countries and emerging economies.



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