ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE SPOTLIGHT OF MASS MEDIA IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA: OPPORTUNITIES AND SHORTCOMINGS

PROBLEMELE DE MEDIU ÎN VIZORUL MASS-MEDIEI DIN REPUBLICA MOLDOVA: OPORTUNITĂȚI ȘI CARENȚE

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Summary: *Over the last decades, environmental journalism has developed new characteristics, and media agendas increasingly include topics related to environmental problems. Locally, the population faces multiple major ecological challenges that generate a variety of press subjects, periodically addressed by media institutions. In this scientific endeavor, we aim to evaluatively analyze the situation in the field based on the following aspects: the types of press materials that most frequently address environmental problems, the typology of environmental issues that often generate topics for journalistic production, and the working techniques used for identifying and selecting sources, expertise, and eligible presentation of information. The methodology used in the study includes the historiographic method, content analysis, the comparative method, the observational method, and case study research. The main results from the analysis highlight the need for an analytical approach in materials published in local newspapers, strengthening the argumentative and expert-based dimension in covering environmental problems, and improving journalists' subject matter competence when writing on environmental issues.*

Keywords: *environmental journalism, environmental topics, expertise, media coverage.*

INTRODUCTION

In the local media space, only a limited number of media outlets specialize in environmental issues, and generalist periodicals are not sufficiently prepared to report daily on such complex topics as ecology. At the same time, Moldovan mass media lacks qualified environmental journalists, a shortage that results in a low frequency of press materials addressing environmental topics. Moreover, most published materials consist of news taken from press agencies, press releases, or materials directly produced by environmental institutions. The importance of environmental journalism is not fully understood, and generalist periodicals do not cover environmental problems to the extent required by current global and national contexts. Thus, ecology remains a non-priority topic for media institutions, especially from an analytical perspective. Sensational subjects, such as ecological disasters, poaching, and illegal logging, remain preferred topics.

At the same time, the responsibility of specialized environmental journalists is not only to inform the public but also to raise awareness, help people understand, and encourage responsible behavior regarding environmental protection. In this context, we agree with the idea expressed by sociologist Andrei Dumbrăveanu in his work *"Environment and Mass Media"*, where he states that "environmental journalism involves, in addition to the sensational element, investigative, scientific, revelatory, and analytical-economic dimensions" [1, p.10]. In the same vein, the purpose of environmental journalism, alongside informing and raising awareness, is to generate public debate on environmental issues, highlight environmental topics ignored by generalist media, and foster closer cooperation between information consumers, institutions in the field, environmental NGOs, and the media itself. This is of critical importance, as mass media has the primary responsibility to discuss initiatives and solutions that can help eradicate environmental problems. As researcher Angelina Davydova also notes, "an environmental journalist is someone who spreads opinions, sets an agenda, and practically becomes an expert or activist" [2, p.3]. It is encouraging that today, all generalist periodicals, including local ones, feature a section dedicated to environmental issues. The development of environmental journalism in Moldova has been spurred by socio-human context and the transformations inflicted by humans upon the ecological sphere. Four decades ago, the Ecology Section was established within the Union of Journalists of Moldova, and between 1985 and 1990, environmental journalism had already experienced steady and significant growth. Currently, *"Natura"* magazine is among the publications that focus on the environment and biodiversity. Another organization is the Environmental and Ecotourism Journalists Association (Ecopresa), which provides assistance and promotes the interests of journalists and professionals in environmental journalism. The radio station *"Eco FM"* broadcasts news and shows about environmental problems, achievements, and initiatives in the field. Given that the number and severity of environmental problems have steadily increased in recent decades, it is vital for ecological topics to appear on every media institution's agenda. However, not all outlets have specialized journalists capable of writing on environmental issues [3, p.17], though journalists' interest in ecology has been growing [4].

Environmental journalism performs several essential functions:

Informative function – Providing the public with information about environmental issues and current or potential risks;

Educational function – Encouraging the adoption of responsible behavior among the population to minimize health risks;

Lobbying function – Encouraging the public to make certain decisions and undertake various actions;

Control function – Monitoring the activities carried out by authorities, as most environmental problems are a result of political and economic policies (e.g., chemical waste dumping, industrial pollution) [5]. Human psychology tends to ignore environmental issues until they have a personal impact [6], which is why the role of environmental

journalism is to convey to the average person information about the state of the environment both locally and globally, to raise awareness, and to motivate involvement in solving ecological issues. It's important to emphasize that an environmental journalist's task does not end with describing the situation, but includes analysis, identifying and investigating the causes of certain phenomena, and thoroughly studying the topic. Therefore, mass media becomes an effective tool for addressing environmental problems.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In this research, we analyzed two local generalist periodicals to determine the environmental topics reflected, the perspectives adopted by the media institutions, the frequency of environmental publications, the types of journalistic content addressing environmental problems, the quality of documentation, and the proportion of articles covering national environmental policies. The two periodicals analyzed were *"Unghiul"* and *"Observatorul de Nord"*, and the study period was from March 1, 2024, to April 1, 2025. The research included 46 issues of the periodicals and 25 articles on environmental topics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As a result of the analysis, we identified the full range of environmental issues that were the subject of published press materials. In *"Observatorul de Nord"*, the 12 articles on the environment covered the following issues: vegetation fires (3 articles), spring clean-up without burning waste (3 articles), plastic waste collection and separate disposal (2 articles), illegal landfills (2 articles), water pollution (1 article), and poaching (1 article). *"Unghiul"* published 11 articles on environmental topics during the analyzed period, covering the following: importance and rules of sanitation (2 articles), hunting regulations (1 article), planting forest strips to improve air quality (2 articles), results of environmental inspectors' checks (1 article), illegal landfills (2 articles), soil pollution (1 article), illegal logging (1 article), and environmental education among youth (1 article).

As observed, the materials dealt with significant regional environmental issues, but articles addressing environmental problems on a national or global level were absent. By typology, *"Observatorul de Nord"* published 2 interviews, 3 reports, 5 news articles, and 2 briefings, while *"Unghiul"* published 9 news articles and 2 briefings. There were no expert interviews, event reports, problem reports, extended news, or articles containing analytical and evaluative elements. A purely informational approach to environmental issues is far from sufficient to raise public awareness and emphasize the seriousness of certain problems. Environmental journalists need to find formats that emotionally engage the reader, helping them understand the depth of the issue. The extremely low number of environmental articles published over a year cannot stimulate readers' interest in this increasingly sensitive area. Modern technocracy generates global problems affecting everyone: man-made natural disasters, climate change, the destruction of fi-

nite natural resources, water, soil, and air pollution, radiation – all require a systemic and constant media approach aimed at influencing and shaping public consciousness. Moreover, using a wide range of sources in environmental articles is essential, ensuring comprehensive and balanced coverage. Given that environmental problems are complex and interconnected, diverse sources help explain them from scientific, economic, social, and political perspectives. Thus, journalists should not rely solely on press releases or NGOs but also engage with government agencies, reference statistical reports, laws, regulations, political statements, public officials, researchers, other press materials, and international organizations. Environmental issues and ecological risks in the region must be explored in greater depth. However, the current situation is explained by the small number of employed journalists and their insufficient training in exhaustively covering environmental topics. Additionally, underdeveloped newsroom infrastructure and inadequate staff training in adapting to new technologies diminish the attractiveness of press materials and hinder the creation of media content tailored to market demands. Similarly, an analytical approach to environmental topics allows the identification of real causes behind ecosystem degradation. A clear analysis of the topic helps prioritize actions, and a thorough understanding of human impacts supports the development of sound environmental policies. Including expert opinions and input from specialists in ecology and related fields enhances the credibility and value of journalistic content.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the investigative effort underline the need to expand thematic coverage so that press content reflects both local challenges and global trends: air and water pollution, drinking water quality, waste management, deforestation, climate effects on agriculture, exploitation of natural resources, lack of effective environmental policies, risks associated with extreme weather events, etc. It is imperative that each edition of periodicals includes at least one article addressing environmental problems. It is both insufficient and concerning for a newspaper to cover environmental issues in only 11–12 articles annually. Improving the quality and reliability of sources must also become a priority, as well as strengthening the informational foundation by shifting from a purely informational to an analytical approach–explaining phenomena and processes is necessary to strengthen journalistic content. Furthermore, the typology of media content on the environment should be expanded by including expert interviews, problem reports, analytical articles, commentaries, and investigations. Only in this way can we help the reader understand the gravity of the situation. Environmental issues reported by journalists must be multi-layered, well-documented, verified, and supported by expert knowledge.

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