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# American Dreaming: Critical Perspectives on a Media Training Program for Emerging Democracies

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**Key words**: journalism; cross-cultural training; culture shock; ideological transfer

**Abstract**: Since the end of the Cold War, the International Media Training Center has brought dozens of Eastern European journalists to study in non-degree programs at U.S. universities. This study is a cultural critique of one such program. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews, participant observation, and articles from university newsletters. The trainees reveal that support from mentors is often insufficient, and some participants face significant hostility after returning to their native countries. The fast-paced media environments in those countries have not forgiven their yearlong absence: organizational power has been redistributed, connections have been weakened, and new colleagues have aggressively taken over one's old turf. The findings suggest that training a few journalists from disparate media outlets is unlikely to have much effect on media professionalism in emerging democracies, unless the trainees are guaranteed an opportunity to become trainers.

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## 1. Introduction

The International Media Training Center of the International Broadcasting Bureau —Voice of America[1] has brought dozens of Eastern European journalists to the United States since the 1990s. Established as the training arm of the U.S. Information Agency (which once countered Soviet propaganda but was folded into the U.S. State Department in 1999), the center pays the expenses of foreign journalists who study in non-degree programs at U.S. universities. [1]

Educational assistance for foreign countries is one of the many forms of U.S. public diplomacy, which started with the U.S. Office of War Information in 1942 and now has an annual budget of about $1 billion a year (JOHNSON & DALE, 2003). The main goal of cultural and educational exchange programs has been "to project the more non-commercial aspects of American values and culture and influence public opinion overseas" (SHUJA, 2008, p.20). But what do media training initiatives mean for the participants, their organizations and their countries? What do these initiatives mean for the U.S.? [2]

This study explored the cultural and learning experiences of media trainees in the so-called Professional Development Year (PDY) program, which targets early-to-mid-career journalists from Eastern Europe. The program was selected because it offers nine months of complete cultural immersion, suggesting a significant investment on the part of the sponsors and potentially offering broader and deeper learning opportunities than short-term workshops and educational trips for foreign journalists. According to the Web site of the U.S. Embassy in Serbia, the program is funded through the Support for Eastern European Democracy Act (SEED) of 1989, implemented by the U.S. Department of State. The cost per participant has ranged from $23,000 to $25,000, covering airfare, living stipend, conference attendance and health/life insurance (UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN SERBIA, 2008). [3]

This analysis aims to glean insight and place the findings within a constructionist-critical framework. After working for Bulgarian newspapers in the 1990s, I participated in the PDY program from August 2000 to May 2001. Over the years, I met other trainees and, through the lens of my own hardships during the program, perceived recurrent struggles with academic disconnectedness and career hardships upon return. I have wondered whose interests the PDY serves and whether trainees' narratives reflect a clear pattern of perceived success or failure. The following goals for this paper are formulated here:

1 This is the name of the organization as printed on certificates of outstanding achievement handed to participants upon completion of the Professional Development Year program. The International Media Training Center is an office affiliated with the Voice of America, which is "a multimedia international broadcasting service funded by the U.S. Government through the Broadcasting Board of Governors," http://author.voanews.com/english/About/ [Accessed: January 16, 2010]. The Broadcasting Board of Governors is a U.S. federal agency that oversees non-military international broadcasting; the board comprises nine members appointed by the U.S. President. One of the members is always the U.S. Secretary of State, http://www.bbg.gov/about/documents/VOAFactSheet10-08.pdf [Accessed: January 16, 2010].

- to contextualize the program as ideological transfer within a historical and critical context;
- to assess its perceived effects on the participants' professional skills and career success;
- to identify obstacles, if any, to the participants' subjective feeling of success and propose ways in which these can be reduced or eliminated. [4]

The following three sections (2, 3, and 4) outline the broad theoretical framework for this paper. Specifically, they focus individually on the historical, critical, and cultural/constructionist context for the United States' efforts to train foreign journalists. Section 5 outlines the research methodology, including sampling and interviewing techniques, along with bracketing as applicable to the participant observation. The findings are presented in detail in Section 6, focusing on the trainees' acquisition of new cultural perspectives, factors for perceived success in the program, and ideological transfer. Finally, the discussion and conclusion (sections 7 and 8) aim to place the findings within the theoretical context outlined earlier in the paper, while also suggesting some practical implications. [5]

## 2. Historical Context

After decades of asking those in power for permission (such as sources' signatures before publication), Eastern European journalists struggle to live up to the Western ideals of neutrality and objectivity (AUMENTE, 2005). For example, Bulgarian journalists have been criticized for mixing facts with opinion, negativism, sensationalistic headlines, and overuse of anonymous sources (DELTCHEVA, 1996). Media in former Yugoslavia have been accused of promoting nationalism and scapegoating ethnic minorities (SOFOS, 1999). Albanian newspapers have been said to suffer from low circulation, intense competition, and lack of transparency (SCHMIDT, 2004). Perhaps the most important shortcoming is lack of a "tradition of independence" (CULLEN, 2005, p.95), with some media apt to associate with political or business factions (PALMER, 2009). [6]

What progress, if any, can be expected from media in former communist countries? SPASSOV (2004) suggests quality media should be characterized by "democratic spirit and political rationality, in-depth debate, analyticity and high journalistic culture" (p.3), but offers no translation as to concrete practices. GROSS (2004) suggests media progress can be defined as "professionalization based on shared standards of journalism and media roles" (p.110), including emphasis on reporting rather than "analysis." [7]

A question that remains open is whose standards of professionalization are best for journalists from emerging democracies. Although the U.S. has "exported" some journalistic formulas throughout the world, such as the inverted pyramid style of writing[2] (POTTKER, 2003), European and U.S. journalism differ in many

2 The inverted pyramid is a way of structuring news stories with the most important (new) element first, followed by the second most important element, and so on. It is considered the most common element of writing news stories in the U.S., arguably dating back to the invention of the

respects, including relationships with audiences and elites[3] (BECKER & VLAD, 2009) and at the level of news attributes, such as amount of election coverage and length of sound/image bites (ESSER, 2008). GROSS (2004) observes that the gap may be narrowing, with Western European journalism becoming more investigative and structured, and American journalism more analytical. Still, media in emerging democracies face very different role models, from the pluralist polarized and democratic corporatist in Western Europe to the libertarian in the U.S. and Canada (BECKER & VLAD, 2009). [8]

From a U.S. perspective, the choice should be obvious. Traditionally, American journalists have believed that the U.S. model is the best in the world (THUNBORG, 1997, p.134). This willingness to spread the "right" way of doing journalism is complemented by the importance of media training as a public diplomacy item promoting the image of the U.S. THUNBORG observes that Americans have been criticized "for conducting development work according to their own images rather than those of the Eastern Europeans" (p.90) and that public diplomacy is often viewed as a "euphemism for propaganda" (p.100), although it can be difficult to distinguish between national interests and altruistic motivations. Here is how the U.S. State Department explains the value of influences on foreign media: "Functions that include the local media, key political elites, academics, and members of non-governmental organizations are designed to assess the overseas public affairs climate and convey and reinforce acceptance of U.S. policies and values" (UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2009, p.565) [9]

Various U.S. agencies engage in some sort of public diplomacy. For example, the U.S. State Department's Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs promotes "international understanding," measured in very practical terms by "610 placements of interviews and speeches given by U.S. government officials in print and electronic media" (UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2009, p.245). The Office of Public Affairs (PA) describes the significance of "journalist tours" this way:

> "... PA will continually improve programs that tap the power of the foreign press to inform, engage, and influence perceptions of U.S. foreign policy. Foreign Press Center briefings, as well as resident and reporting journalist tours, will expand the communication of American values, including freedom, democracy, and prosperity, to

telegraph in the 19th century and the Civil War. Because of the uncertainty and expenses associated with the use of the telegraph, editors advised reporters to start with the most important information instead of submitting their usual chronological accounts (BROOKS, KENNEDY, MOEN & RANLY, 2005). The inverted pyramid has been criticized for emphasizing news production convenience over reading comprehension, as the reader is often unaware of the context until s/he is several paragraphs into the story.

3 BECKER and VLAD refer to the differences in HALLIN and MANCINI's (2004) media models: 1. polarized pluralist model (reflecting a relatively close relationship between journalists and elites, a politically engaged press, and relatively weak circulations in Mediterranean countries); 2. democratic corporatist model (showcasing a grassroots and advocacy journalism, journalistic professionalization, and a mass-circulation press in Northern European countries); 3. liberal model (reflecting political neutrally, informational journalism, journalistic professionalization, and mass circulations in North Atlantic countries).

> larger international audiences" (UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2009, pp.299-300). [10]

In light of such statements, media training programs such as PDY appear to serve more than an educational role; they are also promotional and influence-wielding tools for the U.S. in Eastern Europe. [11]

## 3. Critical Context

From a critical perspective, the PDY program represents an unequal relationship between a body of power (the U.S. government) and disparate individuals from disadvantaged countries. The program is overtly constructed as an altruistic effort to serve the interests of the disadvantaged group by handing them professional power and success. The participants have the chance to play out a cross-cultural journey myth (CAMPBELL, 1968), in which a hero separates from home, achieves victories, and returns triumphant. OSLAND (2000) suggests most expatriates' narratives fit the hero journey framework. What happens in reality to media trainees is very different, as will be outlined in this study's findings. [12]

The PDY program can also be interpreted broadly as an instrument of ideological transfer. One way to view it is as legitimation of the U.S. as a country that grants hero journeys to individuals and exports journalistic standards. LEONARDO (2003), discussing ideology in educational contexts, suggests its major goal is legitimation of dominance by filling the gap between claim of authority and belief in authority. This is rarely obvious, because ideology employs dissimulation, "disguising itself as something other than it is: relations of domination" (p.205). [13]

Thus, ideology does not need to be viewed simplistically as a distortion encouraging extraction of labor. Perhaps a cross-cultural program can represent ideological transfer even if power relations are not explicit. In fact, HALL's (1986) definition of ideology as "mental frameworks—the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation, which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p.29) is remarkably similar to HOFSTEDE's (1998) definition of culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another" (p.17). Cultural exposure, in that sense, is ideological transfer. How it plays out in the experiences of the interviewees is addressed in the findings and discussion. [14]

## 4. Constructionist and Cultural Context

This study was conceived as a cultural critique, which "plays off other cultural realities against our own in order to gain a more adequate knowledge of them all" (MARCUS & FISCHER, 1999, p.x). This is the essence of much ethnographic research and relates to a view of reality as a social and cultural construction. An individual is a social actor who "simultaneously externalizes his own being into the social world and internalizes it as objective reality" (BERGER & LUCKMANN, 1966, p.129). [15]

Social construction is dialectic as people constantly recreate the world within themselves. But there is also constancy, as within a culture "we not only understand each other's definitions of shared situations, we define them reciprocally" (p.130). Language is critical to reality's construction because it "constitutes both the most important content and the most important instrument of socialization" (p.133). When people transcend childhood homes or native societies, they are forced into a "secondary socialization" (p.130), which involves development of new identities that may exist as parallel ones or overwhelm older identities. This secondary socialization builds upon the primary one (such as learning a new professional vocabulary within one's native language). [16]

In the tradition of BERGER and LUCKMANN (1966), the narratives in this study were interpreted as personal, internalized constructions of secondary socialization. Yet, as the interviews were analyzed, it became clear that the framework could benefit from additional grounding in sociological and psychological research on cultural differences, culture shock, and the globality of journalism. Such research is reviewed briefly in the following subsections or referenced as needed in the findings and discussion. [17]

### 4.1 Cultural differences

Studies of "national character" have been published as early as the 18th century (HOFSTEDE & McCRAE, 2004), but studies addressing cultural clashes in professional contexts are relatively new. GLADWELL (2008) argues, for example, that inadequacies of culturally specific communication can lead in some high-pressure situations to consequences as drastic as a fatal accident. These conclusions are based on research by HOFSTEDE, who surveyed the values of 117,000 IBM employees in 72 countries between 1967 and 1973. The data revealed four cultural dimensions: power distance (acceptance of unequally distributed power); uncertainty avoidance (tolerance for ambiguity); individualism (degree to which people are group-integrated); and masculinity (distribution of emotional roles). Country scores have been validated several times since then; now the dataset includes more countries and a fifth dimension, long-term orientation (thrift and perseverance), added to better describe Asian cultures (HOFSTEDE & McCRAE, 2004). [18]

The cultural indices reflect values, which HOFSTEDE (1998) defines as "learned responses to the environment in which people grew up" (p.20). The indices

suggest Eastern Europeans and Americans are very different. Americans' values include individualism, interaction across hierarchies, tolerance of uncertainties, relatively rigid sex roles, and limited thrift and perseverance; by contrast, Eastern European countries score away from world averages on these indices in a direction opposite to the U.S.[4] The following section reviews culture shock as a likely implication of such differences. [19]

### 4.2 Culture shock/fatigue

When people study or work in another culture, their experiences can be less positive than expected. BLACK and MENDENHALL (1990) observe that "work-related cross-cultural interactions are not always successful" (p.114). Some managers given foreign assignments perform poorly, and some international negotiations fail due to lack of "interaction skills that transcend those that are effective when dealing with others from one's immediate in-group" (p.117). BERGER and LUCKMANN (1966) explain the transition between/among cultures as the moving of consciousness "through different spheres of reality" requiring "shift of attentiveness" (p.67). People entering a new environment (e.g., college freshmen) often experience discomfort as they learn to interpret and respond to novel cues. The "collective impact of such unfamiliar experiences on cultural travelers" (p.63) is described as "culture shock" (ZHOU, JINDAL-SNAPE, TOPPING & TODMAN, 2008) or "culture fatigue" (XIAOQIONG, 2008, p.101). [20]

Adjustment difficulties are suspected to limit learning, but are also often viewed as part of the learning experience (ZHOU et al., 2008). OSLAND (2000) suggests expatriates often narrate their difficulties as mythological "threshold guardians," which may include linguistic deficiency and a "culture's disinclination to assimilate foreigners" (p.230). If expatriates fail to pass by the guardians, they might never make it through "the belly of the whale" (p.230), which, figuratively speaking, is the transformative stage of cultural immersion. Some people may be more adept at adjusting to new environments and changes, because of either personality or experience. The next section briefly reviews journalists' cross-cultural values and inclinations. [21]

### 4.3 Journalism as cross-cultural training

Some literature suggests that journalists, who often interact with people across race, age and ethnicity boundaries, may be more culturally adaptable or globally oriented than other professionals. Journalists across the world are exposed to American cultural narratives through TV, Internet and globally distributed publications such as *Time* and *Newsweek*. This can open the door to parasocial interaction relationships (e.g., RUBIN & McHUGH, 1987) with American journalists, politicians or celebrities. JOHNSON-CARTEE (2004) notes, "As news

4 The U.S. has a high individualism score of 91 (world average is 43); low power-distance score of 40 (world average is 55); high masculinity of 62 (world average is 50); low uncertainty avoidance of 46 (world average is 64); and low long-term orientation score of 29 (average is 45), see http://www.geert-hofstede.com [Accessed: June 6, 2009].

viewers, we are 'beside' Wolf Blizter or Dan Rather[5] as he asks tough questions and demands straight answers ..." (p.11). [22]

Furthermore, journalistic values and new media technologies transcend borders, leading to discussions of global journalism ethics (for a review, see WASSERMAN, 2009). Cultural differences seem to affect journalistic decisions to a lesser than expected degree. For example, Chinese and American journalism students have been found similar at the "level of self" (ZHONG, 2008, p.115), including the use of logic, feelings, values, professional conduct and ethics codes. ZHONG offers the following explanation: "It is possible that journalism students do not think and act like others in the same culture, or simply certain cultural differences documented are becoming ineffective among the journalism students, though more evidence is needed for both cases" (p.117). [23]

If journalists' diverse experiences mitigate culture shock, most PDY trainees should experience a relatively easy acculturation process. This is one of the major topics outlined later in the findings section. [24]

## 5. Methodology

The study combined participant observation with in-depth interviews and analysis of newsletter articles about PDY trainees. Fourteen former participants (five from Bulgaria, three from Macedonia, two from Serbia, one from Croatia, one from Romania, one from Kosovo, and one from Albania) were interviewed, in addition to my participant observation. [25]

The sampling was done in the following fashion: The first few interviews were conducted with personal acquaintances, whom I had met during my own participation in the PDY program, or with trainees whose names were available because they had been featured in university newsletters. The first group of potential interviewees consisted of about 25 former participants in the program. They were contacted via e-mail, following an extensive search via Internet sources for their e-mail addresses (i.e., through the Web sites of their current news organizations or academic institutions) or social network profiles. After responses confirming their interest in participating in this research, the interviewees provided their Skype user names or phone numbers at which they could be reached via Skype, thus allowing for the recording of the interviews. In that sense, the initial sampling was a census of all who agreed to be interviewed, among all former PDY participants whose names and e-mail addresses were available to the researcher. [26]

In a so-called "snowball" recruitment approach, these interviewees were then asked to recommend (or persuade) others to participate. Some interviewees had no suggestions; others recommended one or more former participants whom they

5 Wolf BLITZER is a prominent political reporter, anchor, and talk show host for CNN (http://www.cnn.com/CNN/anchors_reporters/blitzer.wolf.html [Accessed: January 16, 2010]). Dan RATHER, currently a talk show host for HDNet, was the managing editor and anchor of CBS Evening News from 1981 to 2005 (http://www.hd.net/bio_rather.html [Accessed: January 16, 2010]).

personally knew. This sampling method, also called chain referral, has been suggested as particularly appropriate for sampling limited or hard-to-reach populations (PENROD, PRESTON, CAIN & STARKS, 2003). The interviewees were generally likely to recommend other former participants whose answers would "maximize opportunities to compare events, incidents, or happenings" (STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1998, p.202) within emerging concepts or categories (i.e., career difficulties after returning to one's home country). STRAUSS and CORBIN refer to this as "theoretical sampling" (p.203) because it becomes more specific once the likely categories and concepts of analysis have emerged following the initial sampling and interviewing. Sampling was considered completed when the categories appeared to be more or less "saturated" (p.215). [27]

The interviewees had audited journalism courses at Arizona State University, Bradley University, New Mexico State University, University of North Carolina, University of Missouri, and University of Tennessee. The interviewees had participated in the PDY program in different academic years, ranging from 1998-99 to 2007-08. [28]

Ten interviewees were women and four were men, reflecting the predominance of female journalists in Eastern Europe. Four of the interviewees pursued master's degrees at American universities after the completion of the PDY program, and one was considering applying to master's programs in the U.S. [29]

The interviewees were promised anonymity, although most said their opinions were no secret. Sources from news articles about the PDY program are identified by name, because their quotes were already published and available online. [30]

### 5.1 Interviews

The interview schedule (please see the Appendix) consisted of 50 multi-layered questions/topics, intended to produce semi-structured interviews: "neither an open everyday conversation nor a closed questionnaire" (KVALE & BRINKMAN, 2008, p.27). In that sense, the interviews employed "active listening" (p.137) with "an attitude of maximum openness to what appears" (p.137), and were similar to the style of long journalistic interviews that the author has had much practice conducting in the past. The interviews required cross-cultural sensitivity in cases when the author and the interviewee did not share the same native language and culture. They were "factual" (p.150), in the sense of being intended to gather specific factual information, as well as focused on the interviewees' perspective and narrative construction of the described events. Some questions and follow-up questions, intended to clarify events and circumstances, were highly specific and used the words "who," "what," where," when," "why" and "how," as recommended by STRAUSS and CORBIN (1998, pp.89-90). [31]

Non-Bulgarian participants were interviewed in English. Bulgarian participants strayed toward Bulgarian, a language shared with the author. Twelve of the interviews were conducted over the phone or Skype (a Web-based, free telephone service). These generally lasted between 40 and 120 minutes and

were concluded only when there appeared to be mutual understanding that the questions and relevant narratives had been exhausted. One interview was conducted in person and lasted more than 120 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded and transcribed. One interview was conducted over e-mail, at the request of an interviewee who preferred to answer in writing. No potentially self-incriminating questions (e.g., "did you pay taxes on your PDY stipend") were asked. [32]

In almost all cases, only some of the suggested questions and topics from the interview schedule applied to any given interviewee. For example, there was no point in asking about career outcomes or issues of re-acculturation in the native country if an interviewee had continued his or her education in the United States. As a general pattern, most interviewees felt they had little to nothing to say in response to some questions but wanted to talk for a long time in response to others. What KVALE and BRINKMAN (2008) describe as "probing" (p.137), or asking meaning-clarifying questions, often revealed that a topic had been exhausted but that another topic required more attention. [33]

Although the interviewee schedule was in the form of a series of suggested questions, most conversations were free-flowing; often, the interviewees' responses determined which question (and in what form) would be asked next. For example, if an interviewee mentioned in passing about how much they liked or disliked American media, the logical question that followed was to explain and offer examples, even though that question appeared later on in the interview schedule. This was meant to ensure a good conversation dynamic. If necessary, questions were rephrased to ensure that they were understood by the interviewee. As is typical in journalistic interviews and as recommended by KVALE and BRINKMAN, the interviews were concluded by asking whether the interviewee wanted to bring up anything else. [34]

As long as the conversations met their purpose as research interviews, the interviewees were overtly and covertly encouraged to speak as much as they wished without feeling pressured to answer any question. The goal was to give them "ample freedom and time to unfold their own stories" (p.131). In some cases, when statements later appeared to be ambiguous or contradictory, some of the interviewees received a follow-up e-mail asking them politely to clarify if possible what they were trying to express. In general, the length of the interviews reflected how much interviewees wanted to say about the program but also (in a few cases) their level of comfort with expressing complex issues and feelings in English. [35]

### 5.2 Participant observation/bracketing

Interpretive theories call for "bracketing of presuppositions" (KVALE & BRINKMAN, 2008, p.31), or phenomenological reduction, which entails suspension of assumptions and setting aside of personal values. However, McCARL NIELSEN (1990) has argued that one should be aware of one's prejudices without trying to transcend them because they are "essential building

blocks or components for acquiring new knowledge" (p.28). While preparing for the interviews, I wrote a 4-page summary of my personal experiences during the PDY academic year and set it aside. This represented both the participant-observation portion of the study and my point of view, which from a constructionist point of view is an inseparable part of this analysis. The interviews led to the unraveling of more memories. Literally, "knowledge was constructed in the inter-action of two people" (KVALE & BRINKMAN, 2008, p.32) and my written account kept growing. Ultimately, I weaved in the findings section the memories of my personal experience instead of presenting them in a separate section. [36]

STRAUSS and CORBIN (1998) refer to the need to recognize one's personal biases, as well as participant biases, as "waving the red flag" (p.97). They suggest that inflexible words and phrases that sometimes emerge in interviews, such as "always," never," "everyone" and "no other way," limit the possibility of alternative explanations and present only one point on a continuum. Although interviewees were trained in thinking objectively as journalists and rarely used such words, both the interviewing process and the analysis entailed an effort to clarify and interpret the meaning of potentially loaded statements. [37]

### 5.3 Data analysis

A narrative analysis (KVALE & BRINKMAN, 2008) was employed, without formal coding of the answers. However, the interview and participant observation data were grouped into themes in order to construct a typology, as recommended by YIN (2002). This typology is one of both crises and inspiration, in the sense that it includes categories of topics or questions that elicited the most emotional narratives, both positive and negative. As can be expected, some of these categories reflected the logistics of the program (e.g., stipend, housing, academic arrangements), which were important factors for success for some and challenges for others. [38]

The interviewees' experiences were analyzed through systematic comparison, which is "comparing an incident in the data to one recalled from experience or from the literature" (STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1998, p.95). The categories reflected my own judgment about the significance of recurrent themes from the narratives. In that sense, some of the data analysis occurred in parallel with the interviewing process, through what KVALE and BRINKMAN (2008, p.262) describe as naturalistic generalization:

> "It develops for the person as a function of experience; it derives from tacit knowledge of how things are and leads to expectations rather than formal predictions; it may become verbalized, thus passing the tacit knowledge to explicit propositional knowledge." [39]

The identification of recurrent themes was done by grouping similar events and actions within categories and subcategories. This was essentially a method of open coding, which is "the analytic process through which concepts are identified, and their properties and dimensions are discovered in data" (STRAUSS &

CORBIN, 1998, p.101). Many clear patterns emerged in that process, but as is to be expected, not every event or interaction described by the interviewees fit these patterns completely. [40]

After that, the analysis entailed some degree of "reassembling data that were fractured during open coding" (p.124) through axial coding, a process of discovering links and intersections between categories and subcategories. The goal was to contextualize the entire experience of the interviewees. Some of the links were cause-and-effect: For example, having a more involved mentor appeared to lead to finding more satisfying housing options, which appeared related to better cultural adjustment. Other links were also in the form of intersection between categories or subcategories. For example, when interviewees talked about money, they almost inevitably brought up leisure travel in the U.S., and vice versa. [41]

The analysis also took into account the institutional discourse promoted by the PDY program in some of the interviewees' narrative constructions of self-change. In ways reminiscent of FOX's (2001) study of institutionalized self-reconstruction strategies in prisons, some of the interviewees relied on Department of State institutional discourses to establish the "conditions of possibility" (FOUCAULT, 1994, p.244) within which they reconstructed themselves by admitting and embracing the superiority of the American model of doing journalism. [42]

Most of the analysis was done by identifying the main ideas in each paragraph of an interviewee's responses or within an entire interview. However, some of the analysis also occurred at the level of words, phrases, and sentences. This was done by brainstorming possible interpretations when a statement appeared ambiguous and comparing to what other interviewees had said about a similar experience, as suggested by STRAUSS and CORBIN (1998). Attempts at clarification were made during the interviewing process, but they were not always successful for interviewees who spoke in English and as non-native speakers occasionally struggled to identify concepts and meanings. [43]

Interpretation at that level was easier with Bulgarian interviewees, who spoke in their native language and were able to express nuances that may not have been immediately obvious had they spoken in English. For example, a Bulgarian interviewee who used the word "cornfields" to describe her editor's prejudice against a small college town in the Midwest was well aware that I shared the same interpretation and there was no further need for clarification. This is an example of an important part of the examination of data: "the interplay that takes place between data and researcher in both gathering and analyzing data" (STRAUSS & CORBIN, 1998, p.58). [44]

## 6. Findings

The categories that emerged include perceived qualifications for participating in the program (including selection process and language skills), acquisition of a new cultural perspective (including acculturation and re-acculturation), perceived success (academic and professional after return), and ideological transfer (including media use, attitude changes and possible "paybacks" to U.S. embassies). [45]

### 6.1 Pre-program qualifications

For the most part, interviewees described themselves as hard-working, motivated journalists with some knowledge of English, who were suddenly presented with an opportunity that was hard to pass up—a full ride to spend nine months at an American journalism school. They knew little about the program and generally expected to be treated as professionals rather than students. [46]

#### *6.1.1 Selection process*

Most interviewees reported receiving an "invitation" from U.S. embassies, followed by an interview with embassy staff and a period of awaiting final approval from U.S. officials. Some felt disbelief when they were selected for what should have been a very competitive opportunity. Some embassy invitations were turned down at first but re-extended and accepted the next year. One participant who failed to qualify for another training program administered by the U.S. Embassy was instead invited to apply for the PDY. Lack of media-related employment did not deter invitations. One participant was effectively unemployed (transitioning between jobs) when he started the training. [47]

An Arizona State University (ASU) newsletter offers the following quote from Bekim GREICEVCI, a Kosovo journalist: "The U.S. Office (in Pristina, Kosovo) contacted me and told me that if I would like to go (to America), I should call for an interview" (CUTLER, 2004, p.8). In the same article, Angela McCAIN, International Media Training Center program coordinator, explains that "the candidates are chosen based on the needs of the different mediums in the region" (p.8). As one Bulgarian put it, "I would say personal connections played a role." That was my experience as well. An editor recommended me for the program to an Embassy officer. Only Serbians (where the program became available after 2006, later than in other countries) reported what seemed like a competitive selection, but had heard about the program either from an editor or embassy personnel. Most interviewees did not have a choice which university to attend. McCAIN, in the ASU newsletter, confirms that U.S. officials make that choice (CUTLER, 2004). An exception was an interviewee from Kosovo, who said he wrote the U.S. Congress inquiring about training programs, and received a PDY invitation and a list of potential host universities. [48]

In recent years, at least three U.S. embassies (Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia) have announced the PDY program on their Web sites. The Macedonian

announcement states: "The awards are granted through an open competition, and applicants will be required to appear for an interview by a committee" (UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN MACEDONIA, 2009). A Macedonian interviewee said the embassy "used to do personal contact" until 2007. Other announcements require nominees to be "young, mid-career journalists" (UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN BULGARIA, 2007), have either "excellent" or "sufficient" English, and agree that their families would not accompany them (UNITED STATES EMBASSY IN SERBIA, 2008). [49]

*6.1.2 Linguistic competency*

Limited language skills cause international students much stress (SOVIC, 2008). Unlike most academic programs that admit international students or visitors, the PDY requires no verification of language skills through an internationally recognized test. Embassy staff members get a glimpse of a candidate's oral skills during the interview or previous participation in embassy events. Most interviewees perceived their English as "good enough," even if they had never studied English in a formal setting. One Macedonian said he learned English from interacting with foreigners and watching American TV. Upon arrival in the U.S., he felt his oral skills were satisfactory but his written English was not. A Kosovar, who learned English from a "long-haired dictionary" (a girlfriend), boasted an almost native level of fluency: "Everybody said, 'You're brilliant. We had people who didn't know how to say hello.'" [50]

Some admitted to having initial difficulties understanding regional dialects. "Southern accent is very different from what we learned in school," said one Serbian. Some communication difficulties also reflected clinging to native concepts. For example, a Bulgarian who struggled to explain that she was looking for a clothesline discovered that most Americans use driers. [51]

Those aware of severe linguistic deficiencies were generally able to overcome them. An Albanian who spent much of her first semester speaking Italian to communicate with newsroom colleagues fluent in Spanish described her ordeal this way: "I thought I knew English. When I landed, I understood I didn't. ... The hardest part was hearing. I wasn't used to the sound of English." She spent many hours studying on her own, and after four months felt she could finally understand and be understood. A Bulgarian who had taken only a few English courses subscribed to *The New York Times* and, with a dictionary's help, read the front page every day. My experience was similarly frustrating. In the first week, many potential landlords I called hung up because they could not understand me. I expanded my vocabulary by studying consistently on my own. [52]

**6.2 Acquisition of a new cultural perspective**

Most interviewees, unless they had relatives or friends in the U.S., did not know what to expect. They were advised by embassy personnel to meet with former participants, but later realized the brief conversations did not prepare them adequately. Still, interviewees reported quickly contextualizing their impressions

from American movies within the reality they were experiencing. Professional interest in news likely facilitated this process. Participants frequently read U.S. newspapers and watched U.S. television, in addition to continuing to follow the news in their home country. Media exposure is a major factor in cultural adaptation (MIGLIETTA & TARTAGLIA, 2009), possibly because news stories are carriers of culturally constructed narratives (SMITH, 1997; BIRD & DARDENNE, 1997). [53]

*6.2.1 Culture shock/fatigue*

In keeping with the hero framework (OSLAND, 2000), several interviewees said they experienced little culture shock, contrary to expectations. A Kosovar put it this way: "I kinda fit into the culture and society immediately. Everybody at the university expected I'll have a cultural shock. They were surprised." A Bulgarian who recalled complaining about being sent to a "village" in the middle of nowhere, nevertheless felt as comfortable as if she had been living in the U.S. for many years. [54]

Although interviewees steered away from the term "culture shock," many admitted to feeling lonely and sad. Especially those who stayed for graduate degrees also realized their native identities did not fit in with the host culture. As a Bulgarian put it, "It turned out I could not develop a U.S. self." He felt grief during his stay in the U.S., "mostly because of the way views and opinions from outside the U.S. box were dismissed." [55]

Several interviewees pointed to different PDY participants who became depressed or frustrated to the point of wanting to leave before the program's end. One Romanian interviewee indeed left after the first semester because he felt he was not getting the promised professional development. After ten years of journalism experience, including coverage of major wars and disasters in other countries, he was unhappy to be placed in an "internship" at a small-town TV station but not allowed to produce any stories. Frustrated anyway with the choice of topics he perceived as too local and standards he perceived as too low, he asked for a short internship at CNN but was told that the program cannot be changed, "just take it as it is." He said that upon his return, embassy staff members apologized and said the program was more appropriate for journalists with more limited experience. The early-quitting trainee became an anchor and went on to win an International Emmy Award for News, which he attributes to opportunities he was able to utilize because of his early return. [56]

Other trainees were distressed by the loss of professional recognition. An Albanian said there was an implicit expectation that "people were going to wait on" PDY participants and recognize that they are famous and successful journalists in their home countries. One Serbian described it this way: "We were doing some big stuff back home. ... When you come here, nobody knows you. You're just nobody." But there was a positive side to being "nobody" as well. A Bulgarian who worked stressful long hours before leaving for the U.S. was

pleasantly surprised her college town felt "normal," "calm" and "very orderly." Another Bulgarian said her academic year in the U.S. was "like at a resort." [57]

*6.2.2 Cultural discoveries*

Lack of cross-cultural training was evident in various minor "shocks" pointed out by interviewees, such as struggling to translate Fahrenheit into Celsius degrees and pounds into kilograms. My frustrations included discovering that European electrical devices cannot be plugged into U.S. electrical outlets, learning to feed parking meters, and understanding the logic behind U.S. highways. Such everyday life skills apparently are difficult to learn from American movies. [58]

Other "shocks" reflected significant social issues. Interviewees were surprised to see obese people, grocery carts overloaded with food, and large numbers of African-Americans. An Albanian saw a Black man for the first time on her flight to the U.S. A Bulgarian interviewee said she had always thought of the U.S. as a progressive country, but after landing in the Midwest quickly revised that belief and began viewing it as "quite conservative" (referring, for example, to the relatively early closing time for bars and night clubs, and the lack of any comments or jokes that could be interpreted as potentially inappropriate). Program participants also quickly discovered the vast inequalities in American society. A trainee who landed in El Paso got "a crash course" during her ride along the U.S.-Mexican border: "You see the slabs on the left side, and nice houses on the right. Visually, it was disturbing." I was personally surprised to discover racial segregation while walking through a Black neighborhood with dilapidated houses and apartment complexes, in stark contrast to nicer quarters. That forced me to revise an earlier belief that all Americans have equal and great opportunities. [59]

Another curious observation was the amount of time Americans spend working. An Albanian recalled writing the following summary to colleagues back home: "Whatever you see in the movies is true. But there is only one word that can describe life here: work, work, work." In her view, Albanians only pretend to work; two-hour coffee breaks are the norm. A Bulgarian who spent a few days observing a large American newsroom was surprised that most reporters seemed older than 40, suggesting it takes a long time for journalistic work to pay off. By contrast, in the 1990s most reporters at Bulgarian national media were in their 20s. [60]

*6.2.3 Food*

For some, one of the main acculturation challenges was trying to get used to American food and the lack of everyday access to fresh fruit and vegetables. Weight fluctuations during the first few months were typical. A Bulgarian often felt sick when she ate American meat and found herself consuming "kindergarten" portions compared to the servings at most U.S. restaurants. Another Bulgarian lost about 15 pounds in the first two months but regained them later. A Romanian said hamburgers made him sick. He had difficulty finding something to eat

because he was not used to cooking for himself. I had similar experiences with American food and became a vegetarian after a few months in the U.S. [61]

*6.2.4 Housing*

Finding an apartment and adjusting to its amenities was another major factor in acculturation success or frustration. Most interviewees lived on campus or within a walking distance from the university. The extent of the host university's involvement varied. Some program assistants or mentors rented an apartment ahead of time; others showed only one "suggested" apartment complex. Help with an extensive housing search was rare. Satisfaction also varied. A Bulgarian was glad to live almost across the street from her mentor, two blocks from the journalism school. University staff had rented and furnished her apartment before she arrived, and she did laundry in the mentor's house. Another Bulgarian spent the first week living in the home of a senior faculty member, and his wife drove her around town to look at apartments for rent. A Kosovar was invited to live in an apartment attached to a faculty member's home and pay only $300 a month, including utilities. [62]

Others were unhappy with the choices made for them. A Romanian who left the program after the first semester said a faculty mentor had rented a "kind of creepy" apartment with "bugs all over the place." The oven exploded once, filling the apartment with smoke and forcing the PDY participant and his roommates (also PDY participants) to call 911. A Macedonian, who agreed to live in an apartment complex suggested by a program assistant, woke up one morning to water dropping from the ceiling and a flooded apartment, but said the landlord quickly cleaned up. [63]

A Serbian had a particularly unsettling experience when she felt she had little choice but to accept living in a "horrible" apartment complex with three male PDY trainees, sharing a bathroom with one of them. A few weeks later, she decided to move out, but the program's administrative assistant offered no further help. The Serbian bought a car and moved on her own into an off-campus apartment. She summarized the experience this way: "I don't have to live with cockroaches. ... I was like, you know guys, 'I know I live in a transitional country, but believe me, we live a very normal life.'" [64]

Those who exercised their own choice were not saved from disappointments either. One participant at first decided to room with American undergraduates, but after getting a glimpse of their party lifestyle moved into a studio, with help from a program assistant. Others were surprised to discover that for-rent apartments in the U.S. are typically unfurnished. This forced them to scramble to buy furniture, sometimes (as in my case) without any help from host university staff. I had three days of prepaid stay in a windowless hotel room within walking distance from campus. One of my mentor's assistants picked me up at the airport but offered no further help. I started looking for a pet-friendly apartment (I had brought my cat), and found one off campus. This forced me to buy a car and, after the car broke down, rely on the infrequent shuttle service provided by the apartment complex.

Housing choices influenced transportation choices, discussed in the following subsection. [65]

*6.2.5 Getting around*

Living in sprawling college towns with limited public transportation is another big acculturation challenge for those coming from large European cities. One Serbian put it this way: "You need your car to go everywhere. ... The whole structure and the whole mentality is to have a house and a car, and I wasn't used to that." Four interviewees bought a car during their stay in the U.S. (two of these co-owned a car) and reported relatively high satisfaction with the program, which suggests that car ownership may contribute to perceptions of success and social connectedness. Others had to beg for rides, including when fulfilling class requirements, such as working at an out-of-town TV station. [66]

Some interviewees explored simpler means of transportation such as bicycles and motor bikes. Early in the program, one Bulgarian made a friend who lent her a moped for the time she was in the U.S. "I felt privileged," she said when comparing herself to other international students and visitors without independent transportation. A Kosovar biked around his small college town but regretted not buying a car, which would have allowed him to travel independently. Others used public transportation, church-sponsored shuttles for international students, or cabs. Some interviewees walked but disliked the experience (I did as well). A Romanian put it this way: "I noticed that nobody was walking on the streets. There were no sidewalks. I felt that the drivers were looking strange at us." [67]

My exploration of means of transportation was stressful. On the second day of the prepaid hotel stay, I called a cab, waited about three hours for it to arrive, and asked to go to a used car dealership. There, I bought a 1982 Volkswagen Jetta, which leaked oil, for $800. White-knuckled, because I had just obtained my driver's license in Bulgaria and had a hard time with the stick shift, I drove the car back to the hotel. On the third day, I drove to the off-campus apartment complex in the sweltering heat, windows down because the car had no air conditioning. It was a memorable drive: The cat got out of the cage, nearly jumped out, and left bleeding scratches on my back. Within a couple of weeks, the car broke down in the middle of a major street. Fixing it was almost prohibitively expensive, and the repairs did not last long. [68]

*6.2.6 Money and travel*

Interviewees received a living stipend of $12,000 in the late 1990s and early 2000s, later raised to $15,000 and even $18,000, according to some accounts. This is a large sum by Eastern European standards, and most interviewees viewed the money as enough. Their spending priorities seem to reflect a desire for maximum cultural exposure rather than an academic emphasis. For example, a Macedonian said the living stipend was too small to buy some journalism books he wanted: "If you have the opportunity to buy a book or ticket to Las Vegas, you choose ticket for Las Vegas." One of the earlier participants, from Kosovo, who

received only $12,000, struggled (with success) to convince officials that PDY trainees need an additional $1,000 to travel to conferences. [69]

Indeed, many trainees incur significant travel expenses in their quest to visit America's landmarks and get a glimpse of big-city life. For example, three interviewees said they spent out-of-pocket funds (sometimes asking family to send them money) for travel. One Serbian said visiting big cities was only possible because she split motel rooms with other trainees and often slept in homes of immigrant friends. At least one interviewee, however, said some PDY participants abuse the program by traveling too much instead of taking classes. She had heard some mentors note disapprovingly that taxpayers' money is used to allow foreigners to see places that most faculty members cannot afford to visit. [70]

My personal experience with money management was somewhat untypical. Instead of traveling around the U.S., I spent much of the first installment of my $12,000 stipend to buy a car and a round trip ticket to Europe. This left me almost without money, so I began working as a survey interviewer and later as a research assistant for a journalism organization. Another financial blow arrived in April, when I discovered that I owed about $1,000 in taxes, so I paid that amount. The PDY coordinator at the time said I was the first trainee to pay U.S. taxes. [71]

*6.2.7 Personal growth*

Just like heroes in myths, expatriates often undergo a personal transformation of consciousness, coming out with "a bicultural perspective, increased self-awareness, and the knowledge that they had the inner resources to master a difficult situation" (OSLAND, 2000, p.235). There was slaying of inner dragons for some interviewees. One Bulgarian said it was only when in the U.S. that he "started working more seriously on my own self, on my relationships, etc." Another Bulgarian said the program broadened her view about opportunities in life; yet another Bulgarian was inspired by the American "healthy psyche and confidence that they can handle anything." One Macedonian said the exposure to the U.S. culture encouraged her to practice time management and include exercise in her daily routine. Even the journalist who left in middle of the program described the time spent in the U.S., especially his travels, as a great "life experience." [72]

Several interviewees said the program made them more open-minded, which indirectly led to professional growth. Some marveled at the "unique and exciting chance to mix with a wide range of nationalities," which is also appreciated by most international students in the U.S. (BROWN & HOLLOWAY, 2008, p.40). Some noted that witnessing the cultural diversity gave them a new perspective on the ethnic tensions at home. Development of collegial relations presented another benefit. A man who became the first ethnic minority anchor at a TV station in his country said the decision to take that job was influenced by the time he spent getting to know a fellow journalist from the ethnic majority during the PDY program:

> "We knew each other before, but we were not so close. I had the chance to meet her. We had a lot of common points, we were having enough time to discuss things ... time we didn't have before. Really, she is the reason I got invited to work at that station and accepted the job." [73]

A Serbian said the program gave her a chance to define her goals, which she could not do back home, "always pursuing your professional career ... always in the atmosphere of struggling for life." For another Serbian, who had lived with her parents all her life, the PDY was her first chance to experience life on her own. A Bulgarian realized the relativity of the hero journey when she heard that many of her U.S. friends were dreaming of living and working in Europe. [74]

*6.2.8 Reverse culture shock*

Some interviewees experienced near-assimilation, becoming "high in host culture identification but low in home culture identification" (ZHOU et al., 2008, p.67). Most were more outspoken about the reverse culture shock than about the original shock of moving to the U.S. When the interviewees occasionally used words representing an extreme, such as "never" and "always," it was generally in the context of describing experiences in or related to their home countries, suggesting a perception of rigidity in their native cultures, especially when compared to experiences in the U.S. [75]

Even the journalist who left early said he missed how friendly, helpful and smiling people were in the U.S. The Croatian who was glad to return to her "boring Croatian TV" also missed the well-functioning aspects of American society and the kindness of Americans. One Bulgarian alumna reported being "totally disgruntled" with customer service back home; another feared careless drivers or sometimes struggled to find the right word in her native language. [76]

The rest of the interviewees felt much more disappointed and filled with pessimism after going back. "Optimism leaves you slowly and gradually. When you come back, you still have ambitions and dreams, and think, 'I'll be able to do this or that,'" said one Bulgarian. An Albanian quoted an Isabel ALLENDE book to describe feeling trapped upon return: "I was like a bird with wounded wings." A Macedonian put it even more bluntly: "I wonder why I have been born here, why you have to be part of this Balkan country, where everything is so corrupt. It's very hard to be honest and to be professional." [77]

Disillusionment with the home country is common among those returning to less developed countries and those who have been successful in adapting to the non-native culture (for a review, see CRISTOFI & THOMPSON, 2007). Expatriates who develop an alternative self are likely to offer "an idealized characterization of the host culture" (CONSTANTINIAN, GUINYARD, HERMOSISIMA, LEHMAN & WEBB, 2008, p.56). Reverse culture shock is especially insidious because most sojourners do not expect to be uncomfortable in their own culture and do not immediately realize how much they have changed (CRISTOFI & THOMPSON, 2007). As a Macedonian put it, "My country is the same as when I left, but I have

changed. When I came back, it wasn't so intense, but I made a lot of comparisons between life in Macedonia and in the U.S." [78]

### 6.3 Perceived success and factors for it

Interviewees perceived program success as dependent on both individual characteristics and social environment. In terms of personal traits, several interviewees argued that the program is best for participants who are young and have limited journalistic experience. According to the PDY program coordinator, this is already an important criterion in the selection of participants (CUTLER, 2004). The following subsections focus on environmental issues (social support, academic requirements, etc.) that influenced how interviewees constructed perceptions of success. [79]

#### *6.3.1 Mentors as magical friends*

In expatriates' narratives, mentors commonly play the role of "magical friends" who "guide the hero past the dangerous guardians of a different world" (OSLAND, 2000, p.228). Interviewees described having a supportive mentor as critical to their success in the program. About half of the interviewees were pleased with their support system, which sometimes exceeded their expectations. One Bulgarian is surprised she still receives handwritten Christmas cards from her mentor, seven years after the completion of the program. Another Bulgarian said she never had friends like Americans, who were willing to give her rides at 6:30 a.m. A Macedonian said a mentor and the mentor's wife were like parents to him and other PDY trainees. [80]

This was not always the case. Based on conversations with others, another Macedonian concluded that she was "maybe one in ten" or "one in five" who had good support: "People who organize this program need to check the people who are working with the trainees. ... Some participants complain that they saw their mentors only once during the program." Interviewees were nearly unanimous in their recommendation for more support from mentors. [81]

Having a less involved mentor did not matter as much if other supporters were present. One participant received much support from the wife of a faculty member (not her official mentor). A Kosovo journalist, who had lunch with his officially assigned mentor only once, still managed to get an office and to work well with other professors. The limited mentorship was, in fact, constructed as a blessing in disguise: "I was not very keen on ethics; ethics comes with what you see. ... My mentor was an ethics professor, and that's where we disagreed." [82]

I had significant academic support from two faculty members, different from my officially assigned mentor, who was generally unavailable. Still, I felt I had insufficient support, especially during academic breaks. For example, before the start of the second semester, I had an outpatient surgery. The nurse told me it would be fine to drive myself home, but she had no idea that I walked several miles after the surgery. I remember thinking that this was unacceptable, that

somebody should be checking on me, and that if an American came to my home country, he or she would never be left alone. [83]

Sometimes, American undergraduates served as cultural mentors, especially for PDY trainees who were close to them in age. Two interviewees mentioned enjoying the party scene at their host universities. A young Bulgarian photojournalist who spent a semester working at the student newspaper made many American friends and said everybody was very willing to correct her captions and give her rides. But trainees in their 30s and 40s had difficulty connecting with U.S. undergraduates. "You cannot make close friendships with young Americans," said one Macedonian. [84]

*6.3.2 Academic performance*

Many interviewees described U.S. academe positively. Their classes were dynamic and engaging, in contrast with the tedious lecture style of Eastern European universities. But there was also a shock for some who were left to choose on their own from thousands of possible courses. One Bulgarian said there should be better orientation: "I arrive and they hand me a catalog of classes. I expected some sort of structure. ... If you learn through trial and error, you'll waste your time." An interviewee who was already a graduate of an American-style college in Europe described the problem this way:

> "These programs expect people to have been trained in the 'American way' of individual research and work, finding things out. ... Freedom is OK; however, make at least some token compulsory provisions. These will greatly reduce the (initial) stress for people coming from repressed environments." [85]

Excessive freedom may be particularly difficult in light of Eastern Europe's relatively high uncertainty avoidance[6], which "indicates to what extent a culture programs its members to feel either uncomfortable or comfortable in unstructured situations" (HOFSTEDE & McCRAE, 2004, p.62). Yet when some forms of structure were provided, interviewees did not necessarily like it. At one university, PDY participants and other visitors were required to attend a weekly seminar on international media systems. One Bulgarian described it as a waste of time: "We were taught like kindergartners. We showed up just to sit." Later, the seminar apparently evolved into a weekly visiting lecture, which another interviewee described as interesting and engaging. [86]

Some were disappointed also by the lack of expectations. A Croatian with 14 years of TV experience said she had to fight to get beyond introductory broadcast classes and receive advanced training. She found it "kind of weird" to travel that far on U.S. government money, only to be left without support or supervision. As she put it, "I didn't come to do nothing. ... They shouldn't waste their own money

6 On HOFSTEDE's cultural dimensions, Bulgaria and Turkey share an uncertainty avoidance score of 85; Greece – 112; Romania – 90; Hungary – 82, Poland – 93; Russia – 95. This places Eastern Europe well above the world average score of 64 for uncertainty avoidance. USA's score is 46 (http://www.geert-hofstede.com [Accessed: June 6, 2009]).

to bring me here and put me in a situation to fight." She concluded that the program had no academic goals; rather, "they actually wanted me to see America and bring America back home." [87]

A Kosovar recommended encouraging PDY participants to earn a degree and requiring them to produce a research project or a report outlining their achievements. He reiterated the common suspicion that some participants do nothing: "I was involved, but I don't know if the other people were involved." [88]

All trainees receive a certificate of outstanding achievement when they meet with program staff in Washington, D.C., for a week in the spring. The certificate is granted regardless of whether trainees ever attended a class. Interviewees said they typically audited between two and five classes per semester. Some were disappointed their mentors explicitly discouraged from trying "too hard" (e.g., taking more than two classes) or constantly emphasizing that "you don't have to do that." Some also resisted "re-learning" journalism. One TV reporter avoided journalism classes because "they teach something I already know." Several took non-journalism courses, such as in computer science and foreign languages (different trainees reported taking French, Spanish and Italian). [89]

No official grades are assigned to PDY participants. Some were grateful not to take exams; others (including myself) asked professors to assign them grades or take exams along with the "regular" students. This was not always an option. A Serbian was not allowed to participate in some assignments in her journalism classes. For example, she was not offered the quiz and not allowed to shoot video along with other students. A Romanian (at a different host university) reported similar frustrations. When he and other PDY participants were to present final projects in one class, the instructor invited the "regular" students to present first, leaving no time for the visitors. The Romanian put it this way: "We didn't really get any real feedback from the professors. They didn't care about us. We were talking to them ... and they were like, 'Oh, yeah, yeah, OK,' and that was everything." [90]

*6.3.3 Professional improvement*

Most interviewees reported learning new skills or improving old ones. A Macedonian who used to work for a daily newspaper learned the technical skills he needed to transition to TV. Another Macedonian improved her TV editing skills and learned to produce stories with more "angles." An Albanian with TV experience said she learned for the first time to edit video and use cameras. A Kosovar, who learned online editing skills for TV stories, appreciated the practical orientation: "Here in Kosovo, you learn in theory, even the smallest things. ... In the United States, you learn something today, and the next class you have to do it in practice. That was amazing to me." [91]

A Bulgarian, who also developed some technical skills, said the program helped him "preserve the belief that journalism can be done by the book, more or less." For another Bulgarian, the skills learned during the PDY program brought

confidence: "When I came back, I had the feeling that I knew why I am in this profession. I had the confidence that I can work on my own, no matter for what publication." [92]

PDY participants' practical experience varied from university to university. Some wrote or produced stories/photos for student media. A Macedonian journalist helped in the lineup of stories at a student TV station but did not have a chance to go on the air because he could not "speak English like an American." Some interviewees reported being discouraged from working for the student newspaper or TV station, even when they repeatedly asked to do so. One Bulgarian, who asked to volunteer at the local TV station, eventually scaled her request down to observing the preparation of a talk show. Even that took months to fulfill, despite what she described as constant nagging on her part. My experience was similar. As a PDY trainee, I sought a chance to publish in the student newspaper several times, but my messages and phone calls went unreturned. I finally saw my byline after a faculty member at the end of the second semester recommended a story of mine to the editors. [93]

Some interviewees used their location to become occasional correspondents, sending back reports about elections, human-interest pieces about immigrants, or travel stories about their own American experiences. One Bulgarian was asked by her newspaper to go to New York to investigate a developing story with an American connection. Another Bulgarian, who was in the U.S. during the terrorist attack on Sept. 11, 2001, sent her colleagues multiple text messages about reactions to the event, which were published as an improvised analysis. [94]

Despite all the positives in terms of professional improvement, most interviewees had expected to spend time with American working journalists rather than sit in college classes. Several suggested that visits to media outlets should be central to the program, above and beyond the spring visit to Washington, D.C., which features a tour of some large newsrooms (such as CNN and *USA Today*). [95]

### *6.3.4 Career outcomes*

The PDY served as a springboard for one Bulgarian, launching her into covering major diplomatic developments. The international affairs classes she took and the countless hours she spent watching C-Span[7] in the U.S. paid off after her return: "There was nothing I was asked (about the U.S. political system) that I couldn't explain." Over time, she earned a raise and a promotion to an editor's position but after a few years lost interest and left journalism to take a public relations position. [96]

Many other interviewees changed jobs almost immediately upon return. A Bulgarian who was aware of interest from a national newspaper before she left

7 C-SPAN defines itself as "a private, non-profit company, created in 1979 by the cable television industry as a public service ... to provide public access to the political process" (http://www.c-span.org/About/Default.aspx [Accessed: January 16, 2010]). It broadcasts U.S. government speeches, sessions, and proceedings, often live.

received a job offer upon her return. She has stayed with the same employer for seven years and feels lucky that her editor encourages human-interest leads, a technique she learned in the U.S. Another Bulgarian had freelance offers from foreign news agencies, resigned upon return and was surprised that her editor "didn't sound like they were sorry to lose me or anything." [97]

Indeed, there seems to be some disparity in the appraisals of the program's value in the context of Eastern Europe versus the U.S. Americans who work with PDY participants believe the trainees would make a positive difference in their native countries. A classmate of Bekim GREICEVCI, a Kosovar who spent a year at Arizona State University, is quoted in a university publication as saying, "Bekim chose his road passionately, and I believe he will be one of the best journalists his country has ever seen" (in CUTLER, 2004, p.24). [98]

In the same article, GREICEVCI promises that he will "try to share" with his colleagues what he has learned in the U.S. And here is how Gary WORTH, news/public affairs director for KRWG-TV and journalism instructor at New Mexico State University, describes his expectations for PDY visitors in a newsletter article by GALLAGHER (2004, p.2):

> "By working with American media professionals and experiencing the media at work here, (the exchange students) hopefully gain insights into how they can perform differently when they return home. And as they progress in their careers at home and take on added responsibilities, we assume they will implement changes in their news organizations." [99]

The reality is often very different. For example, one Bulgarian returned to discover that she had been fired. She heard it from a colleague on the street, who said the decision was made as soon as she left for the U.S., even though she had signed paperwork to return to the same newspaper. Her beat had been given to somebody else. She was rehired at an intern's salary but left six months later to pursue further education in the U.S. She described the experience as a "tragedy":

> "My editor said, 'You have been fooling around for a year in the cornfields. To me, this is no education.' ... I think people who get this kind of training should be used for the betterment of the newsroom. Someone has invested in these people, and the investment is free to the newspaper." [100]

An Albanian TV journalist after her return was allowed to use a camera only at 1 p.m., when the heat was unbearable, and forced to anchor an early-morning show alone for three weeks in a row. She put it this way: "There was a lot of animosity. People who were in charge were fearing I'm going to replace them. ... I was mistreated, basically." Three months later, she took another job and led the first co-anchored TV show in Albania. A Serbian found somebody else had taken her beat while she was gone. Although she did not expect to be promoted, she was shocked by the lack of appreciation and felt that her career was "going backward." She took a public relations job four months later. [101]

"People look at you with suspicion and say, 'Look at her, she thinks she knows it all,'" said another Bulgarian. Some interviewees suggested their bosses felt threatened. A TV journalist from Kosovo returned to find a new station director, an "old communist" with whom he "disagreed on a lot of things." Colleagues had described him to the director as "ambitious" and speaking English more fluently than it seemed desirable. There was also a sense of threat: "When I came back, everybody was afraid I will take over." He went to work for another station but ultimately left journalism for a PR position. He sometimes regrets foregoing a job offer in the U.S.:

> "If I was put in a situation again to go to U.S. or lose my friends, I would go to U.S. ... I got an offer to work as a deputy producer on a CNN show, and I said, 'No, my country needs me.' When I came back here, the whole picture came out different." [102]

The literature suggests this is not unusual. American expatriates have similar experiences. They are sometimes "demoted or assigned to a lateral position upon their return" (OSLAND, 2000, p.237). One fifth of expatriates resign, and one third never get to use the new skills they learned (OSLAND, 2000). [103]

*6.3.5 Lack of catalytic outcomes*

Regardless of whether they stayed with the same employer or changed jobs, many interviewees had difficulty putting their new knowledge or skills to use. A Bulgarian said that new ideas are not easy to sell if they "come from a lowly reporter who is not a relative to any editor." A Macedonian, who was used to the relatively formal dress code of American TV newsrooms, switched back to wearing blue jeans soon after his return. Although he marveled at how U.S. investigative journalists slowly work sources and craft in-depth stories, he said such an approach is not easily applied in Eastern Europe. [104]

Another Macedonian had ideas for reorganizing the work at her station but no way of realizing them: "It's hard to do something ... it doesn't depend on me. We don't have as many producers. We don't have money to buy more cameras. The system is different." A Serbian said the problem is that Serbian media are overstaffed with unproductive workers: "They have less people in American TV stations. Those journalists have to produce much more news packages in a day. ... Cut the staff and produce more. It's possible but nobody is doing it." [105]

Most interviewees were pleased to get exposure to the "American way" of doing journalism, suggesting that they wholeheartedly shared the ideological claim about the superiority of the U.S. media model (THUNBORG, 1997). This is the topic of the following section. [106]

**6.4 Ideological transfer**

Interviewees who felt they achieved new skills and knowledge often became more aware of the inadequacies of their home environment. One Bulgarian reported with acclaim that U.S. journalists live by "many more rules." For

example: "In Bulgaria, nobody thinks too much what it would be like to put a picture of somebody shot on the front page." However, the following subsection suggests acclaim was not universal. [107]

*6.4.1 Evaluations of media*

As noted earlier, media content is significant in the sense that it reflects predominant cultural narratives. U.S. media were not always perceived as an example to follow, suggesting some resistance to cultural and ideological transfer. As one Bulgarian put it, American news reports are often "too shallow, too narrow in terms of perspectives." An Albanian resented the constant interruption of TV news and shows by commercial breaks. A Croatian said her employer, a public television station, had much higher standards than most American TV stations, driven by sensationalism and commercial interests. Several interviewees were surprised by the extreme emphasis on local news, which they perceived as lopsided. A Kosovar put it this way: "Everything that happens around the world is seen from the American perspective: From our perspective here, we never thought of how something affects us but how it affects the best interest of people in need." [108]

Even when interviewees disliked some media content, they generally appreciated the efficiency and wealth of resources supporting the production of media content. [109]

*6.4.2 Relations with U.S. embassies*

Most interviewees did not construct the program as a public diplomacy tool. One exception was a Croatian, who expressed awareness of the program's public diplomacy goals, but said she "wasn't indoctrinated by some ideals and ideas—just saw the reality." Although critical of many aspects of U.S. media and society, she reported sometimes "defending America" in personal conversations. Her work does not involve coverage of U.S.-related news. [110]

Most interviewees have received embassy bulletins and have been invited to cover embassy events or visits of U.S. officials. Some were invited to lunch with the ambassador after they returned and/or participated in reunions of PDY alumni at expensive locations. Most interviewees had friendly relations with U.S. embassies both before and after the PDY program. Virtually all interviewees who returned emphasized that the embassies did not start inviting them to more events than before. [111]

By all means, interviewees did not feel used. Many viewed the relationship as mutually beneficial because by Eastern Europe media standards interviews with American officials are very newsworthy. One former Bulgarian journalist, who covered the "U.S. beat" for several years after the PDY, recalled with pride interviewing U.S. Army General Wesley CLARK and Senator John McCAIN. She had such connections with the State Department that sometimes she knew the

date of arrival of prominent visitors before the news had reached embassy staff. She had also been consulted in the selection of new PDY trainees. [112]

In some cases, the relationship may be more far-reaching, as described by a Macedonian:

> "Usually, they call us to meet the guests from the U.S. They want to see what we think. People who have been to this program think differently than people who haven't been there. They look to the problems here ... from the right angle. We have a different point of view. We can give them the right information for the situation here." [113]

Media intelligence is conducted by various U.S. agencies; for example, the State Department's Office of Research and Media Reaction has a budget of more than $11 million (UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 2009). Such activity is not limited to Europe: For example, the American Institute in Taiwan "advises Washington of local media attitudes" (p.599). [114]

## 7. Discussion

The study aimed to gather insight into the experiences of media trainees from Eastern Europe and place the findings within a critical-cultural context. On a practical level, the data suggest that participants could benefit from advance cross-cultural and/or linguistic training, as well as increased academic and cultural support from their host universities. Individual motivation to learn and conscientiousness predict positive training outcomes (TZINER, FISHER, SENIOR & WEISBERG, 2007); thus, performance expectations should be more consistent with the participants' proven motivation and conscientiousness (if these can be assumed from their successes in Eastern Europe). [115]

The findings also supported the view that the program entails ideological transfer and that it does not seem to significantly benefit the journalists and their media organizations in the long run. Some motivated Eastern European journalists have difficulties adapting to life in the U.S. because of insufficient support; those who adapt and learn new skills often have difficulty putting these to use back home. They are envied for having tasted the American dream; in reality, they have lived on $12,000-$15,000 over nine months, isolated in small towns with limited access to transportation. In some cases, fast-paced media environments in Europe have not forgiven their yearlong absences. Organizational power has been redistributed, sources and connections have been lost, and new colleagues have aggressively taken over one's old turf. [116]

The ideological transfer has occurred, but it hardly serves its purpose in those cases when PDY alumni leave journalism, their native countries or both. Furthermore, although the PDY program feels like a turning point in the lives of most participants, it has not made them role models at home. This is perhaps because journalistic practices and norms are not easily exported; historically, they have been "tied to the media environments in which journalists work" (SINGER, 2006, p.2) rather than to some distant norms and values. As a 2005 report from

the USC Center on Public Diplomacy notes, "By some estimates as much as $30 million was spent on media training in the Balkans and, by some accounts, things are worse now than they were before the well-meaning Westerners arrived" (ROBISON, 2005, p.9). Raising media standards in emerging democracies is perhaps unlikely to be achieved without a significant change in legal and social aspects of media environments (libel laws, access to public records, etc.). [117]

At the very least, training reporters from disparate media organizations could have some effect if they were guaranteed to disseminate their new skills or perspectives. Earlier media training programs have aimed for just that outcome. Jerome AUMENTE, who was asked by the U.S. Information Agency in 1989 to train journalists in former communist countries, suggests that, "[k]ey among our goals was the hope that we could train others as trainers and thereby institutionalize our efforts" (2005, p.85). [118]

"Train-the-trainer" programs, which tend to improve trust and motivation, have been proven to be successful models of spreading Western medical practices (e.g., PIRRALLO, WOLFF, SIMPSON & HARGARTEN, 1995) and healthy behaviors (e.g., RAMOS, MAY & RAMOS, 2001) in other countries. In the context of media training, the BBC World Service Trust (BBC's international charity) has worked to raise standards of accuracy and impartiality among Sri Lankan journalists by providing "editorial and journalist skills appropriate to their working environment" (MILLER, 2006, p.174), including training local trainers and solving practical problems in a Sri Lankan context. The Trust has run similar programs in the Middle East, emphasizing that local trainers are much more effective than English-speaking trainers (ROBISON, 2005). An obvious option in that direction could be to engage PDY participants to lead training events in their home countries. [119]

### 7.1 Limitations

This analysis must be tempered by some limitations. Most interviewees were satisfied with at least some aspects of the program. This suggests that the most dissatisfied trainees may be underrepresented in this study. The presence of four interviewees who pursued graduate studies in the U.S. suggests this analysis may outline a little higher degree of adoption of U.S. norms and values than what is typical among trainees who stay for nine months. In keeping with the hero narrative, interviewees may have also downplayed experiences that made them feel weak or unimportant. [120]

### 7.2 Directions for future research

One direction is to extend this study to include more international media training programs paid for by the U.S. government agencies and compare them to programs run by international charities. Another is to conduct textual analysis on written evaluations completed by PDY participants. However, a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request for these records was denied. The FOIA allows journalists, scholars, and the general public to request information from the

federal government that is not otherwise available in already published documents. Martha A. DIAZ-ORTIZ, FOIA and Privacy Act officer for the Broadcasting Board of Governors, explained the denial of the records with the following:

> "…the information you have requested is privileged from disclosure under FOIA Exemption 5, 552(b)(5), as pre-decisional and deliberative process material. The evaluations are not published for public review and its candid comments and recommendations are for intra-agency use to enhance the agency's Professional Development Year program" (personal communication, August 17, 2009). [121]

## 8. Conclusion

I share many interviewees' sentiment that the PDY was a life-changing event. There was a personal gain, but my training made no difference to Bulgarian media. Furthermore, media independence from government is one of the norms of American journalism, guaranteed by the First Amendment[8] and reinforced by views of media as watchdogs or the Fourth Estate. But THUNBORG (1997) notes that, among U.S. agencies providing help to foreign media, "a strict promotion of the First Amendment was sometimes considered to stand in conflict with the national interest" (p.138). Apparently, media training as a government operation must be seen as very different (at the level of its premise) from media training conducted by charities. It would be unacceptable for American journalists to receive training paid for by their own or a foreign government, but a different standard is assumed for Eastern Europeans. This and the lack of performance expectations or any other guarantees in the PDY program suggest U.S.-paid media training is more often a means of promoting American culture and policies than an honest attempt at raising journalistic standards in emerging democracies. [122]

## Appendix: Interview Schedule

- How were you selected for this training program? What were your feelings when you were selected?
- What were your expectations from the program? How much did you expect to learn and/or advance your career upon returning home? How did you imagine life in the US?
- Before coming to the U.S., what was more important to you—your job or life outside the job?
- Did you expect to be successful and happy during this training? Why or why not?
- How, if at all, did you find any of your expectations different from reality?

8 The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution was ratified in 1791. It is often interpreted as a guarantee of the freedom of the press, although it does not explicitly limit interference from the executive or judicial branches of the government. It reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances" (http://www.usconstitution.net/const.html#Am1 [Accessed: January 16, 2010]).

- Did you face loss of identity during the training? How did you cope with it? Did you develop a bi-cultural identity—one for your home country and another for your host country?
- Did you feel that you had enough language training to survive and/or succeed?
- What was the culture shock like? Did you experience feelings of loss of control, grief, or expectations of better life ahead? Please describe.
- To what degree did you agree with or accept U.S. culture? Can you explain?
- How would you evaluate your level of stress during the program?
- Did your host institution provide resources and support to alleviate the culture shock and stress resulting from it? Was there one or more individuals assigned to provide help to you? Were they easily accessible and eager to help you? Why or why not?
- Did you have enough money to live on? Why or why not?
- What were your transportation options while you lived in the U.S.? How did you feel about them?
- Did anyone help you make housing arrangements? Were you satisfied with your apartment/neighborhood while in the U.S.? Please elaborate.
- Did you receive any pre-training to help you understand the American academic environment? What was it?
- Do you think you had good understanding of the American academic environment when you arrived on your host campus? Or did you develop it during your stay? Please explain.
- How many classes did you take the first semester? The second semester?
- Did you attend classes on a regular basis? Why or why not?
- Was there any incentive for attending classes on your host campus? Or disincentive for not attending classes? Was there anything at all that you were required to attend? Please describe.
- Did you learn any new reporting or editing skills by going to classes or through discussions/meetings with other trainees? Specifically, what?
- Did the program change your attitudes toward journalism? How so?
- Did the program fill any gaps in your education (such as lack of a journalism degree or lack of training in practical journalism skills)? If yes, what?
- Did you have any work published/broadcast by American media during your stay in the U.S.? Why or why not? What were your feelings about that?
- Did you become friends with other students? Were they American, international, or from your own country? If yes, were those friendships fulfilling? Please explain.
- Academically, how did you do during the program? Please explain.
- How much/often did you travel during your stay in the U.S.? How did you like that?
- Do you think the program improved your understanding of globalization and/or media as global business? Why or why not?

- What is the most important thing you learned, overall?
- Did you complete an exit interview or training assessment questionnaire before returning home? What did you say in it?
- Did you stay in touch with colleagues at home while in U.S.? How did you feel about that?
- Did you continue reading/watching your home-country media while you were in the U.S.? Why or why not?
- How much, if at all, did you read American newspapers, listen to American radio and/or watch American TV? Did you like U.S. media? What did you learn from that?
- Did you write about your experiences in the U.S. for your media organization back home? Why or why not? If yes, what did you write about?
- During the training, did you have ideas about how to improve your work and/or organization when you returned home? What were these ideas?
- Did you think these ideas were feasible and would be well-accepted by your colleagues and bosses? Why or why not?
- Were you excited to go home and apply what you learned from the training? Please describe how you felt.
- Did you experience reverse culture shock upon returning home? What did that feel like?
- What happened to you professionally when you returned home? Were you promoted? Fired? Stayed in the same position? Please explain.
- Did anyone take your turf/beat while you were gone? If yes, what did you do?
- Did you find yourself using new approaches to interviewing sources, seeking public records or writing/producing your stories?
- Did your studies in the U.S. influence your choice of topics (e.g. more human-interest stories, more investigations) to write about upon returning home? Why or why not?
- How did your boss and colleagues comment, if at all, on changes in your performance and behavior after returning home?
- For how long did you stay in the same job after returning from the training?
- What (if any) of the things you learned in the training program were applicable to your professional situation back home?
- What were the personal ramifications, if any, of spending a year abroad (e.g., loss of friends or relationships)?
- How did the program change you or enrich you personally, if at all?
- What suggestions for improvement would you offer the organizers/administrators of this training program?
- If you could go back in time, would you go on that program again, now that you know what it's like? Why or why not?
- Since your return, has the American Embassy stayed in touch with you? Please describe.

- Have you been asked to cover U.S.-related events, such as American officials' visits to your home country? Have you been invited to interview U.S. guests or write about U.S.-sponsored programs for your home country? How do you feel about that?

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