THE IDENTITY OF PUBLIC RELATIONS EDUCATION: AN ASSESSMENT ON COMMUNICATION FACULTIES IN TURKEY AND IN BALTIC COUNTRIES*

Feride AKIM**
Seda ÇAKAR MENGÜ***

Abstract

The indicators of an institution's identity are behavior, philosophy and design that come into existence within that institution and also the culture which is in interaction with these factors. All of these factors can be handled with regard to the identity of public relations profession. This study aims to manifest the identity of public relations education within the context of the elements comprising corporate identity (educational design, behavior, philosophy, culture and communication). The items in the questionnaire have been designed to be able to make inferences about these issues. Accordingly, Turkey, which has reached the condition of a newly industrialized country, and Latvia, a developing country in the Baltic Region, and Estonia as a developing country constitute the universe of research. Considering that professional criteria are universal, taking these countries as the sampling of this research through a case study results from the fact that the respective countries display a difference from the others with regard to their economic and social status 20 years ago and their free market mobility after getting separated from the USSR. Therefore, the data gathered about these countries are compared with those related to Turkey. A questionnaire was sent via link to the e-mail addresses of academics who are teaching in public relations field in the respective countries. According to this study, in which the three countries are compared, public relations is seen as a profession the most in Turkey. Communication faculties in Turkey, which are providing education in the field of public relations, consider this profession along with the 'problem-solving process facilitator' role while the faculties in Latvia and Estonia give more weight to the 'communication facilitator' role. It has also been found that as for the degree of importance with regard to the roles of public relations practitioners is concerned, 'being a part of management and have a voice in the strategic decision-making process of the management' is of primary importance for the participants from the three countries.
Keywords: *Identity, Education, Public Relations*

HALKLA İLİŞKİLER EĞİTİMİNİN KİMLİĞİ: TÜRKİYE VE BALTIK DENİZİ ÜLKELERİ'NDEKİ İLETİŞİM FAKÜLTELERİNE YÖNELİK BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

Öz

Bir kurumun kimliğini ortaya koyan, kuruma yönelik oluşan davranış, felsefe, dizayn, iletişim ve bu unsurlarla etkileşim halinde bulunan kültürdür. Tüm bu unsurlar, halkla ilişkiler mesleğinin kimliği kapsamında ele alınabilir. Bu çalışma, halkla ilişkiler eğitiminin kimliğini, kurum kimliğini oluşturan unsurlar bağlamında (eğitime yönelik dizayn, davranış, felsefe, kültür ve iletişim) ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, 2011 yılında yeni endüstrileşen ülke konumuna gelen Türkiye ve Baltık Denizi Ülkeleri'nden gelişmekte olan ülke kategorisinde yer alan Letonya ve gelişmiş ülke statüsünde yer alan Estonya araştırmanın evrenini oluşturmaktadır. Meslek kriterlerinin evrensel olmasından hareketle örnek olay çalışması bağlamında bu ülkelerin ele alınmasının nedeni, söz konusu ülkelerin 20 yıl önceki ekonomik ve toplumsal durumları ile SSCB'den ayrıldıktan sonraki serbest piyasa hareketlilikleri bazında halkla ilişkileri uygulama biçimleri açısından diğer ülkelerden farklılık göstermeleridir. Dolayısıyla bu ülkeler ele alınarak Türkiye ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Söz konusu ülkelerdeki iletişim fakültelerinin halkla ilişkiler alanını konu alan bölümlerinde ders veren akademisyenlerin elektronik posta adreslerine yanıtlamaları için link aracılığıyla anket gönderilmiştir. 3 ülkenin karşılaştırıldığı araştırma sonuçlarına göre halkla ilişkilerin meslek olarak görülme durumu en yüksek Türkiye'dedir. Türkiye'deki iletişim fakültelerinde halkla ilişkiler alanında verilen eğitim halkla ilişkilerin 'sorun çözme süreci kolaylaştırıcısı' yetiştirilmesine yönelik rol tanımıyla örtüşürken Letonya ve Estonya'da 'iletişim kolaylaştırıcısı' rol tanımıyla örtüşmektedir. Halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcılarının rollerine ilişkin önem derecesi sorgulandığında, her 3 ülkeden araştırmaya katılan katılımcıların, halkla ilişkiler uygulayıcılarının 'yönetimin bir parçası olması ve yönetimin stratejik karar alma sürecinde söz sahibi olması' kriterinde yoğunlaştıkları saptanmıştır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: *Kimlik, Eğitim, Halkla İlişkiler*

* This study has been supported as a YADOP project (number 32247) confirmed by İstanbul University Scientific Research Projects Unit. The research part has been conducted in co-operation with Akademetre Research & Strategic Planning Corporation.
** Asst. Prof. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü, feakim@istanbul.edu.tr
*** Prof. Dr., İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Halkla İlişkiler ve Tanıtım Bölümü, sedamengu@yahoo.com

INTRODUCTION

Public relations aims at the accumulation of knowledge based on research along with a standard education system to disseminate this knowledge, the faith in life-long learning, allegiance to ethical principles as well as developing the insight to acquire responsibility for improving societies. Public relations appears as a dominant factor in structuring societies and creating social reality. While public relations practices are shaped in accordance with the economic level of a society, these practices also transform the culture and social conditions of that society by influencing them. The most important factor for the respective practice to be considered as a profession is to aim at serving a society by assume responsibility with respect to the needs of that society. At this point, the formation and acquisition of professional culture is quite important.

At the core of the professional culture are the practitioners themselves as well as their life - worlds. In fact, the structure of society and the practices affect the structure of the profession. Public relations education; on the other hand, is a process in which the life - worlds of practitioners and the values of the situation are created and shared. In this process, making sense of the identity intrinsic to public relations profession coincides with the identity of the public relations education. In this sense, public relations profession can be considered as an institution. Institutionalization of public relations and formation of its unique values will obviously make its identity more explicit and steady.

Regarding the period of 20 years at least, devoted to the research pertaining to the professional criteria of public relations, there are significant studies in the USA and various European countries. It is believed that the basis that has been established chronologically by Ferguson (1984), Pavlik (1987), Botan and Hazleton (1989), Pasadeos, Renfro and Hanily, Vasquez and Taylor (2001), Sallo, Lyon, Acosta-Alzuru and Jones has a great value for the field, and when considered as a whole, all these authors has made totally landmark decisions and reached complete agreement (Botan & Taylor, 2004: 648-650). However, there seems to be no detailed studies related to Latvia and Estonia which separated from the USSR in 1991 and have affinity in historical and geographical sense. Considering that professional criteria are universal, taking these countries as the sampling of this research through a case study results from the fact that the respective countries display a difference from the others with regard to their economic and social status 20 years ago and their free market mobility after getting separated from the USSR. Therefore, the data gathered about these countries are compared with those related to Turkey.

The View Towards the Identity of Public Relations Profession

By definition, public relations is a method of communication open to development and improvement. As a result of being people oriented, public relations launches its practices with respect to interpersonal communication and interaction. Being the smallest units of a society, human beings direct the development of social actions. Here, the formation of human beings as subjects is also one of the functions that public relations should have.

According to Ihlen, the most important point is the inability of the existing public relations theory to present a good overall ontology. Beyond being a means of practice, public relations cannot express its identity satisfactorily. This issue leads to the misperception of the function this profession as deficient and problematic. While public relations is defined as an affirmative and beneficial means or method by some authors, it is considered as a negative field of application causing wrong cognition. We are talking about a method of communication called public relations that has emerged in different ways throughout history and existed behind the events that have brought about social movements, revolutions or destructions. The identity and culture of this profession displays us the ways that it is practiced and perceived. Needless to say, the technical data pertaining to a profession are not enough to put forth the reason for existence of that profession. While the explanations about public relations include the perspectives from different paradigms, public relations also emerge in the manifestation and acceptance of these paradigms. Therefore, playing a significant role in the creation of reality, public relations is either acclaimed or blamed for the performances in this created reality. Public relations is a culture policy and the real purpose of culture policy is to make the issues affirmative and acceptable, which necessitate persuasion and confirmation. Thus, you can do what you want without getting into political struggle.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the identity of public relations with respect to the elements constituting this identity. Hence, the function of public relations in social, economic, cultural and political areas along with the ways that it is perceived as well as the values and beliefs that it benefits from and also creates; in addition, the way it expresses itself and the reason for existence are analyzed with regard to different paradigms. Our view of public relations as a practice or profession and how we make sense of it from the points of ideology and discourse display our knowledge of public relations. Our thoughts about public relations; on the other hand, constitute the reality about this profession as well as the practices within the context of this reality. Therefore, it is thought that the analysis of public relations as both an element of the creation of social reality and also a function or means presented by this reality will enlighten the ways of making sense, which are related to this profession.

When we consider the dimensions of public relations culture, we just see the values and beliefs adopted by public relations, historical background of public relations that direct communication policy along with its philosophy and practice, assumed roles and models, attitudes, expectations, well-known professionals of public relations and the perception of public relations practices. Public relations culture denotes the intellectual structure shared commonly. In addition, it indicates the ways of perceiving, interpreting and making sense of this profession in physical and social sense and acting accordingly by public relations practitioners.

Acquisition of public relations culture is important and necessary. Public relations culture manifests the elements of public relations practices adopted in a society, which shape the profession as well as the professional identity of practitioners. Moreover, it

encourages the practitioners to appreciate, defend and develop the public relations profession; thus, the position of public relations in the system is strengthened. By forming meanings and control mechanisms that direct and shape the attitudes and behaviors of public relations practitioners and academics towards the profession, it introduces a policy. Furthermore, it contributes to the institutionalization of the profession and the deletion of wrong and deficient conception (Mengü, 2012: 7).

The institutions' modus operandi towards public relations is determined by activist groups as well as the differentiating expectations and values of stakeholders. Changes in the social and economic structures that institutions exist bring with it the differences in practices. This situation also transforms the cultural structure of public relations. Within the context of different approaches that institutions assume (functional, semantic and postmodern), the purpose and function of public relations redefine themselves. All these approaches have different views to internal and external target groups with regard to the perspective of the mass or the public. The perspective of an institution is reflected in public relations practices. In this sense, the role that a business or an institution assumes in a society is reflected in the public relations role and culture of that institution.

The following questions should be answered: Can the given history of public relations explain the reason for the existence public relations today? What are the best definition, role and function of public relations? While making generalizations about the profession through relation building and dialogue, we should be careful. Each individual in a society gets into dialogue with the others with values and beliefs that have come into existence in his or her culture. Thus, public relations practice is shaped according to the cultural and historical context that is applied (Zaharna, 2001; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2003; Molleda & Suarez, 2005 as cited in Hodges, 2006: 81).

Studying public relations culture necessitates questioning the relations of public relations with other elements of society. As social actors, public relations practitioners are open to influences in socio-cultural and global senses. In their relationship with the public, they function within the context of meanings, values, principles and norms of their professional culture. In addition, regarding the understanding of professional culture, Hodges has also indicated that the culture of public relations practitioners can make a significant contribution to the development of national culture as well.

International Trends and Applications in Corporate Communication 2011 Study was introduced in 2000 and has been held since then every two years. The findings of the research in 2011 are quite interesting and significant as they show us the transformation not only in communication profession, but also in business world. There are some important issues related to the research:

As a reply to the uncertainty of global economic situation, more importance has stated to be given to corporate culture and the interaction among employees.

Corporations have now realized that their employees are the most important value and focused on enhancing their motivation; thus, started to invest in them.

Communication managers think that their primary task is to provide consultancy to CEOs and increase corporate reputation. They position communication as a strategic function and stress the importance of corporate reputation in the current situation (Graceroodhouse, 2011).

AIM AND METHODOLOGY

The indicators of an institution's identity are behavior, philosophy and design that come into existence within that institution and also the culture which is in interaction with these factors. All of these factors can be handled with regard to the identity of public relations profession. This study aims to manifest the identity of public relations education within the context of the elements comprising corporate identity (educational design, behavior, philosophy, culture and communication). The items in the questionnaire have been designed to be able to make inferences about these issues.

Accordingly, Turkey, which has reached the condition of a newly industrialized country, and Latvia, a developing country in the Baltic Region, and Estonia as a developing country have been chosen as the sampling of this study. As an initial step, which of the 175 universities (104 state and 71 private) in Turkey have active departments providing education on the basis of public relations (Public Relations, Public Relations and Publicity, Public Relations and Advertising or Public Relations and Relationship Management) has been determined. The respective departments have actively been providing PR education in 22 out of 104 state universities and 14 out of 71 private universities. In the respective departments of 22 state universities, the number of the faculty is 163 while it is 74 in 14 private universities; thus, totally 237 academics in both sectors have been teaching.

A questionnaire consisting of 29 items was sent to all those 237 academics and 100 of them replied and returned it. In the second phase, the institutions providing higher education in Latvia were determined. There are 17 state colleges, 15 higher education institutions established by legal entities, 13 state institutions providing higher education, 8 colleges established by legal entities and 6 universities. Public relations, communication and public relations and advertising departments are in 3 of the higher education institutions established by legal entities; 2 in state universities; 2 in the colleges established by legal entities and 1 in the state institutions providing higher education.

27 academics in 3 of the higher education institutions established by legal entities; 16 in 2 state universities, 9 in 2 colleges established by legal entities; 6 in 1 state institution are currently teaching. The total number of all those academic staff is 57. Only 40 of those who are employed in the respective institutions have replied the questionnaire. There are 12 state universities (it has been found that all universities belong to the state) and 8 private institutes in Estonia. In only 1 one of the state universities is there a department of communication management and public relations. It should also be noted that 5 of the academics out of 8 employed in that institution have replied the questionnaire.

Visual and functional design of the question forms have been improved by implementing pilot studies. Hence, the information providing potential, fluency and comprehensibility

of the data gathering devices have been tested. In this study, online questionnaire technique has been used. During the interviews, Webropol, online questionnaire software, which is heavily favored all over the world has been used and the link which provided an easy access to the respondents were sent to their addresses. The data obtained from the respondents was simultaneously sent to the database of Akademetre and made ready for the analyses.

FINDINGS

42.2% of the academics from Turkey, to whom the link of the online questionnaire was sent, 70.2% from Latvia and 62.5% from Estonia replied and returned it. As for the gender of the respondents from both Turkey and Latvia, 65% is female and 35% male. Moreover, 40% of the respondents from Estonia are female and 60% of them are male. As for the age of respondents, 57% of the respondents from Turkey are between 32 and 41, and 32% is between 42 and 51. Similarly, 55% of the respondents from Latvia are between 32 and 41, 27.5% are between 42 and 51. In addition, 60% of those from Estonia are between 32 and 41 while 20% is equally between 22-31 and 42-51.

Moreover, 17% of the academics from Turkey who have contributed to this study are from Istanbul University, 10% from Atatürk University, 9% from Anadolu University, 6% from Yaşar University, 5% equally from Kocaeli, Istanbul Aydın and Ege University, 4% from İzmir Ekonomi and Bahçeşehir University and 3% equally from Kadir Has, İstanbul Bilgi and Başkent University.

So far as the academics from Latvia who have replied the questionnaire are concerned, 35% of them are from Turiba University, 20% from Riseba University, 15% from Latvia University, 10% from Vidzeme University, 7,5% are equally from Riga Stradins University and Alberta College and 2.5% are equally from Baltic International Academy and Biznesa Vadibas College. In addition, 5 of the academics who have contributed to the study are all from Tallinn University.

When the academic titles are taken into consideration, 36% of the academics from Turkey are assistant professors, 29% are associate professors, 17% are professors and 14% are lecturers. On the other hand, 57.5% of the academics from Latvia are lecturers, 15% are assistant professors, and 10% are associate professors and 7.5% are professors. Moreover, 80% of the academics from Estonia are lecturers and 20% of them are assistant professors.

As for the periods of service, 29% of the respondents from Turkey have worked between 11 and 15 years, 24% between 16 and 20, 18% between 6 and 10 years, 15% 21 years and over and 14% between 1 and 5 years. Meanwhile, 55% of the respondents from Latvia have worked between 1-5 years, 22.5% between 6 and 10 years, 12.5 between 11 and 15 years, 7.5% between 16-20 years and 2.5% more than 21 years. As for Estonia, 60% have worked between 6 and 10 years, and 20% have equally worked between 16 and 20 years or more than 21 years.

An examination towards the job training in the respective faculties indicates that, inter-

nal training is provided at the ratio of 27% in Turkey, 42.5% in Latvia and 40% in Estonia. On the other hand, the ratio of external training stands at 31% in Turkey, 80% in Latvia and 60% in Estonia.

The ratio of internal training in the communication faculties in Turkey is 70.4% for a period between 1 month and less; similarly, between 3.5 and 4 months with the ratio of 14.8%, 4 months and over with the ratio of 11.1% and 1.5- 3 months: 3.7%. The ratios in the same category for Latvia are as follows: 47.1% between 1 and 6 months, 35.3% between 3.5 and 4 months, 11.8%: 4 months and over, 5.9% between 1.5 and 3 months. Internal training is held for a month in Estonia.

The ratio of external training in the communication faculties in Turkey for a period between 1 month and less is 64.5%. While the ratio for the period between 1.5 and 3 months is 29%, it stands equally at 3.2% for the period between 3.5 and 4 months as well the over 4 months. The ratios for the same periods in the communication faculties in Latvia are as follows: between 3.5 and 4 months: 43.8%; between 1.5 and 3 months: 25%; equally for 1 month or less and 4 months and over: 15.6%. External training is held for a 1-2 month periods.

As for being abroad, 83% of the respondents in Turkey, 90% in Latvia and 80% in Estonia have been abroad. In the same way, 25.3% of the academics from Turkey, 55.6 from Latvia and 100% from Estonia have been abroad to teach. Moreover, the respondent from Turkey have been abroad to participate in educational activities, conferences and congresses. The reasons for being abroad for those from Latvia are conducting an international scientific project as well as carrying out a public relations study that was started in their country. Likewise, the respondents from Estonia have been abroad to be the practitioner of a public relations study that was commenced in their country.

As for the period of being abroad, 26.5% of the respondents from Turkey have been abroad between 1 month and less, 19.4% of the academics from Latvia between 9.5 and 12 months and 75% of those from Latvia between 2 and 3 months.

When the respondents were asked if they considered public relation as a profession, 96% of those from Turkey, 92.5% from Latvia and 80% from Estonia gave affirmative replies. The reasons for considering public relations as a profession for the respondents from Turkey are successively: necessitating accumulation of knowledge based on research, having a standard educational system to disseminate this knowledge, creating faith in life-long learning, having a sense of responsibility for improving societies, and having ethical values. Moreover, the respondents from Latvia have respectively checked, necessitating accumulation of knowledge based on research, having a sense of responsibility for improving societies, creating faith in life-long learning, having a standard educational system to disseminate the accumulated knowledge and having ethical values. On the other hand, it has been determined that the respondents from Estonia attached relatively equal importance to necessitating accumulation of knowledge based on research, having a standard educational system to disseminate this knowledge, creating faith in life-long learning, having a sense of responsibility for improving societies and having

ethical values.

As for the education that public relations professionals should acquire, the respondents from Turkey mainly checked; they should acquire education to develop communication projects that will affect work strategies, to perform corporate communication activities as aimed, to assess the communication problems along with the reasons for them, to provide effective consultancy to the corporate management for communication problems.

Meanwhile, the respondents from Latvia predominantly checked that the public relations practitioners should acquire education to assess the communication problems along with the reasons for them. The other items that these respondents checked are successively as follows: to provide effective consultancy to the corporate management for communication problems, to develop communication projects that will affect work strategies and to perform corporate communication activities as aimed. Moreover, with respect to the education of public relations practitioners, the respondents from Estonia seems to have given importance to to provide effective consultancy to the corporate management for communication problems most. The other items pertaining to the respective education are: to develop communication projects that will affect work strategies and to perform corporate communication activities as aimed.

An assessment over the role definitions of public relations practitioners indicates that the respondents from Turkey mainly checked to assist systematically the process of providing solutions to the communication and relationship problems of the management by co-operating with other managers and also to establish a two-way communication between an institution and its environment and during this communication process assumes a mediating role by assisting the knowledge exchange.

On the other hand, the respondents from Latvia seem to have given the primary importance to the aptitude to establish a two-way communication between an institution and its environment and during this communication process assumes a mediating role by assisting the knowledge exchange. Then, they checked the items defining public relations practitioner as the expert who knows the problems of public relations problems best and who is able to encounter them best; the management follows the recommendations of public relations practitioners and indirectly participates in public relations problems and solutions. Likewise, the respondents from Estonia seem to have successively focused on: establishing a two-way communication between an institution and its environment and during this communication process assuming a mediating role by assisting the knowledge exchange and then, assisting systematically the process of providing solutions to the communication and relationship problems of the management by co-operating with other managers.

It has also been found that as for the degree of importance with regard to the roles of public relations practitioners is concerned, being a part of management and have a voice in the strategic decision-making process of the management is of primary importance for the participants from the three countries.

Furthermore, for the role of public relations profession in society, the participants from Turkey preponderantly checked assuming the protection role against the groups that may prevent the benefits of a corporation in the public as the most important function. The participant from Latvia and Estonia; on the other hand, seems to have given primary importance to being the supporter of the discourse of the company that is given service and persuading the public accordingly.

For the frequency of the strategically planned and executed practices through the co-ordination of academics, the participants form the three countries primarily checked activity management. Besides, the respondents from Turkey secondly marked crisis management. It was brand management for the respondents from Latvia and sponsorship for those from Estonia.

The replies to the question about the facilities in communication faculties have shown that Public Relations Ateliers are the most in Estonia, then Latvia and Turkey. Similarly, Public Relations Agencies and News Agencies are the most in Latvia, then Turkey and Estonia. As far as the technical installation in the respective faculties is concerned, computer laboratories are most available in Turkey, then, Latvia and Estonia. In addition, workshops are the most in Latvia, then Turkey and Estonia. Training club; on the other hand, are most available in Estonia, then Latvia and Turkey.

As for the activities that are held regularly at faculties, the respondents from Turkey checked the seminars the most (respondents can check more than one item). While it was workshops for the respondents from Latvia, it was conferences for those from Estonia. When the respective activities are held thematically, the participants from Turkey appear to have given significance to Communication Management, while those from Latvia gave priority to Advertising and Public Relations in Business World and those from Estonia to Brand Management as topics of instruction.

As a reply to the question about the equipment used most in instruction, all participants from the respective countries commonly marked LCD projectors, then videos and laboratories.

Likewise, the common reply to the question related to the activities performed by students at the communication faculties was public relations campaigns from respondents from the three countries, while social responsibility campaigns and faculty newspaper are the other practice areas for the respondents from Turkey, advertising campaigns and social responsibility campaigns are the secondary practices for the Latvian respondents. For those from Estonia, it is the Faculty Magazine.

In this regard, as for the institutions that the communication faculties are in co-operation with, the respondents from both Turkey and Latvia checked successively the media, private companies and non-governmental organizations most while those from Estonia mentioned non-governmental organizations most; then, the media and private companies.

As for the activities of public relations agencies, relations with the media, social respon-

sibility and activity management are the most productive areas for the respondents from both Turkey and Estonia. The respondents from Latvia have pointed out marketing, corporate and brand image and crisis management within the same context.

For the areas that public relations practitioners need most, the respondents from Turkey successively mentioned universities, media companies and employee associations. Meanwhile, the respondents from Latvia checked universities, political parties and media companies. Finally, the respondents from Estonia focused on media companies and non-governmental organizations.

When the models for training public relations professionals at the communication faculties were questioned, it was determined the Turkish and Latvian participants commonly focused on the choice indicating an education rather based theoretical knowledge along with opportunities for practice is provided for students. When they start performing their profession after graduation, they encounter several difficulties. There has been a gap between academic and practitioners although its dimension changes in time. Meanwhile, the participants from Estonia rather checked the item: an apprentice observes, imitates and follows his or her recommendations. Similarly he or she solves the problems by playing it by ear and also is deprived of theoretical knowledge.

When the respondents were asked about their perspectives towards communication education process that should consist of three dimensions, namely instruction, education and research, those from Turkey and Estonia checked most the research the dimension and those from Latvia gave the primary importance to the education dimension.

As for the qualifications of the instructors to provide public relations education, the respondents from Turkey and Estonia seem to have focused on having a sufficient level of foreign language and having national and international publications related to the field. The respondents from Latvia; on the other hand, gave more importance to having work experience in private sector related to the field and having a sufficient level of foreign language.

When the respondents were asked about which courses should be taught in the field of public relations to fulfill the profession consciously, the items checked by those from Turkey and Estonia are as follows in order of priority: sociology, social psychology and psychology. For the participants from Latvia, the respective courses are; management, social psychology and sociology.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the internal and external training practices, the duration in Turkey is rather shorter than those in Latvia and Estonia. It can be inferred that it results from the unsatisfactory co-operation between the sector and the academic world. As for the period of being abroad, the academics from Turkey have usually been abroad for 1 month or less to teach, have education or participate in conferences. The academics from Estonia have usually been abroad for 2-3 months and 3.5-6 months to teach as well as continue the public relations studies that were started in their country. Meanwhile, those from Latvia

have been abroad between 9.5-12 months most and 2-3 months to teach, participate in international scientific project and continue the public relations studies that were started in their country. Consequently, the academics who have been abroad to teach and continue the public relations studies that were started in their countries are mostly from Estonia and Latvia.

Public relations is considered as a profession most in Turkey, then Latvia and Estonia. When the reasons for considering public relations as a profession were questioned, the points mentioned in order of importance are; requiring an accumulation of knowledge based on research, having a standard education system, creating a faith for life-long learning, helping improve societies and having ethical values. As for the ratio of assuming the factors above among the respective countries, Estonia is the first, which is followed by Latvia and Turkey. For the three countries, the education that public relations specialist should have for professional competency are as follows according to the order of importance: acquiring education to develop communication projects that will affect work strategies as well as acquiring education to design corporate communication activities as aimed, to provide effective consultancy to the corporate management for communication problems and acquiring education for the evaluation of the results of corporate communication activities.

The ratio of considering public relations as a profession is the highest in Turkey. As a result of necessitating knowledge based on research, public relations is defined as a profession. While the public relations specialists in Turkey have educational expectations towards communication projects and corporate communication activities, the expectations of the specialists in Latvia are around solving the communication problems and providing effective consultancy to the corporate management for communication problems.

For the role definitions of public relations practitioners, the practitioners in Turkey predominantly checked to assist systematically the process of providing solutions to the communication and relationship problems of the management by co-operating with other managers (the role of easing the problem-solving process), the job definition in Latvia and Estonia focused on establishing a two-way communication between an institution and its environment and during this communication process assumes a mediating role by assisting the knowledge exchange (the role of easing communication).

Execution of public relations in the USA and Europe displays a difference according to social structures. According to Verčič and Van Ruler, while the conception of public relations in Europe is defined as the communication for the public and together with the public, the one in the USA is the communication management as well as solution focused on corporations. According to this determination, it can be inferred that a role definition based on American perspective has been adopted in Turkey.

However, as a result of the fact that Turkey is a developing country as well as the structure of the state institutions and bureaucracy are the issues to be improved urgently, the definitions adopted by Estonia and Latvia would be far better for Turkey. The point in

question is a two-way perspective that should be adopted in order to build the culture policy necessary for Turkey. Cultural structures of societies (adopted views, values etc.) influence the cultural structures, communication strategies and roles of the organizations in those societies.

As for the significance level of the roles of public relations practitioners, the participants seem to have given utmost importance to having a voice in the strategic decision-making process of the management and secondly to serving to the interest of target groups along with the interests of institutions. In addition to these, assuming a gate keeping role for informing the target groups about the communication policies of institutions in a transparent, clearly defined and comprehensible way is at the bottom. Public relations practitioners usually are in the dominant coalition and having a both public and mass oriented perspective, display a development process focused on governance.

While the respondents from Turkey appears to have been in favor of an asymmetric communication model along with a pragmatic and defensive role by checking assuming the protection role against the groups that may prevent the benefits of a corporation in the public, Latvia again assumes an asymmetric communication style along with the lawyer role by checking being the supporter of the discourse of the company that is given service and persuading the public accordingly. Nevertheless, Turkey seems to have assumed a rather symmetric communication style according to the ratio of agreeing with the role of developing dialogue between the company it is serving and the public.

There are also some discordant points with regard to the views pertaining to public relations practices in Turkey and the European countries, which results from the differences in cultural backgrounds of public relations practitioners. In accordance with these findings, public relations either seen as a way of communication established for the public as in European perspective or the persuasion of the target groups to realize the objectives of corporations as in Turkey, the communication model is asymmetric in both sides.

An analysis towards the strategically planned activities for the co-ordination of academics has shown that activity management is seen as the most important in all three countries. The respondents from Turkey have given secondary importance to brand management and those from Latvia, to crisis communication. This situation indicates that particularly the operational process, then strategy and research have given importance in the respective countries. In fact, an ideal public relations execution process is successively research, strategy and operation.

It has been observed that the execution area as well as the means of public relations is gradually developing in Turkey. In the other countries where strategy prone practices take place, the respective areas and means are used more frequently.

As for the areas that public relations studies need most, it has been determined that the political parties and non-governmental organizations in Turkey are in need of development with respect to public relations studies. It has also been observed that these organizations rather focus on the media, so the other areas are somehow lack of inte-

rest. The argument that public diplomacy practices in Turkey are superficial is verified by other studies as well.

While the communication faculties in Latvia and Turkey focus on practice with respect to the models to train public relations professionals in universities, those in Estonia give significance to theoretical education.

Furthermore, regarding the qualifications of the instructors of public relations education, the respondent from Turkey and Estonia have mentioned having a satisfactory level of foreign language and also having national and international publications, on the other hand, the respondents from Latvia have rather considered having work experience in private sector related to the field of expertise more important. This result supports the finding that the communication faculties both in Turkey and Latvia give weight to practice.

As a response to the question about the courses that should be taught to perform the profession consciously, the respondents from Turkey and Estonia have mentioned the following according to the order of importance: sociology, social psychology and psychology. For those from Latvia, these courses are; management, social psychology and psychology. There is a lack of courses with respect to management and the graduates of public relations departments seem to be incapable of drawing up a budget.

As for the public relations education in Turkey, the expression that the courses in public relations should equally include theory and application seems to be given the highest importance with the ratio of 41%. From the point of the sum of the positive values, the expressions; at the core of the professional culture are the practitioners themselves as well as their life worlds; social structure and practices influence the structure of the profession and public relations education should be reflected on the professional function of public relations appear to be given significance. The expression; the courses in public relations should be weighted in theory has been regarded as the area which needs improvement most; thus, the activities in the respective area should be given more importance.

As for the views of the Latvian respondents about the public relations education, working area is not limited to the country borders and having creativity uniting application and theory have been considered equally important. Nonetheless, the ratio of being totally agree with the expression: working area is not limited to the country borders is much higher than the other criteria.

The role definitions of public relations practitioners and the working areas of public relations agencies are compared on the basis of Turkey, the roles of practitioner are generally expert prescriber, communication technician and media relations. The consequences of this situation might be the differences labor policies of the institutions that public relations practitioners work in, wide or narrow visions of CEOs and differences in institutional cultures. Likewise in Latvia, the activities in crisis management, issue management, marketing and corporate and brand image are held with regard to the communication

technician role. It is observed that this role limits the power of public relations practitioners and degrade them to a passive position. Meanwhile in Estonia, all public relations practices except crisis management are carried out with expert prescriber role and all practices regarding the relations with the media are performed with communication facilitator role. Hence, it can be inferred that the public relations practitioners in Estonia are attributed power and confidence.

The expert training model in Turkey, which is usually based on theoretical knowledge and implemented by creating practice opportunities for students related to their fields, has assumed the problem solving process facilitator role that systematically contributes to the solution development process to define and solve the corporate communication and relation problems of the management by co-operating with other administrators. Similarly, it is noticed that again the problem solving process facilitator role has been assumed with respect to the approach that theoretical and applied knowledge is built on the existing knowledge of students. Hence, an educational policy encouraging the students in public relations departments to take part in the dominant coalition when they graduate seems to be pursued.

As for training public relations professionals in Latvia, the reflection model indicating that theoretical and applied knowledge is built on the existing knowledge of students is used and this model is administered in the context of communication facilitator.

While the reflection model is mainly applied in Estonia, communication facilitator and communication technician roles are equally used.

With regard to communication technician and communication facilitator roles in Turkey, the research dimension (political researches towards the sector or the critical, societal and intellectual researches) appears to be in the foreground. Here, the problem solving process facilitator and media relations roles are related to the educational dimension (the purpose of communication education is to train the professionals to be employed).

In the context of communication technician and problem solving process facilitator roles in Latvia, the educational dimension is highlighted. At this point, for both Turkey and Latvia, the importance of creating trained and skilled manpower to be employed operationally in the sector can be noticed conspicuously. Media relations role; on the other hand, is rather related to the educational dimension (apart from professional activities, aiming to make the students media citizens).

In Estonia, communication facilitator, problem solving process facilitator and expert prescriber roles are assumed in the educational dimension. The professionals to be employed for the sector are trained with regard to these roles.

Roles define a collection of activities people routinely do (Baskin et al., 1997: 63). As the roles of public relations practitioners determine the limits of their responsibilities and authorities along with what is expected from them, these roles also indicate to what extent they will be a part of the decision-making process. Taking part in this process gives the practitioners a role to draw the road map of a corporation. Furthermore, as far as

the role difference between managers and technician is concerned, against the public relations technicians who are in the position of inactive pawns and whose course of action is determined by senior managers, there are powerful public relations managers who voice themselves, shape the mental maps of administrators and consequently play serious roles in determining the destination of a company. Public relations managers have a voice in determining the operational areas of corporations. If public relations practitioners are included in the "think tank" formed within corporations, there will be high probability of success as they will provide important knowledge about the time and direction of the moves. Thus, limited or high power of public relations practitioners obviously affects the dimensions of corporate power (Akım, 2010: 118-119).

Managers make policy decisions. They are held accountable for public relations program outcomes. Managers view themselves and are viewed by others in the organization as communication and public relations experts. They easify communication between management and publics and guide management throughout what practitioners describe as a "rational problem-solving process" (Dozier, 1992: 333). Communication technicians don't make organizational decisions. Their main role is to prepare communications that help execute the public relations policies created by others. Communication technicians don't do research to plan or evaluate their work (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 91; Guth & Marsh, 2003: 43).

As indicated in "Public Relations in the 21st Century Report", either in a private company, in a consultancy agency, in a non-governmental organization or in a government institution, having numerous responsibilities necessitating us to comprehend various issues in public relations career simply displays the importance of undergraduate education.

In her article, "Changing Work Ethics and Public Relations Paradigms", Steyn has pointed out that just few of the public relations practitioners in Turkey play the "public relations strategist role" and this situation does not contribute to the development of social (enterprise) strategy as well as the fulfillment of the designated objective. The style of public relations activities of institutions is determined by the differentiating expectations and values of both activist groups and stakeholders. Transformation of the social and economic structures that the institutions are in unavoidably brings along some differences in practice. Hence, the cultural structure of public relations also undergoes a transformation. Regarding the different approaches adopted by institutions (functional, semantic and postmodern), the aim and function of public relations re-define themselves.

All these approaches have different views towards the internal and external target groups according to the perspectives of either the mass or the public. Such a perspective of a company is reflected in the function and quality of public relations practices. Therefore, the role that a business or institution has assumed in a society influences the public relations role and culture of that institution.

As for the internal and external training practices in this study, the periods for the respective activities are shorter than those in Latvia and Estonia, which may have resulted from insufficient co-operation between the academic world and the sector. At this point,

the behavioral dimension of public relations identity is put forth.

According to Wright and Stacks having discussed that the perfection of public relations education in the USA stems from the qualifications of the academics in public relations departments rather than the universities themselves, draw attention to the importance of the issue.

In Turkey and Estonia, having a sufficient level of foreign language and having national and international publications related to the field have been stressed, while in Latvia, having work experience in private sector related to the field of expertise and having a sufficient level of foreign language have been highlighted. This situation displays the behavior and philosophy intrinsic to the identity of public relations.

Public relations is considered as a profession primarily Turkey as well as the other countries within the scope of this study, which again indicates the behavior and philosophy dimension pertaining to the identity of public relations.

The aim of communication education in Turkey is to train more technicians and mediator for the public relations sector by taking the educational dimension as a basis, which defines the training of the professionals to be employed. Likewise, in Latvia, both technicians and strategists are trained by taking the educational dimension again as a basis. Such an implementation denotes the cultural dimension of public relations identity.

According to Botan, traditional approaches in public relations instrumentalize the publics to meet the organizational policy or marketing requirements by degrading them to a secondary position. Nevertheless, dialogue raises the publics to an equal level with organizations. Therefore, the change in accordance with the communication realized within the context of public relations, which depends on mutual relations and dialogue, reflects a transformation in line with integrative – collective formation approach.

In fact, what determines the differences among the perspectives towards functional and uniting approach is their attitudes towards the publics. Here, axiological differences can be seen clearly. Kent and Taylor (2004) later explained the concept of dialogue in detail as a theoretical basis for ethical public relations challenging Grunig's symmetric public relations theory. Especially now, public relations might be in the position to adapt the theories that are out of the field to health communication and political communication. Nonetheless, it currently functions as an applied communication model among areas of specialization (Botan & Taylor, 2004: 653).

Historical explanations towards public relations demonstrate how academics understand public relations and with which philosophical view they perceive it. As L'Etang pointed out, historical explanations are not impartial or neutral; they carry ideological and ethical elements. For instance, Pieczka states that functional logic and system theory are the antecedents of current public relations theory. These antecedents have not only been influenced by the functional history of public relations but also influenced this history (Vos, 2011: 120).

The culture of public relations practitioners is defined as follows: the life world of practitioners – holistic views, concepts, values and hypotheses related to the profession- collectively refer to the habitus concept. Moreover, their professional experiences as well as the identities guiding their behavior are incorporated into the public relations culture. These factors disperse with wider social and cultural influences through socialization. Professional practices comprising actions will systematically create a difference in the world (Hodges, 2006: 85).

Values are the abstract and symbolic (cultural) forms of mentioning the central problems intrinsic to institutions. Normative concepts are shaped in the context of concrete problems. Actors have to make their choices according to real options. As a result, normative standards or value standards arise. Institutionalization is the embodiment of the respective standards as an element existing at the core of an actor's role.

REFERENCES

Akım, F. (2010). *Halkla İlişkilerde Stratejik Karar Halkla İlişkiler Uygulayıcılarının Rolleri.* İstanbul: Der'in Yayınları.

Baskin, O., Aranoff, C. & Lattimore, D. (1997). *Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Botan, C. H. & Taylor, M. (2004). Public Relations: State of the Field. *Journal of Communication*, *54*(4), 645-661.

Dozier, D., M. (1992). The Organizational Roles of Communications and Public Relations Practitioners, In J. E. Grunig (Ed.), *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (pp. 327-355). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Graceroodhouse. (2011, October 13). Corporate Communications International: Trends and Practices Study 2011. Retreived from http://gradbaruchian.com/2011/10/13/corporate-communications-international-trends-and-practices-study-2011/

Grunig, J., E. & Hunt, T. (1984). *Managing Public Relations*. USA: Thomson Learning.

Guth, D. W. & Marsh, C. (2003). *Public Relations: A Values-Driven Approach*. USA: Pearson Education, Inc.

Hodges, C. (2006). PRP Culture: A Framework for Exploring Public Relations Practitioners as Cultural Intermediaries. *Journal of Communication Management, 10*(1), 80-93.

Ihlen, Ø. (2007). Building on Bourdieu: A sociological grasp of public relations. *Public Relations Review*, *33*(3), 269-274.

Kent, M. L. & Taylor, M. (2002). Toward a Dialogic Theory of Public Relations. *Public Relations Review*, 28, 21-37.

Mengü, S. (2012). *Halkla İlişkiler Bir Kültür Politikası*. Konya: Eğitim Kitabevi.

Verčič, D., Van Ruler, B., Bütschi, G., Flodin, B. (2001). On the Definition of Public Relations: A European View. *Public Relations Review*, 27, 373-387.

Vos, T. P. (2011). Explaining the Origins of Public Relations: Logics of Historical Explanation. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, *23*(2), 119-140.