How the theory of information and journalism ethics contributes to the ethics of public relations: six principles from the dialogue between codes of ethics and Luka Brajnović’s legacy

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ABSTRACT

The ethics of public relations (PR), irrespective of how many different theoretical and practical approaches have contributed to it, still has a gap to fill concerning the role of human person. This study attempts to fill this gap by introducing into PR theory the intellectual legacy of Brajnović (1919–2001), a pioneer of both journalistic ethics and information theory. The main goal of the study is to arrive at the formulation of the principles that could guide PR, based on the human dignity of each person engaged in PR communication. This goal is reached by applying the method of content analysis to two sources: (1) to 13 ethical codes that were designed as guidelines for members of 18 PR associations, both national and international, from the European Union and the United States of America; and (2) to a sample of texts from Brajnović’s written legacy. As the result, six principles of PR ethics emerge: (1) Truthfulness, (2) Transparency, (3) Professional Integrity, (4) Professional Competence, (5) Loyalty, and (6) Social Responsibility. The conducted research has shown that the concepts of human person and information, as they are explicated in Brajnović’s theoretical work, can be applied to ethics of PR.

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Introduction

Contemporary public relations are a recognized profession, because they have developed clear and limited cognitive, normative and symbolic mechanisms (Noordegraaf 2011, 470). Contemporary public relations are a topic of numerous university studies around the world and thousands of practitioners have been educated on PR literature (that is, its cognitive mechanism). In addition, there are numerous national and international PR associations whose conduct is regulated by ethical codes (normative mechanism). Public relations also have their own rituals, heroes, ideals and missions.
(symbolic mechanism). To be involved in the field of public relations for a period of more than ten years, as the author of this article was, firstly as a manager of the PR office at the biggest Croatian archdiocese, and then as a university teacher, is a sufficiently rich experience to confirm the lively interaction of these three mechanisms: the cognitive, the normative and the symbolic. However, the daily work and the regular exposure to students’ questions and doubts convinced me that, in every profession, the ultimate ‘to be or not to be’ questions are the ethical ones.

Public relations still seek to find theoretical answers and practical responses to difficult ethical issues, and there is the general impression that the right answers are not to be found in the contemporary life of the profession (Grunig 2014). Thus, it is no wonder that scholars ever more often turn to ‘older’ authors and practitioners who are beyond the focus of current PR professionals. This rising interest especially concerns the authors who have recognized the value of the dignity of human person as central to public relations.1 One such scholar, who has earned a special place in the history of information and communication sciences primarily as a professor of journalism and journalist ethicist in the Spanish-speaking world,2 is Luka Brajnović (1919–2001).

What does Luka Brajnović – as one of the first European scholars to publish a handbook on journalism ethics (Lesniczak 2010, 26) – have to do with ethical codes of regulating contemporary public relations?

I am convinced that the introduction of Brajnović’s concepts and theories into the field of ethics of public relations could be a potentially productive step, if for no other reason than because of his treatment of public relations as a profession that is not subordinated to journalism or marketing; instead he gave greater authority to all these professions by placing them in the field of information sciences. He arrived at this view after dedicating more than a decade of his theoretical work to deontology of journalism which has since gradually evolved into a theory of information. In other words, Brajnović subordinated journalism, advertising, propaganda,3 and public relations to the imperative of transmitting true information. This is why his theoretical approach has significant implications for ethics of public relations.

To answer the research question from the title of this paper, how the theory of information and journalism ethics contributes to the ethics of public relations, I would like to initiate a dialogue between the written legacy of Luka Brajnović from the second half of 20th century, and the codes of ethics issued by public relations associations from the 21st century. My purpose is to show how ethics of public relations can be improved by fully acknowledging the concept of dignity of the human person. In what follows, I will firstly introduce Luka Brajnović as a professor and scholar, emphasizing his contribution to the field communication science. I will then give a brief overview of Brajnović’s theory of information and its reception. In the third part, I will explicate the methodology of the research, i.e. the content analyses of selected ethical codes and a sample from Brajnović’s written works, respectively. In the fourth part, I will present and discuss the results of the content analysis in the form of six ethical principles. In conclusion, some proposals concerning my main research question will be offered.
Notes on Brajnović’s life and significance

To arrive at Brajnović’s concept of information and to understand the roots of its development, it could be useful to mention at least a few key biographical notes about circumstances that may have contributed to it: personal and professional suffering under three different regimes, as well as a professional career as a writer, journalist, editor, scholar and professor.

Luka Brajnović was born in 1919 in the coastal town of Kotor (today belonging to the state of Montenegro). Being of Croatian ethnical origin, he studied in Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, where he worked as journalist, writer and critic. Much can be said about his personal and professional suffering under the pressure of the fascist and Nazi regimes during the Second World War, and of the communist regime immediately after the war. Due to the latter pressures, he emigrated from Croatia, firstly to Italy and then to Spain. In Spain, he participated in the translation and publication of the Bible into the Croatian language. In Spain, he was one of the founders of the School of Journalism at the University of Navarre in Pamplona, wrote important contributions to the history of literature, and became famous for his column ‘Foreign Bulletin’, in the daily newspaper Diario de Navarra. His work as a scholar and professor became known even outside of the borders of Spain. He was awarded an international prize for media ethics (at the University of Navarre) that bears his name to the present day. His family was with him when he passed away in 2001 in Pamplona (Kolić Stanić 2016, 2018a).

The University of Navarre on its website has placed him among the group of ‘giants’ who provided ‘relevant and fruitful communication research channels throughout the world’, and who ‘worked so that communication was a university discipline and achieved an academic recognition that was at the height of what history had already given it’.4

Theory of information and public relations

According to Brajnović (1979a, 37), information has an ethical dimension because information that is not true is not real information. This postulate is often quoted and used (Galdón López 1992; González Gaitano 2001; Fernández Areal 1992; Tamayo De Serrano 1992) and remains one of the most original parts of Brajnović’s legacy, although some other authors have reached the same conclusion, especially from the perspective of semiotics (Bettetini and Fumagalli 1998).

Brajnović’s book El ámbito científico de la información (The scientific field of information) published in 1979a is a ‘work of epistemology of information that will not fade’ (González Gaitano 2017). In this work, Brajnović develops his own information theory as part of his wider ambition to outline the foundations of information science. For this enterprise, Brajnović chooses to follow, as he says, an ontological and teleological path, in order to demonstrate that information is a scientific subject in itself and for itself (1979a, 17). This approach is motivated primarily by the need to clarify the basic terms to avoid potential misunderstandings, starting from the most basic one – the term information itself (1979a, 22). So, as his first and foremost task he attempts to define and delimit information as a phenomenon in its own right.
To this purpose, Brajnović adopts Aristotle’s doctrine of the four causes (1967, 24–31; 1979a, 25–31) distinguishing four aspects of information: (1) informational truth (the material cause), (2) communicability and clarity of information (the formal cause), (3) understanding by the recipient (the efficient cause), and (4) interpersonal relationship between the informant and the informed with the aim of increasing human progress understood as cultural improvement (the final cause).

Applying this theory to public relations and journalism, Brajnović argues that ‘many times journalism is confused with information, and advertising with propaganda and public relations, precisely because the meaning of information is confused’ (1979a, 27). He excludes agitation, imagination and lies from his concept of information; in fact, he maintains that ‘journalism, advertising, propaganda and public relations are informational areas that complement each other, since through their messages they provide the recipient with knowledge of facts, events, products, services, ideas and of concrete human relations’ (1979a, 26). He refers to these four areas as the ‘informational four-color process’ (1967, 32–5), without implying that they exhaust the whole information area, or that they are exclusively informational in character; in fact, they can also take extra-informative characteristics such as beauty.

Journalism, advertising, public relations and propaganda have different purposes, but share the same basic purpose – to inform; therefore, they all require – to a greater or a lesser degree – the means of social communication (Brajnović 1978, 321–22).

The aims of public relations, according to Brajnović (1978, 338; 1967, 34), are neither commercial nor ideological but simply social, because they tend to create, increase and maintain the contacts and relations of an organization with its public through sincere and reciprocal information. Otherwise, they are no more than sheer propaganda or unethical advertising. Therefore, if public relations lose their sincerity and informative reciprocity, they can hardly be considered as such. The purpose of public relations is therefore constituted by the relationships of certain people with an internal or external (e.g. employees or consumers), specialized (e.g. journalists) or general public, in order to be able to adapt to their environment for the good of the society (1978, 338).

Invoking Brajnović’s distinction between communication and information, González Gaitano explains the difference between their deontology (or ethics). The ethics of communication should include the analysis of human communication in general, while the professional ethics of information is concerned ‘only with that professional activity that refers to information that is published through the media of social communication’ (1992, 388–389). Defining the scope of information ethics, the same author argues, together with Brajnović, that journalist ethics should not be concerned with all kinds of information transmitted by the media since, for example, public relations and advertising use the same media for sharing information. In this way, González Gaitano maintains that information sharing can take the form of either journalism, public relations, advertising, or propaganda and that, therefore, the ethics of information refers to all these types of information (1992, 388–389). For our purposes, it suffices to say that various types of information are shared through various means of social communication: journalism, public relations, advertising or propaganda.
'First the human person, and then the society!' In his ethical thought, Brajnović establishes a dialogue with several philosophical theories and traditions by focusing on the concept of the human person, which he sees as more important than the concept of society. He offers the following definition of the human person:

an individual being, rational and free, singular in itself and separate from others, subject of his action and subject of the duties and rights defined by natural law and by just human laws; it is the reflection of the image of God and inviolably possesses human dignity, the right to respect, life, freedom, work and participation in redemption. (Brajnović, 1969, 128)

In the context of positioning the value of the human person within the public relations theory, an important anthropological contribution came from Parackal (2012), who highlights the importance of ethical relationships and dialogue for delineating an integral vision of the discipline. He defines public relations as ‘inherently human practice because it is a relationship management between the organization and its publics, constituted of human persons’ (2012, 3). For Parackal, the foremost ethical imperative is the respect for the person. This imperative should be complemented by other duties – truthfulness, dialogic communication as public relations practice, authenticity of the organization and the practitioner, social responsibility. Simplifying, the fulcrum of Parackal’s anthropological approach to public relations can be summarized as follows (141): ‘The organization and its publics should be considered as a community of persons who are endowed with incomparable worth and inalienable dignity. Consequently, they should be treated with due respect.’

There are other definitions of public relations that are also motivated by an anthropological approach, i.e. by taking the concept of human person as their starting point. Thus, stable quality relationships, according to La Porte (2009, 214), constitute the purpose of institutional communication:

Although the type of relationship is often only commercial, it does not seem appropriate to consider the public of a company exclusively as a ‘consumer’, because people are not just subjects who buy and sell things (…) but human beings, with all the profound implications of this term.

The same conceptual foundation of institutional communication can also be recognized in the idea of media relations as presented by Carroggio, Mastroianni and Gagliardi (2012, 52), who in their personalistic model focus on the ‘dignity that makes it [viz. the human person] the subject of the right to information and truth’.

Although most PR theories have generally fulfilled their theoretical purpose, they have left a considerable gap considering the anthropological dimension of public relations (Parackal 2012). For this reason, it is critical to identify the models that are based on the concept of the human person, such as the personalistic model of Carroggio et al. or the anthropological model of Parackal. Arguably, such models have their precursor in Brajnović’s theory of ethics and information (Brajnović, 1967, 1969, 1970, 1978, 1979a, 1979b, 1991).

It is the purpose of the following sections, using the method of content analysis applied to both contemporary ethical codes and selected excerpts from Brajnović’s work, to explicate the principles and duties that could guide public relations.
Methodology

The main challenge of my study can be summarized by the following question: How can Brajnović’s theory of journalism ethics, which he has elaborated in detail, be applied to the ethics of public relations? If Brajnović considered that journalism, propaganda, advertising and public relations are rooted in the field of information, then, I presumed, it should be possible to reach ethical principles of public relations from the principles of journalism.

Methodologically, my research was conducted through four steps. In the first step, I extracted ethical principles from Brajnović’s writings on journalism ethics. Secondly, I extracted ethical principles from ethical codes of various associations in the field of public relations, although a minority of the codes were designed according to ethical principles. Thirdly, I identified the principles that are common to Brajnović’s works and the selected ethical codes. With respect to the list of principles thus obtained, I have designed categories and subcategories for my research matrix. The fourth step was to conduct a content analysis of the two samples: a sample of ethical codes and a sample of Brajnović’s works on journalism ethics. I then used the results of this analysis to derive ethical principles of public relations.

The first sample of my analysis (Table 1) contains 13 ethical codes regulating the conduct of members of 18 national and international associations from the following Western countries: Austria, Croatia, Germany, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States of America; and two codes of international associations, i.e. Global Alliance and ICCO. The research also included PR-Ethik Rat and DRPR – public relations councils for ethical issues superior to national associations in Austria and Germany. What all these associations have in common is their strategic goal to advance ethical conduct, regardless of whether this goal is advanced at a declarative, promotional or operational level (Kolić Stanić 2018b, 2018c, 2019; Kolić Stanić and Barišić 2019). So, ethical codes of these professional associations can be considered as actual normative standards of the profession, since they purport to express the core values of public relations as a specific form of communication (Kim and Ki 2014; Taylor and Yang 2015; Bowen 2007).

The second sample of my analysis consists of a sample from Brajnović’s theoretical work on journalism ethics Deontologia Periodistica [Journalism Deontology] (1978). The method applied to both samples was content analysis (Krippendorff 1980). For the purpose of the research, the final matrix for the content analyses included 6 basic categories: Truth, Transparency, Professional Integrity, Professional Competence, Loyalty and Social Responsibility (Kolić Stanić 2018a). These categories were distributed in 25 sub-categories (Table 2). The categories differ from categories or principles that have resulted from other studies of PR ethical codes (e.g. Kim and Ki 2014) or from studies that were designed to compare codes of ethics in public relations and journalism, respectively (Yang, Taylor, and Saffer 2016). However, it should be stressed that these categories are the result of a ‘research dialogue’ between one author’s work (Brajnović’s) and 13 different codes, so the primary aim was not to compare the obtained results with the results of other studies. The conducted analysis reveals not only what the various codes of PR associations have in common, but also what makes them different with respect to ethical requirements. Exactly between these similarities...
and differences a space has been opened for ethical concepts and principles introduced by Brajnović and thus the possibility of improvement of standards and norms regulating the field of public relations.

Although consulting the work of Luka Brajnović on journalism ethics had the main purpose of extracting the categories necessary for the analysis of contemporary ethical codes, I also wanted to read Brajnović’s texts with the eye of a PR professional and see what fruits an experimental dialogue between his theories and contemporary PR ethical codes could bring. I have assumed that, in this sense, we could arrive at new valuable knowledge, so I dare say that the rereading of Brajnović’s works has overcome in many elements most of the initial expectations.

**Results**

In the discussion of the results of the conducted content analysis, I will consider only ethical principles and duties that can be derived from these principles, i.e. leave out categories and subcategories. My goal is to propose principles and duties for PR professionals based on ethical concepts and theories of Luka Brajnović, as well as on his concept

### Table 1. Sample of analyzed ethical codes.

| Analysed code | Country  | Association          | Full name of the association                                                                 |
|---------------|----------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| PRVA          | Austria  | PRVA VIKOM OPR PR-ETHIK-RAT* | Public Relations Association Austria (Public Relations Verband Austria)                        |
|               |          |                      | Association for Integrated Communication (Verband für integrierte Kommunikation)               |
|               |          |                      | Austrian PR Quality Seal (Österreichisches PR-Gütezeichen)                                       |
|               |          |                      | Public Relations Ethic Council Austria (Österreichische Ethik-Rat für Public Relations)         |
| CPRA          | Croatia  | CPRA                 | Croatian Public Relations Association (Hrvatska udruga za odnose s javnošću)                  |
| DRPR          | Germany  | DPRG GPRA DeGePol DRPR* | German Public Relations Society (Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft)                        |
|               |          |                      | German Federal Association of Spokespersons (Bundesverband deutscher Pressesprecher)          |
|               |          |                      | Society of Public Relations Agencies (Gesellschaft Public Relations Agenturen)                |
|               |          |                      | German Association of Political Consultants (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Politikberatung)       |
|               |          |                      | German PR Council (Deutscher Rat für Public Relations)                                        |
| FERPI         | Italy    | FERPI                | Italian Public Relations Federation (Federaione Relazioni PUBBLICHE ITALIANA)                  |
| ASSOREL       | Italy    | Assorel              | Association of Communication and Public Relations companies (Associazione imprese di comunicazione e relazioni pubbliche) |
| PRCA          | UK       | PRCA                 | Public Relations Consultants Association                                                       |
| CIPR          | UK       | CIPR                 | Chartered Institute of Public Relations                                                       |
| DIRCOM        | Spain    | Dircom               | Association of Communication Managers (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación)             |
| ADECEC        | Spain    | ADECEC               | Association of Communication and Public Relations Consultancy Companies (Asociación de Empresas Consultoras en Relaciones Públicas y Comunicación) |
| PRSA          | USA      | PRSA                 | Public Relations Society of America                                                            |
| PR COUNCIL    | USA      | PR Council           | Public Relations Council                                                                        |
| GA            | International | GA   | Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management                          |
| ICCO          | International | ICCO | International Communications Consultancy Organization                                         |

*PR-ETHIK-RAT and DRPR are public relations councils for ethical issues superior to national associations in Austria and Germany.*
### Table 2. The matrix for content analysis.

| Aristotle’s causes | Material cause | Formal cause | Efficient cause | Final cause |
|-------------------|----------------|--------------|-----------------|-------------|
| Ethical principles of public relations | I. Truth | II. Transparency | III. Professional integrity | IV. Professional competence | V. Loyalty | VI. Social responsibility |
| Subcategories | | | | | |
| Always respect the truth (1) | Conflict of interest (non-financial) (8) | Honesty (10) | Professional competence in general (12) | Loyalty (18) | Social responsibility/common good (20) |
| Never lie (2) | Financial transparency (9) | Integrity (11) | Proper education (13) | Confidentiality (19) | Respect for the human person/human rights (21) |
| Don’t mislead the public (3) | | | Development of the necessary practical skills (14) | | Respect for democracy (22) |
| Avoid exaggeration (4) | | | Continuous improvement (15) | | Respect for laws (23) |
| Offer the information context: explain and interpret (5) | | | Professional prestige (16) | | Respect for culture (24) |
| Accuracy of information (6) | | | Keeping the commitments made (17) | | Sanctions by associations (25) |
| Duty to rectify (7) | | | | | |
of information. Since, according to Brajnović, truth is at the heart of information, the principle of truthfulness is what makes theory of information relevant to ethics.

The order of exposition of the principles is determined by Brajnović’s doctrine of four causes of information (Brajnović, 1979a, 57–58). I will therefore begin with informational truth as the material cause and conclude with cultural enrichment as the final cause.

**First principle: truthfulness of information**

The Principle of Truthfulness of Information includes the following duties: respecting the truth, avoiding lying, not misleading the public, avoiding exaggeration, explaining and interpreting information, offering accurate information, and, finally, the duty of rectification.

The results of my analysis are quite surprising: it turns out that there are six codes (PRVA, CPRA, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, CIPR, ICCO) that make no mention of truth or truthfulness. The PRSA and Dircom codes mention truth as a necessary virtue for life of a society, and the German code (DRPR code) dedicates an entire section to the principle of truthfulness, recognizing it as fundamental for PR professionals.

Such results are worrying, since the analyzed codes regulate the conduct within a profession that deals with information, and informational truth, according to Brajnović (1979a), is the material cause of information. Or, to put it more directly, when the truth is not communicated, the information does not in fact exist (37, 52, 73, 76). This ontological principle applies not only to journalistic information, but to any kind of information.

According to PRCA code, PR professionals ‘have a positive duty at all times to respect the truth’ (PRCA code: 2017). However, none of the examined codes explicitly mentions the duty of avoiding lies, and in most of them the prohibition against propagating false information is absent (CPRA, Assorel, CIPR, Dircom, PRSA, GA and ICCO).

On this point Brajnović (1978) is more than clear: in all occasions, without fear and without any kind of falsification, one is obliged to tell the truth (241–242); false, invented or unverified information is to be avoided at all costs because it constitutes a moral evil, sometimes even a moral crime (163).

**Explaining and interpreting**

The code that faces the problem of exaggerated declarations and comments is the PRCA code: it defines it as contrary to the values of accuracy and truth. Brajnović (1978) is also precise on this point: the language used must be clear so the message conveyed can be easily understood by its recipient (118). Therefore, he argues, any stylistic exhibition could cause damage to the understanding process and thus become a serious ethical defect, since exaggeration means moving away from the truth (145). A sensational type of journalism, for instance, typically leans on exaggerations and thus violates the principle of truthfulness. Every kind of sensationalism is problematic but extreme sensationalism (which can exalt violence, hatred, perversion, prostitution,
morbidity and other types of sociopathological behavior) is ethically illicit (Brajnović 1978, 150).

While most of the analyzed codes (PRVA, CPRA, FERPI, PRCA, CIPR, ADECEC, PRSA, PR Council, GA e ICCO) do not explicitly cite the duty to explain and interpret information, almost half of them (CPRA, FERPI, PRSA, PR Council, GA, ICCO) require objective communication from PR professionals. As Brajnović (1978) is keen to emphasize, the one who informs must act as a reliable bridge between the truth and the public: he or she is obliged to convey the truth (115). In my opinion, if a journalist has the duty to explain and interpret facts, and not to hide behind informative neutralism (118), this duty should be even more binding for PR professionals who are called to clearly state their own position to the public and not to conceal it under the pretense of alleged objectivity.

**Accuracy of information**

According to most of the codes (CPRA, PRCA, CIPR, PRSA, PR Council, GA, ICCO), a PR professional has a duty to provide accurate information. Among them, the PRSA code is the most comprehensive in this regard. The accuracy of information is often linked to truth and honesty, for example in GA and in PRSA codes. Brajnović (1978, 156) claims that violation of accuracy damages the integrity of information and, therefore, can never be justifiable whatever the cause (e.g. laziness, distraction or fatigue). According to him, even urgency or imperfection of technology cannot be a good excuse for inaccuracy of information because a professional must foresee such circumstances (Brajnović 1978, 162).

Furthermore, according to Brajnović (1978, 160–162), there is also a possibility of inaccuracy of voluntarily conveyed information, i.e. inaccuracy that is caused by one's taste, prejudices or dislikes. This kind of violation of norms of ethical communication applies to those situations in which information is not completely falsified but reconstructed according to one's own needs or one's intellectual capacity. In such situations, Brajnović claims, we are not dealing with information but with distortions of information which can be harmful and unethical. Finally, if an information is published despite the lack of supportive data – e.g. due to its high degree of relevancy at the time of publication – its incompleteness must be clearly stated.

In conclusion, the results of the analysis show that most of the examined codes lack explicit references to the duty of rectifying incorrect information; in fact, only the two American codes (the PRSA and PR Council) mention the duty of correcting erroneous information and of doing this promptly. On this point too, Brajnović (1978) has a clear position: ‘You can always make mistakes, but you must always correct them!’ (255). He thus reminds us that being in the service of truth and justice also means admitting the error and correcting it as soon as possible. It should therefore be taken for granted, according to Brajnović, that slandering, defaming or accusing without substantial evidence are acts against reputation and dignity and therefore require not only a correction but also compensation for possible damages.
**Second principle: transparency**

Transparency as an ethical principle of public relations implies four duties: (1) respecting the transparency of information; (2) offering and maintaining transparent results; (3) declaring any conflict of interest (financial or other); and (4) not offering/accepting gifts that can put journalists, politicians or other professionals involved in sharing information in a dependent position, i.e. in a position of an 'employee'.

**Non-transparent information is illicit and unjust**

The vast majority of the analyzed codes mention both the duty of declaring the origin of information in a transparent way (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, CIPR, Dircom, ADECEC, PRSA, PR Council, ICCO) and the prohibition of deceiving the public (PRVA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, Dircom, ADECEC, PRSA, PR Council, ICCO). This implies that the public can be deceived in two general ways: by the content of information or by the identity of the sender, i.e. by hiding the context. The first case has already been discussed in the section on truthfulness. The second case is a matter of transparency: hiding the informational context is the same as non-transparent communication, which can take various forms – e.g. hiding its source, purpose, sponsors or interest of the client one represents.

The German (DRPR) code is the most comprehensive concerning the cases of content distortion, while the FERPI deals more with cases of concealment of informational context. When discussing such cases, Brajnović (1978) claims that those who are unable to understand love for truth as a whole cannot participate in the moral progress of humankind (255) and that only information that is transparent from an ethical point of view (not concealed, not falsified, non-tendentious and sufficiently explained) can be useful to the public. Whoever violates the duty of transparency violates the right of others to be informed and places limits on human freedom. For this reason, the author views non-transparent information as illicit and unjust (Brajnović 1978, 115–16).

**Respecting the independence of other professions**

The most serious problem in this regard occurs when promises and guarantees are offered compromising the integrity of media or public officer. The PRVA and the Assorel codes clearly state that results that are dependent on a third party (e.g. media or public officer) cannot be guaranteed.

In Brajnović’s writings on journalism ethics I was not able to find explicit mention of the term ‘transparency’, which indicates that transparency could be considered as a specific issue related to public relations. However, the normative declarations of the two mentioned codes (PRVA and Assorel) are in line with Brajnović’s (1978) ethical views, according to which the freedom of journalists and of public officers must be respected, as both have their own dignity as persons and as professionals who carry out activities in the service of the society (92).

The duty to declare any conflict of interest (financial or other) in practicing public relations is explicitly mentioned in almost all analyzed ethical codes (only in GA this term is completely absent). Moreover, several of them even have special sections dedicated to this topic⁵ (e.g. CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, CIPR, PRSA, ICCO), which does not mean that conflict of interest is not also included in other parts of the its texts,
e.g. the ones that deal with independence, integrity or fairness. In most of the codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRSA, PR Council, ICCO), two duties are given special attention: the duty to declare conflict of interest before accepting an assignment, and the duty to be especially cautious when, accepting an assignment with a potential conflict of interest, an explicit consent of the parties involved has been reached. This means that it is not allowable to have hidden interests in representing clients; therefore, the highest possible degree of transparency is required when considering the possibility of representing, for instance, clients who are in competition. The PRSA code emphasizes that avoiding the conflict of interest leads to greater mutual trust, and the ICCO code confirms the primacy of the current customer towards another possible customer if a conflict of interest is found between the two. It is also forbidden to corrupt the independence of media, of legislation and of government offices. In fact, according to Brajnović, corruption becomes an especially dangerous type of anti-social behavior when it affects professionals who deal with information (González Gaitano 2017).

In the analyzed ethical codes, the concept of transparency also entails a duty to declare any financial interest or collaboration and the duty to abstain from offering gifts or favors that put a journalist, politician or other conveyor of information in a dependent position. The Croatian code (CPRA) contains details concerning the value of the gift, referring to the national law. These and other similar cases can be subsumed under the duty of respecting the independence of journalists, politicians, public officer and others.

In the context of transparency of financial interests, it is worth repeating that, according to Brajnović, corruption is a betrayal of the profession (González Gaitano 2017).

Third principle: professional integrity

The principle of integrity of PR professionals implies the following duties: the duty to develop and protect one’s integrity, to carry out professional work honestly, to develop professional virtues where justice is at stake.

Most of the analyzed codes (CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, CIPR, Dircom, PRSA, PR Council, GA, ICCO) make explicit reference to the virtue of integrity. In almost all of them this term refers to professional integrity; only the FERPI code extends its meaning to personal integrity defining it as ‘maintenance of high moral principles and good reputation’ (FERPI code 2017). In Brajnović’s understanding, the basic principle of morality is to do good and avoid evil, and it is the (rightly formed) conscience of a human person (including even a professional) that has the capacity to distinguish good from evil. The moral integrity of a professional, being derived from the dignity of the human person, consists in acting freely in service of truth and society (Brajnović 1978, 92). Those who deny dignity, freedom and other human rights cannot participate in the moral progress of humanity (Brajnović 1978, 255).

The conscientious objection

In the context of professional integrity, it is interesting to mention Brajnović’s opinion about conscientious objection, which can help a professional to protect his or her
moral integrity. The author believes that when a professional agrees to work for an organization, he or she automatically accepts the public posture and orientation of the organization. As to Brajnović’s view on the conscience clause, for him the loyalty to oneself has priority, so the loyalty to the organization one agrees to work for must be minimally compatible with one’s core values, ideas and beliefs. This means that a professional must not undermine the organization from the inside or work against it even if the organization changes its orientation after the contract is signed. If a professional feel unable to continue to be loyal to the organization, the solution is to break the bonds that bind him or her to the institution; otherwise, he or she might become opportunistic or even be tempted to commit a sabotage. (1978, 136, 214). Here we see once again that the professional, for Brajnović, is always a human person endowed with dignity and therefore is always under an obligation to act in coherence with his or her own posture (beliefs, values, principles etc.).

**Professional virtues**

The honesty of a PR professional is an important moral virtue and therefore an indispensable segment of PR codes. In almost all examined codes this virtue is called ‘honesty’ or ‘fairness’ (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, PRCA, CIPR, Dircom, ADECEC, PRSA, PR Council, GA) and many codes dedicate an entire section to it (CPRA, DRPR, CIPR, PRSA, GA). The analysis has shown that honesty is linked to respect for the truth, while the concept of fairness is typically linked to what Brajnović (1978) calls ‘justice’ – a tendency towards equal treatment of humans and, as a necessary condition of any functional society, one of the main social virtues (129). As such, justice is also connected with fundamental rights of a human person: if these rights are violated, an injustice is committed. Consequently, when a person is deprived of true and important information, he or she suffers a kind of injustice.

Concerning professional integrity, Brajnović’s (1978) considers five professional virtues that he takes to be indispensable for anybody involved in information exchange: self-criticism, audacity, temperance, prudence and opinion (191–99). Thanks to the first virtue a person is capable examining one’s own intentions, which is a necessary condition for the other four professional virtues to be developed. That is, besides being self-critical, those involved in information exchange must also be audacious because they work for truth and for freedom. They also need prudence to be good advisers and temperance that restrains them from hurting others without necessity. Finally, sincerity is morally required for free expression of opinions. This kind of approach to professional virtues clearly reflects Brajnović’s strong inclination to the Aristotelian ethical legacy.

**Fourth principle: professional competence**

The following virtues and duties of PR professionals derive from the principle of professional competence: to be well prepared, to be adequately educated, to possess necessary practical skills, to continuously improve oneself, to contribute to the prestige of the profession, and to accept assignments according to one’s competences.
Most of the examined codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, Assorel, PRSA, PR Council, GA) mention professional competence or ability, although not always under the same label or giving it the same degree of significance. For Brajnović (1978, 49, 248) there is no doubt that skills ought to be developed and improved. As to the negative side, he sees professional incapacity as resulting from intellectual impotence and weakness of the will.

I find the results of the analysis regarding professional training somewhat disappointing: only four codes explicitly mention education or study in the context of professional competence (CPRA, DRPR, PRSA, GA) and only two of them (PRSA and GA) recognize its ethical significance, i.e. as a necessary condition for exercising a profession in a morally appropriate way. Brajnović, in contrast, considers education as one of the core professional duties – one ought to prepare oneself for one’s profession by adequate education, study and training.

**Importance of university education**

Early enough, as information society became more developed, Brajnović noticed the importance of university education: for him, speaking and writing skills were not enough; more thorough, systemic knowledge became indispensable for any profession dealing with information – the goal is to use language in such a way to facilitate the recipient’s understanding of the conveyed content (Brajnović 1978, 260, 277). At this point, it is essential to emphasize Brajnović’s devotion to the humanistic educational ideal – it is the formation of the whole person through humanistic education that enables a future professional to develop a broad enough vision of the world to let him or her serve the public in an appropriate way (Brajnović 1978, 258–61).

Unlike education, practical skills are explicitly mentioned in most of the analyzed codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, CIPR, Dircom, PRSA, PR Council, GA). Among those, only three codes (DRPR, PRSA, GA) maintain that training in practical skills are indispensable for ethical conduct. Brajnović (1978) also dedicates much attention to practical skills, such as: practical application of different genres, different languages and different ways of expressing oneself, the development of specializations, the use of different sources of information, and the use of different media (266–318). In each of these ways of exercising one’s profession an ethical dimension can be recognized with respect to the way they are used. Finally, it is important to point out a skill that Brajnović considers as a necessary requirement for the profession: knowing how to work in a team. Interestingly, there is no reference to this ability in the analyzed codes, despite its significance for all PR activities.

As to the virtue of lifelong learning, the analysis reveals that most of the codes (PRVA, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, Dircom, ADECEC, PR Council, ICCO) do not take it into consideration. Only the GA explicitly refers to keeping informed and up to date with one’s professional skills as an ethical requirement of the profession, while PRCA touches on updating one’s knowledge of ethical regulations.

**Constant improvement of ethical education**

Apart from explicitly referring to constant improvement as a professional duty, Brajnović (1978) also stresses the importance of ‘improvement of professional
conscience’ (45–9), which can also be interpreted as improvement of one’s knowledge of professional ethics.

Enhancing professional prestige as a duty of PR professionals is recognized – though under various labels and with various degree of importance – by the vast majority of the analyzed ethical documents (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, CIPR, PRSA, PR Council, GA). The term mostly used to refer to this ethical goal is ‘reputation of the profession’. Five codes (CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, PRCA, CIPR) put ethical conduct in direct relation to the enhancement of professional prestige, which is a duty that applies both to individuals and professional associations.

The duty to contribute to the prestige of the profession is also important for Brajnović (1978) who, in fact, considers it as one of the core professional duties, without neglecting the right of a professional to his or her own prestige and to a just remuneration, such that it allows a dignified life (45). As the most dangerous impediments to the prestige of information-related professions, Brajnović lists ignorance, mediocrity, dishonest or morally doubtful methods and scandalous, invented or irrelevant news (257–58). He also addresses the prestige of those responsible for relations with the public and advises them to build their prestige on three foundations: preparation for the profession, experience and skill.

The analyzed codes also take as a professional duty the duty to refuse a position in the cases when a person considers him- or herself as incompetent for carrying it out – an attitude completely in harmony with Brajnović’s views. The Croatian code (CPRA code) expands on this point and states that assigning important tasks to professionals with little experience, knowledge and competence damages the reputation of the profession.

**Fifth principle: loyalty**

The principle of professional loyalty includes two duties. The first is that of being loyal to oneself, the colleagues, the employer, those who one decided to represent, the public, and the society. The second one is respecting professional secrets.

The principle of loyalty is mentioned by most of the analyzed codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRSA, GA) as the duty to be faithful to those who are represented, considering certain limits: for example, the PRVA requires respecting human dignity and human rights, legal and ethical norms. According to the Croatian code (CPRA code), loyalty to the client or the employer must also include the public interest; the German code (DRPR code) emphasizes that loyalty must be in harmony with ethical and legal norms; the PRSA code reiterates how, besides being loyal, the public interest must also be served. When the GA code deals with the duty of loyalty, it also points out that the public relations professionals should serve the society and therefore must respect the right to freedom of expression.

**Multiple loyalties**

While the analysis of the codes revealed two or three concurrent loyalties (loyal to both the society and the represented parties, Brajnović (1978) identifies a surprisingly large number or multiplicity of loyalties required of the journalist: to oneself, colleagues, the
journalist’s client organization, the source of information, the public, and, finally, the country (135–136).

The author maintains that loyalties, while limiting freedom, may not compromise the truth under any circumstances (135). Loyalty to oneself means being consistent with one’s own ideas and beliefs; the loyalty to colleagues means the need to help them.

Both concepts can also be applied in the context of public relations. A PR professional loyal to a represented organization must not act in a way that would be detrimental to the organization’s interests. Indeed, such a professional must share and promote the views of the organization. Any action in violation of this principle would constitute opportunism or sabotage. Furthermore, loyalty to the source of information – in the case of public relations – is consistent with the former two loyalties (loyalty to the represented parties and the employer). Being loyal to the public means provision of information for the benefit of the general public. In public relations this can translate into loyalty to the targeted audience when the professional aims to build a lasting relationship with such an audience. The final loyalty considered, i.e. the loyalty to the country, in the context of the public relations sector could be translated into loyalty to the society. As Brajnović (1978) puts it, respecting all these loyalties, in the work of a professional, can sometimes be difficult but remains possible (144).

**Keeping promises**

While five of the analyzed codes fail to deal with the concept of loyalty, all of them deal with the issue of confidentiality. The duty of confidentiality implies that any information received from or concerning the client, or the employer must be kept strictly confidential. When dealing with confidentiality, the analyzed codes use terms such as ‘confidential information’ or ‘confidential’. In this regard, I would like to suggest two examples intended to demonstrate that compliance with requirements of this duty may prove to be difficult, delicate, complex and serious. The PR Council code reports the situation in which a former public officer becomes a consultant. They may be hired by an agency only if compliance with the confidentiality rules of their former government or employer is ensured. The Assorel code, on the other hand, addresses the duty of confidentiality in cases in which a PR professional represents two competing entities which are privy to information relating to both of them. In such a case, the Assorel code states that the information must be kept confidential and separate. When Brajnović (1978) deals with the issue of confidentiality in the context of professional secrets, he suggests that a professional has both a moral duty and a right to safeguard and protect a secret when he or she is in a position to divulge the information (206, 208). Although there are other professions that must uphold duty of confidentiality, in the case of those dealing with information – due to the very fact that they publish the information – the situation is more complex. For this reason, the author proposes rules that can be summarized in a single general rule: be true to your word and cause no harm to others unjustly (Brajnović 1978, 208).
Sixth principle: social responsibility

For PR professionals, the principle of social responsibility is reflected in their duty to act in a socially responsible manner and in a way that will contribute to the common good, personal and human rights, democracy, laws and culture. For professional associations, this requirement also includes the duty to levy sanctions on any violation of ethical codes.

Analyzed codes recognize the importance of social responsibility for the profession, albeit in different ways. In some cases, this issue is mentioned already in the opening lines; however, the language used is such that it does not mention social responsibility or the common good explicitly, but rather as ‘respect for the public’ or ‘respect for the public interest’ (or the ‘public good’). Nevertheless, when the obligation to promote the common good collides with the loyalty to the represented entity, the ethical codes seem to struggle to decide if the PR professional should be loyal to society or to the employer. Further, when dealing with triple loyalties, the question remains: Should the PR professional be mainly loyal to the company, to the employer (the agency) or to the represented party (the client)? Most of the codes try to balance these competing loyalties (PRVA, CPRA, FERPI, ADECEC, PRSA, PR Council, ICCO), while only three codes give precedence to the public interest (DRPR, PRCA, GA).

The PRCA code asserts that the public must be treated with honesty and integrity above all, while the GA code gives the most unambiguous and most decisive guidance for the cases of conflicting loyalties, stating that professionals must be guided by a high sense of service to the public, rather than to the individual members of the society. In the same vein, DRPR features a somewhat weaker statement that responsible advocacy must have limits.

What solution does Brajnović offer to the problem of ‘double’ or even ‘triple loyalty’? His position has already been described in the context of loyalty. As for the principle of social responsibility, it is important to stress that a PR professional must view the public as a community of people who need to be treated as such: their dignity must be respected (Brajnović 1978, 120–25, 287). It remains evident, therefore, that Brajnović advocates the position that every professional, especially one dealing with information, is always obliged to serve others (115–18, 188–90). For this reason, PR professionals must, without any doubt, be at the service of society. According to Brajnović, it becomes clear that a PR professional is entitled to refuse to represent a client whose actions are ethically unacceptable. Likewise, PR professionals have a duty not to defend the crimes committed by the represented organization or the members thereof. Indeed, they must help the organization to change.

Professionals, too, are persons

Regarding this issue, Brajnović (1978) goes an extra mile by introducing an element that is not present in the analyzed codes: service to society and to others must always be in harmony with one’s personal freedom (123–125). This statement builds on the author’s position that professionals are also persons.6 This means that they are also obliged to act in accordance with their basic human traits and their conscience (95, 124, 212–215). Furthermore, Brajnović highlights that socially responsible professionals display respect for truth, freedom and justice in their activities. In other words, these ethical values come before any professional obligations and therefore no other loyalty can take precedence over them. In this context, it should be noted that only the PRVA
code explicitly names professional’s conscience as a relevant category. Based on this reflection, I conclude that public relations must refrain from acting in any way that would constitute a deviation from the principles of truthfulness, liberty and justice because; by acting otherwise, they would compromise their own dignity, the dignity of the general public and of the profession itself. While respect for the dignity of the individual is the center point of Brajnović’s ethical considerations, most of the analyzed documents do not touch on that aspect at all, while six codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Dircom, GA) can be treated as exceptions. Out of these, only two (CPRA, GA) provide a more substantial level of elaboration of the issue. Even though the public is made up of many individuals, Brajnović never sees it as an amorphous matter, but always as a group of people, each with their own personality, wishes and needs (Brajnović 1978, 288).

**Dignity of the human person**

Most of the codes (PRVA, HUOJ, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, PRCA, Dircom, PRSA, PR Council, GA, ICCO) affirm respect for human rights. Freedom is the most cited human right in the codes (PRVA, CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, Dircom, PRSA, GA, ICCO). Brajnović, on various occasions, makes the same point that ethical behavior cannot exist without freedom. For him, freedom is not a right granted by positive law but derives from the very dignity of the human person: ‘Freedom is the greatest sign of human dignity’ (Brajnović 1978, 123). Freedom is, of course, not absolute, but limited by truth, justice and personal responsibility. Where do these limits come from? Brajnović answers: from respect for one’s own dignity, that of other people and of the profession, since freedom and dignity of the human person are the crucial grounds for the principle of equality of all humans as members of the same species (125).

Among various types of freedom, the freedom of expression is the most cited (CPRA, DRPR, FERPI, Assorel, Dircom, PRSA, GA). This is also in tune with Brajnović (1978) view, since various rights are grounded in freedom of expression – the right to information, the right to transmit, communicate, publish and disseminate news, ideas and opinions, and the right to be informed in a truthful and honest way (91–2).

Brajnović’s crucial point about human rights is that they come from the very nature of the human person. When he talks about the right to information, he points out that not all people have the right to all types of information: certain types of information are in fact classified as professional or personal secrets (i.e. by the right to privacy). So, not all information has an informative value for everyone; some information has value only for those who perform certain functions in a society. On the other hand, when the right to information is mentioned in context of social rights, this applies to information that is necessary for all or for many (Brajnović 1978, 131–33).

**Free society**

Codes that contain unambiguous references to democracy (PRVA, DRPR, Assorel, PRSA, PR Council), consider it either as *conditio sine qua non* for the profession or a value to which the profession is obliged to contribute. In accordance with Brajnović’s position (1978), PR professionals are not required only to respect human, cultural and social values (including religious and democratic values), but also to contribute to their development (190). The author argues that a free society is a necessary condition for
exercising such a profession. Both socialist and capitalist societies harbor threats to freedom of expression. In the former, freedom is suppressed due to ideological pressure; in the latter, it gives way to consumerism (Brajnović 1978, 137–41). The same line of reasoning can also be applied to the field of public relations: a free society is indeed crucial for the exercise of PR activities, since even democratic societies can be susceptible to conditioning by various ideologies. And finally, the profession itself has the duty to strengthen the freedoms in a society and contribute to a society in which the freedom of expression is unhindered (Brajnović 1978, 125, 188–190).

In terms of the observance of the laws, two codes put respect for the person above compliance with the laws: PRVA emphasizes that those laws that have footing in human dignity must be respected; GA puts the ethics and respect for the person before compliance to the laws. Brajnović (1978), on the other hand, maintains that just laws must always be respected and goes on to state that laws and ethical codes fall short of complete regulation (191). Of course, if something is not regulated by juridical norms of the laws or by ‘quasi-juridical’ norms of the codes, it does not necessarily mean that it is illicit. A professional must place responsibility for him- or herself before the responsibility to the state or the society. Furthermore, Brajnović (1978) observes that in the case that a law supports a code, it actually reinforces it (252).

**Cultural enrichment of a society**

Only the Spanish code of Dircom refers to respect for culture. This means that almost none of the codes consider respect for culture by PR professionals as important; they rather refer to the respect for the general public, for the society and the common good. As I have already mentioned in the context of democracy, cultural values of a society must not only be respected, but also strengthened and developed.

Brajnović (1978) believes that true and honest information possesses a constructive, formative and educational force for a society, a movement capable of encouraging cultural growth and providing new types of knowledge such as political, economic, cultural, scientific and artistic (268, 273). Unlike the codes, Brajnović (1978) finds this point to be very important, since cultural enrichment of a society is the very purpose of information (92).

Bearing in mind the ultimate purpose of information and the fact that public relations is a profession that belongs to the field of information, cultural enrichment is a fundamental guiding principle for public relations. If journalism enriches the culture of an information society, public relations enrich the culture by creating long-term quality relationships in a society. The Spanish code of Dircom – whose founder won the Luka Brajnović Award in 2017 – deals with the issue of respecting the culture.

Finally, Brajnović (1978) analyzes the phenomenon of scandal-mongering journalism, which promotes what we call anti-culture. In this type of journalism a human being is transformed into an individual who ‘acts but does not think, breathes but barely lives a human life’ (171). As a result, the focus is shifted from information and people to (informational) products, consumers, mass culture and consumer society. Here a neat parallel can be drawn to public relations: there are also public relations that use scandals as tools and thus suppress the culture instead of nurturing it (Brajnović 1978, 172–77).
**Laws as support to ethical codes**

Most of the codes make no mention of sanctions for members of PR societies (PRVA, DRPR, PRCA, CIPR, ADECEC, PR Council, GA, ICCO). The reason might perhaps be found in the fact that such issues are addressed in associations’ statutes or bylaws. In any case, the codes are considered binding for members of PR associations, while some of them are also a reference for all the professionals in their respective countries, for members and non-members alike (PRVA, DRPR, CPRA). The specific sanctions provided by some codes are public complaints, denial of membership status or expulsion from the association. An interesting element that emerged during the analysis of the codes is that half of them institute a supervision duty and a duty to report any violation to the association’s bodies. In this regard, the FERPI code and the PRCA code are very clear. In the cases of Austria and Germany, they are ethical councils that have the obligation to self-control the work of professionals in those countries, regardless of the membership in associations (PR-ETHIK-RAT and DRPR).

As to sanctions and the obligation to respect ethical codes, Brajnović (1978) is very clear on this point: ethical codes should not be identified with ethics (191–92, 217). Professional honesty comes from natural law and from professional conscience, not from positive laws or professional ethical codes. The mere existence of the codes reflects the need of professionals to have rules valid for all those who practice the profession (Brajnović 1978, 218). Brajnović stresses the importance of ethical codes being supported by the laws: if positive laws do not support the codes, their binding force is weak, since the professional expelled from an association can continue to exercise the profession, even if he or she is not a member anymore (218). Together with Brajnović, I conclude that PR associations should promote not only their own ethical codes, but also the promulgation of laws in their respective countries. They would thus secure the necessary support to the codes and, in this way, to the profession itself.

**Possible ethical answers to six stereotypes**

In order to show that Brajnović’s theoretical approach can be successfully applied to contemporary PR, in this final section, I will use the aforementioned principles to offer ethical answers to six stereotypes concerning PR professionals. To be sure, I cherish no illusion that these answers can solve all ethical problems in the field of PR.

The first stereotype: *Those who deal with public relations must inevitably lie in their work.* Nearly half of the analyzed codes – those that have omitted any reference to truth or veracity – may have contributed to this stereotype. Lying? No. Never. There is no position or situation in which lying can be justifiable. One is always obliged to communicate the truth. Although most of the analyzed ethical codes explicitly use the terms ‘truth’ and ‘truthfulness’, it is surprising that there are five documents in which these terms do not appear. In my opinion, this is a disturbing fact: it can be compared to not finding the term ‘life’ in an ethical code for medical doctors. Truth and information should always come together.

The second stereotype: *Public relations professionals are champions at playing hide and seek.* The principle of transparency is present in all analyzed codes, which suggests that the transparency (of financial sources and interests) is a serious problem in the sector.
Those who do not understand the love for the whole truth cannot participate in the moral progress of the human community. Only ethically transparent information can be useful to the public. Every type of corruption represents a betrayal of the profession.

The third stereotype: What a PR professional thinks is not important; what is important is what the boss thinks. Think only with the head’s head? No, regardless of the price. Notwithstanding, only five of the examined codes mention the term ‘dignity of the human person’, only four the term ‘person’, and only one of them the term ‘conscience’. PR professionals have a duty to protect their moral integrity. When they agree to work for an organization, they thereby accept the public posture of the organization, and this posture must be in tune with their own posture; otherwise, their work becomes contaminated by opportunism.

The fourth stereotype: Anyone can work in public relations. False. Working in public relations is not a human right. It is a profession. Although most of the codes include competence or professional capacity, only four of them devote space to education. According to Brajnović, intellectual impotence is a sure path to professional incapacity. Therefore, true professionals ought to refuse a given task if they are aware that they do not have the necessary skills to carry it out. Some codes also mention this obligation.

The fifth stereotype: PR professionals are faithful only to the institution they work for. On the contrary, PR profession is dealing with the multiplicity of loyalties. There is a perplexity that has emerged through my analysis of the ethical codes as to whom one should primarily be loyal to. Is it the public relations agency? Or the organization? Maybe the society as a whole? The concept of loyalty is not found in five of the examined codes, while confidentiality has been recognized by all of them. So, PR professionals have a duty to be loyal to several authorities: themselves, their colleagues, their employer, to those they decide to represent, as well as to the public and the society. This multiple loyalty, although limiting freedom, cannot be opposed to the truth. The general moral rule is this: respect the word given and do not cause harm to others unfairly.

The sixth stereotype: For public relations professionals, social responsibility is only cosmetics. Making the face of public relations more beautiful by applying social responsibility? Wrong. The analyzed codes recognize the importance of social responsibility for the profession and they express it, if only indirectly. Every professional, especially one involved in information exchange, is obliged to constantly serve others; for this reason, PR professionals have a primary obligation to place themselves at the service of the public. Making this point, I should reiterate Brajnović’s important insight that the proper purpose (final cause) of public relations is the cultural enrichment of the society. Therefore, those forms of public relations that promote anti-culture represent, as it were, the very negation of the profession.

**Conclusion**

It is entirely appropriate to apply the theoretical approach of Luka Brajnović – a scholar who has earned a privileged place in the history of information and communication sciences – to the field of public relations. The personal and professional phases Brajnović went through were essential to the development of his theory of information and his conception of ethics.
The first impulse to this development came from the suffering he personally had to experience, both as a citizen and a media professional, by living under non-democratic regimes of various types and in various states. It is indicative that this suffering did not break him; on the contrary – it made him stronger. The second key impulse to the formation of his concepts and theories came from his deep and lively understanding of the communication processes in the media and other organizations. This understanding gradually emerged through his professional development and affirmation – initially as a journalist, then as an editor, and finally as a university teacher and scholar interested primarily in information theory and media ethics. In a symbolic way, the university award which carries his name testifies to the importance and timeliness of his influence.

Brajnović developed an original concept of information applicable not only to journalism but to all other activities which are somehow involved in transmission of information, including public relations. His ethical concepts and theories surpass the field of journalism and, over time, have been merged with the concept of information. In an Aristotelian fashion, he has demonstrated that (informational) truth is the material cause of information.

In the research presented above, I have attempted to apply Brajnović’s criteria of ethical journalism and his theory of information to the growing field of public relations. I have done this by applying the method of content analysis to two sources: (1) to 13 ethical codes that were designed as guidelines for members of 18 PR associations, both national and international, from the European Union and the United States of America; and (2) to a sample of texts from Luka Brajnović’s written legacy. As the result of this analysis, six principles of PR ethics have emerged: (1) Truthfulness, (2) Transparency, (3) Professional Integrity, (4) Professional Competence, (5) Loyalty, and (6) Social Responsibility. As a proposal for further analysis, it might be rewarding to apply the proposed criteria to various PR manuals, especially those that contain explicit references to ethical (mis)conduct.

At various stages of this study the value of the human person has emerged as an unavoidable concept. This testifies to its importance for the ethics of public relations. For this reason, I would like to emphasize three contributions of Brajnović’s ethical conceptions, and especially his six criteria, to the field of public relations – both for PR practitioners and theoreticians.

Concerning PR practitioners, Brajnović’s ethical conception grounded in his theory of information makes a strong claim concerning the protection of the dignity of all persons involved in the communication process. As I have been eager to show in the preceding pages, one should avoid taking this claim as a mere theoretical contribution that can hardly be applied to any concrete situation. For this reason, I have stressed the need for naming and formulating clear and comprehensible ethical principles/criteria out of which concrete duties guiding the conduct of PR practitioners can be deduced. I have proposed six such principles/criteria. They are to be taken less as obstacles to behavior than as bridges enabling communication that respects and promotes human dignity.

Analyzing ethical codes of various PR associations, I gained an impression that most of them have been put together with the aim of meeting contemporary ethical challenges that typically arise out of concrete examples of unethical conduct. Only a minority of the codes (CPRA, DRPR, CIPR, PRSA and GA) were designed according to ethical principles that can be taken as basic positions. Brajnović’s ethical conception
has a different logic: if we could formulate clear and universal ethical principles grounded in respect for human dignity, such principles will then also be applicable to present and future challenges. This kind of approach is positive in the sense that it appeals to individuals and organizations to act out of respect for ethical principles. So, it might also be endorsed by authors of ethical codes of PR associations.

PR ethics is the subject matter of numerous studies and it is not an exception that scholars and scientists participate in writing of ethical codes (for instance in Germany or Croatia). Having its origin in Aristotelian doctrine, Brajnović’s ethical conception can be useful to such scholars and scientists because it offers a view of the historical development of the PR field that goes far beyond the occurrence of its first theoreticians, associations and codes.

So, if one were forced to reduce Brajnović’s original contribution to PR ethics to a single sentence, it would be the following recommendation for PR practitioners, organizations and writers of ethical codes: one should strive towards formulating clear, unambiguous and applicable ethical principles grounded in the dignity of the human person. If they would accept such an approach, they would lose nothing; indeed, they would gain a great deal.

**Notes**

1. Among public relations practitioners of the second half of the 20th century, the name of the French PR expert Lucien Matrat (1907–1998) occupies a special place. Under his leadership, in 1965 the International Code of Ethics, better known as the Code of Athens, was adopted. This code was based on two pillars: his enthusiasm after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was passed in the United Nations in 1948, and his deeply Christian view on the dignity of the human person (Watson 2014). Furthermore, when Grunig (2014) published his study on ethical problems and theories in public relations, he confirmed the teaching of Boston professor of public relations Albert J. Sullivan (1915–1992). Sullivan, in attempting to define ethical public relations, did not doubt that human rights stand above all particular values (e.g. commitment, trust, loyalty, obedience) since they ‘belong to people simply because they are human and no one may take them away’ (Grunig 2014, §31).

2. See, e.g. Fernández Areal 1992; Fontán 2001; Galdón López 1992, 1994, and 1999; González Gaitano 1992, 1989, 2001, and 2017; Labaš 2010; Lešnícak 2010; Tamayo De Serrano 1992.

3. Brajnović defines propaganda as dissemination of facts and ideas of a political or philosophical nature in order to generate adhesion to one’s cause, which differs from demagogy (1978, 332–333; 1967, 33–34).

4. Universidad de Navarra, ‘A hombros de gigantes.’ Accessed 1 August 2019. [https://www.unav.edu/web/a-hombros-de-gigantes](https://www.unav.edu/web/a-hombros-de-gigantes)

5. However, it should be noted that not all analyzed codes have their texts broken down in sections.

6. Through insight in Brajnović’s theory, it become obvious that he was an author with a strong inclination to personalistic views regarding both the concept of ethics and the concept of information. Since I have endorsed these concepts, the ethical model of public relations proposed in this work can be characterized as personalistic. Personalism is a crucial element of the author’s intellectual profile, as it was confirmed by a recent study on the influence of French personalism on Catholic Croatian thinkers in the 1930s. The study demonstrated that Brajnović belonged to the group of Croatian intellectuals who promoted a Christian version of personalism (Culo 2013, 544–545). The same author was one of the founders of the famous Croatian magazine *Person and Spirit* launched in 1949.
in Madrid. In the very first editorial of the first issue, referring to the 1940s, he argued that the process of depersonalization and contempt for the personality of a person had reached its climax. He went on to insist that both liberal capitalism and communism trampled over the two most sacred characteristics of the human being: the person and the spirit (Culo 2013, 544).

7. Very often scholars express the impression that public relations enjoy bad reputation, e.g.:

Tkalac Verći, Ana. 2016. Odnosi s javnošću. [Public Relations]. Zagreb: Hrvatska udruga za odnose s javnošću, 19; Tomić, Zoran. 2016. Odnosi s javnošću - Teorija i praksa. [Public Relations - Theory and Practice]. 2. ed., integrated and revised, Zagreb-Sarajevo: Synopsis, 37-38.; Broom, M., Glen. 2010. Cutlip & Center’s Učinkoviti odnosi s javnošću. [Cutlip & Center’s Effective Public Relations]. 10. ed., Zagreb: MATE, 3-4.; Biondić, Iva. and Ružica Cigler. 2008. “Inventura odnosa novinar – PR.” [Inventory Journalist Relations with PR]. Medianali 2 (3): 42-44.; Kunczik, Michael. 2006. Odnosi s javnošću. Koncepti i teorije. [Public Relations. Concepts and Theories]. Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti Zagrebačko sveučilište, 17-20.; Grunig, E. James. and Hunt, Todd. 1984. Managing Public Relations, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 4.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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Table A1. Sources of Analyzed Codes.

| Country   | Code acronym | Code full name                                      | Source                                                                 |
|-----------|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Austria   | PRVA Code    | Code of Conduct of the Austrian Public Relations    | Accessed 19 September 2017. https://prva.at/itrfile/_1_/d4d06c40110d731e9b73df17cddf9c00/20170323_Ehrenkodex%20des%20PRVA.pdf. |
| Croatia   | CPRA Code    | Croatian Public Relations Association Code of Ethics | Accessed 19 September 2017. http://www.huoj.hr/files/File/Eтикi_{k}odeks_HUOJ_final.pdf. |
| Germany   | DRPR Code    | The German Communication Code                        | Accessed 3 March 2017. http://drpr-online.de/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/German_Communication_Code.pdf |
| Italy     | FERPI Code   | Italian Public Relations Federation Code of Professional Conduct | Accessed 19 September 2017. http://www.ferpi.it/associazione/statuto-regolamento-e-codici/codici/codice-di-comportamento-professionale-della-ferpi/. |
| Italy     | Assorel Code | Professional Principles and Codes of Conduct for Public Relations in Italy | Accessed 20 March 2017. https://www.assorel.it/relazioni-pubbliche/assorel-rp-0002156.html. |
| UK        | PRCA Code    | PRCA Professional Charter                           | Accessed 19 September 2017. https://www.prica.org.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/PRCA%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Updated%20Following%20Review%20in%20September%202016.pdf |
| UK        | CIPR Code    | Chartered Institute of Public Relations Code of Conduct | Accessed 19 September 2017. https://www.cipr.co.uk/sites/default/files/Appendix%20A%20-%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20-%20Updated%20June%202012.pdf |
| Spain     | Dircom Code  | Association of Communication Managers Code of Ethics | Accessed 21 March 2017. http://www.dircom.org/sobre-dircom/codigo-ético. |
| Spain     | ADECEC Code  | Association of Communication and Public Relations Consultancy Companies Code of Ethics | Accessed 22 March 2017. http://www.adecce.com/quienes_somos/codigo_etico.php. |
| USA       | PRSA Code    | PRSA Code of Ethics                                  | Accessed 19 September 2017. https://www.prsa.org/ethics/code-of-ethics/. |
| USA       | PR Council Code | The PR Council Code of Ethics and Principles         | Accessed 19 September 2017. http://prcouncil.net/join/the-pr-council-code-of-ethics-and-principles/. |
| International | GA Code | Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations | Accessed 19 September 2017. https://static1.squarespace.com/static/561d0274e4b0601b7c814ca9/t/56c202bc2ea51074cb2171/1455555260837/GA_Global_Ethics_Protocol.pdf |
| International | ICCO Code | The ICCO Stockholm Charter                          | Accessed 11 July 2017. https://iccopr.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/StockholmCharter.pdf. |