

Deep-rooted economic crises challenge investigative journalism worldwide

Funds for investigative reporting are drying out in many countries. CoViD-19 accelerates this trend. Media policy and public service media become important actors in slowing down this erosion.

The task of journalists' fulfilling their watchdog function is mostly hindered by the fact that in many countries resources for in-depth journalistic investigation are few and far between. Moreover, the unavailability of specific teams fully dedicated to in-depth reporting, as a result of newsroom downsizing, as well as the lack of ample time, typically required when covering an investigative journalism news story, have rendered the operation of news media as "watchdogs" an infeasible venture. The CoViD-19 pandemic has only accelerated this erosion.

This is one core finding derived from a survey by researchers of the ["Media for Democracy Monitor 2020" research project](#), conducted under the umbrella of the [Euromedia Research Group](#) in eighteen countries¹ around the globe in the first half of 2020 (www.euromediagroup.org/mdm).

However, there are cases, such as Finland, Iceland and the Netherlands, where ad hoc resources on investigative reporting is preferred as an alternative. In the Netherlands journalistic projects of a special quality and investigative function of newsrooms have been strengthened by an established subsidy policy. Subsidies oriented to investigative journalism also granted in Flanders, in a market where media organizations' resources on in-depth reporting are in decline.

Across the Atlantic ocean, due to financial pressures, media organizations in Chile, have substantially cut down on producing investigative journalism news stories and have instead resorted to purchasing news items of in-depth research from freelancers or outsourcing such news topics to companies. The *Centre for Investigative Journalism* in Chile has also developed a model of crowdfunding applicable to the research of high quality news stories and a website is conducting investigative journalism by means of long-term subscriptions.

Among the countries which seem to retain a commitment to investigative reporting are Sweden, Denmark and the UK. In Sweden, a 10% of editorial resources in privately-owned national media organizations is being offered to investigative journalism as opposed to the regional privately-owned media editors who seem incapable of keeping up with that trend.

¹ The countries participating in the research project entitled "Media for Democracy Monitor 2020" are Australia, Austria, Belgium (Flanders), Canada, Chile, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

In Denmark, well-funded investigative journalism is prioritized by most leading news media through the existence of specific task forces and the operation of editorial offices for investigative journalism.

In the case of the UK although the tradition of in-depth investigative journalism has been adversely affected by financial pressures (in the commercial media sector), particularly in the local and regional press, the production of significant investigative journalism stories by commercial news organizations remains a dynamic practice.

In Australia, although the research journalism-related investments have been reduced and the conditions are less favourable, the media sector, especially public broadcasting, is still dedicated to investigative journalism.

In some countries, such as Finland, where the watchdog role of journalism is made harder because of limited resources, considerable exceptions are public service media, which are undertaking initiatives to counterbalance deficits of investigative journalism. There, the public service broadcaster YLE entertains a specific group engaged in investigative journalism only.

In conclusion, the existence of investigative reporting is proportional to the financial strength that characterizes the media organizations at the national level. Where economic survival of the media outlets is being set as a first priority or an urgent need, journalistic investigation is currently at a low ebb and vice versa. In some countries, targeted public subsidies demonstrate effectiveness during times of economic crises.

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Download of the policy brief:

<http://www.euromediagroup.org/mdm/policybrief02.pdf>

The Media for Democracy Monitor 2020 (MDM) is a longitudinal research project on the performance of the media with regard to democracy. In 2011, communication and political scientists from 10 countries delivered a state-of-the art report, based on relevant indicators, researched by national experts. Results have been published by Nordicom ([free and open access book](#)), and on the [website of the Euromedia Research Group](#).

In 2020, experts from 18 countries applied the MDM indicators to their national media landscape, providing insights on the development of the media performance with regard to democracy over the decade of media digitalization (2010 to 2019). Full results will be released early 2021. The [Dutch Journalism Fund](#) support the research project.

The Euromedia Research Group is the academic host of the MDM project, which is coordinated and managed by Josef Trappel, University of Salzburg, and Werner A. Meier, University of Zurich. Contact: josef.trappel@sbg.ac.at; wenera.meier@uzh.ch