



Deliverable 7.1

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ENJOI - Engagement and Journalism Innovation for Outstanding Open Science Communication

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www.enjoiscicomm.eu



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To ensure the quality and correctness of this deliverable, we arranged an internal review and validation process. The deliverable was drafted by the work package leader (Marco Boscolo, formicablu). All partners contributed and reviewed the overall draft. Before submission, the formicablu team made a final review and validation.

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY AND DISCLAIMER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Summary	4
2.	Project overview	6
3.	Engaged (science) journalism	7
3.1	Science and Scientific Journalism Today	9
3.2	Context: Science journalism during Covid-19	12
3.3	Objective: Media landscape research and interviews	14
4.	Method	15
5.	Interviews	19
6.	Success stories in Europe	21
6.1	Engagement in cross-border collaborative journalism	21
6.2	Engagement in investigative and slow journalism	27
6.3	Engagement in fact-checking	34
6.4	Engagement in local journalism	38
6.5	Engaged journalism via social media	41
6.6	Engaged journalism via newsletters	46
7.	Conclusions	49
8.	References	51



1. SUMMARY

To fully benefit from a rapidly changing digital society, citizens need to feel that the information they receive responds to their **real needs** and is useful to face and solve **real problems**. The Covid-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and many more global challenges highlight the urgency of improving science journalism in a systematic way.

We argue that, to address this challenge, one of the crucial resources is **engagement**. Within the ENJOI project, we are exploring and testing engagement as a **key asset of innovation in science communication** distributed via media platforms, with a strong focus on **journalism**.

This **Digital Engagement Focus Report** (Deliverable 7.1) is the result of a first track of research exploring **how digital media have exploited engagement in covering science**. To do so, we combined **desk research** and **semi-structured interviews**.

The desk research took into consideration a comprehensive literature review, previous local pilot projects as well as the landscape of innovation already happening in European media through the lens of engagement. After defining the concept of **engaged science journalism**, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 key executive leaders of very innovative media covering science (both specialized science media and generalists with a strong attention to science).

The results highlighted the importance of engagement in 6 different areas, all crucial for an effective engaged science journalism: **cross-border and collaborative journalism, investigative and slow journalism, fact-checking, local journalism, social media, and newsletters**. All these different domains have at least three common aspects:

- Engagement **increases audiences' trust** in science journalism;
- Engagement should be seen not only as a key aspect of science journalism, but also as **a methodology**;
- When engaged science journalism is successful, it results in **audiences being willing to offer financial support**.



This Report sums up the main contents of the desk research and the interviews, with a specific focus on **covering science using engagement and user-centered approaches**. Further contents collected during the 15 interviews will feed the ENJOI website and podcast series.

This research is part of the broader effort (carried out within WP7) of **exploring the current landscape of science media through the prism of innovation**.

After engagement, the second focus report will look into how **data and open science** are used in journalism, analysing 15 products of outstanding data journalism on different topics, plus 5 related to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The third report will assess an **innovative digital format**, mapping 10 examples of interactive, visual, multimedia formats and evaluating their impact through a survey and a digital discussion group. Finally, the last report will track the use of **solution journalism**, mapping 20 stories on high impact topics that focus not only on problems but rather on how communities respond to developing sustainable solutions.

Overall, WP7 will work in strict collaboration with all the other WPs, with the long-term goals of embedding the concepts of engaged science journalism within the ENJOI project itself, building a community of people interested in science journalism and communication and creating a solid network around the future **ENJOI Observatory** for an Outstanding Open Science Communication. In fact, this report not only is the first contribution of the landscape research carried out within WP7, but within the overall structure of the ENJOI project it is intended as a series of input for the engaging activities of other WPs, namely WP3 and WP4.



2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

ENJOI (ENgagement and JOurnalism Innovation for Outstanding Open Science Communication) will explore and test **engagement** as a key asset of innovation in science communication distributed via media platforms, with a strong focus on journalism.

Through a combination of methodologies and in collaboration with producers, target users and stakeholders of science communication, ENJOI will co-create and select a set of **standards, principles** and **indicators** (SPIs) condensed to a **Manifesto for an Outstanding Open Science Communication**. ENJOI will deploy a series of actions via **Engagement Workshops, Labs, field** and **participatory research, evaluation** and **testing** phases.

It will also build an **Observatory** as its landmark product to make all results and outputs available to foster capacity building and collaboration of all actors in the field. ENJOI will work in four countries: Belgium, Italy, Portugal and Spain, taking into account different cultural contexts.

ENJOI's ultimate goal is that of **improving science communication** by making it more consistently reliable, truthful, open and engaging. Contextually, ENJOI will contribute to the **active development of critical thinking, digital awareness and media literacy** of all actors involved in the process.



3. ENGAGED (SCIENCE) JOURNALISM

Putting **audiences** at the centre of journalism to better serve their needs. This assumption should be part of the building blocks of journalism itself, but it is only in recent years that a **community-centered approach** has entered the newsrooms. This approach is called **engaged journalism**.

There are many descriptions of engaged journalism, throughout both journalism practice and research (Wenzel & Nelson, 2020). Perhaps one of the most comprehensive definitions is the one given by **Lindsay Green-Barber**, a leader in the media and communications impacts strategy.

«Engaged journalism is an inclusive practice that prioritizes the information needs and wants of the community members it serves, creates collaborative space for the audience in all aspects of the journalistic process, and is dedicated to building and preserving trusting relationships between journalists and the public» (Green-Barber, 2018).

The concept of **audience's need** is the cornerstone of any interpretation of engaged journalism. A need that cannot be identified with a top-down approach, as it constantly changes and evolves over time. For this reason, news providers should constantly work to «*fill a specific need* for their audience, whose attention can no longer be taken for granted» (Batsell, 2015).

Indeed, audiences can no longer be considered static, silent and passive. Connectivity and digital transformation demand for a much **higher degree of dialogue and involvement** at all the communication levels. How is engaged journalism putting this into practice?

The key is making the public an **active part of the news reporting process** (Blatchford, 2018). **Sharing ideas for a story**, or even calling for ideas among the readers/users is the first step. The second one is inviting users to **share their knowledge**, to act locally in search of information and stories or to verify numbers and facts, opening up to taking advantage of the expertise that can be found among users, contacts, connections, even very specific skills that can enrich the coverage of a certain issue. Media applying engaged journalism acknowledges that **collectively readers and users know more than a small newsroom** about many topics.



Going beyond simply listening to the users' preferences and asking them to actively share knowledge, points of views and sometimes specialized expertise makes journalism more **consistent** and **inclusive**. It directly addresses the audiences' real needs, covers stories with diverse nuances and includes diverse socio-cultural perspectives and experiences.

Media experimenting in that direction find that being open about their process and sharing their learning curve makes reporting more accessible and useful for their audience, encouraging them to be active and to take part in the conversation (Pfauth, 2017).

The concept of “**audience**” itself is no longer something fixed and unchangeable. Everyone can be part of different audiences depending on their interests in that specific moment, and most importantly everyone can contribute to the public discourse.

This is not just due to the power of **social media** - which we should stop calling “new media” in relation to journalism (Sgarzi, 2016). In engaged journalism, the audience is part of the media ecosystem in a deeper way: it has a crucial role in establishing a **more resilient revenue model**. That's why engaged journalism paves the way towards a more **sustainable journalism**.

Within the ENJOI project, we aim at exploring **engagement** as a key asset of innovation in **science journalism**. Our starting point is that engaged journalism as intended above should be applied (also) to science journalism.

Now more than ever, science journalists need to reflect on the relationship with their audience, in order to (re)build **trust**. This could be achieved through what from now on we will call **engaged science journalism**.

We performed a qualitative analysis of several journalistic experiences promoting this approach (both in explicit or implicit way) throughout Europe. But before diving into the success stories of European engaged science journalism, it is important to consider the unique **context** in which science journalists are operating today.



3.1 Science and Scientific Journalism Today

Defining what science and scientific journalism are today is beyond the scope of this work and of the ENJOI project itself. But here it could be useful to try to briefly understand **the evolution of science in relation to society in the last decades and its implications for scientific journalism.**

A well-established corpus of social science studies¹, traces the evolution of the relationship between science and society as a process that brought from the necessity of explanation and popularization at the beginning of XX century to a more complex relationship. Among the series of reasons that contributed to perspective change is the different necessities of the audiences that emerged in the second half of the previous century. After the use of two atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as notably declared Robert Oppenheimer the scientific director of the Manhattan project responsible for the science behind both of them, science “has known sin”². This moment could be taken as **the beginning of a different relationship between science and society**, with the members of the former held more accountable for the consequences of their deeds by the latter.

This relationship became even more complicated with the emergence of the environmental movements in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, a journalistic investigation written by a former scientist on some substances used in agriculture³ greatly contributed to the prompt of the coagulation of some of the first ecological movements around the Earth Day initiative⁴. Today, as one of the most influential science communication handbooks⁵ states in its first line, **“science and technology are embedded in virtually every aspect of modern life”**. And this implies more and more questions and requests from members of the society towards the scientific community.

The situation described above has **profound implications in science journalism.**

¹ See for example Bucchi, M. (2004): *Science in Society. An introduction to social studies of science*, London and New York, Routledge. Or Bucchi, M. and Trench, B. (Eds.) (2020): *Routledge Handbook of Public Communication of Science and Technology*, London and New York, Routledge.

² See Russell, B. (1955): *The Mind of Robert Oppenheimer*, The New Republic.
(<https://newrepublic.com/article/104826/the-mind-robert-oppenheimer>)

³ Carson, R. (1962): *Silent Spring*, Houghton Mifflin.

⁴ See Worster, D. (1977 and 1994): *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*, Cambridge University Press.

⁵ National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2017): *Communicating Science Effectively: A Research Agenda*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. doi: 10.17226/23674



From a popularising and explanatory perspective felt as a necessity at the beginning of the XX century we are now witnessing a more complex and nuanced situation. Part of the research on science and society relationship identify the need of scientific information as part of the toolbox needed by all citizens to be an active and aware participant in the contemporary world⁶. Another part of the research in the field led to the emergence of **a more entangled relationship**. An example of this is the so-called **post-normal approach**, exemplified by the work of Michael Brüggemann when put in relation with journalism⁷. This approach refers to the work of Funtowicz and Ravetz that interprets the relation between science and politics, and so society at large, “where facts are uncertain, values in dispute, stakes high and decisions urgent”⁸ as post-normal. This is the case of many of the issues emerged in the recent years elicited by the climate crisis and its consequences (such as, climatic migrations of human beings), the application of AI and machine learning technology to several aspects of our everyday life and many more: **science and technology are part of society and have complex, post-normal effects on one another**. The realisation of a full democratic society, therefore, requires a **full compliance of scientific citizenship**, and this can only be achieved by making sure that every societal, cultural and socio-economical challenge is dealt **within a framework that keeps together and values scientific and humanistic knowledge as well as socio-economic and ethical comprehension of complex issues**. None of the most prominent current societal challenges, from the climate crisis to the implementation of automation, can be dealt solely equipped with scientific and technological tools and notions. Therefore, science journalism can and should be doing much more than explaining the science behind phenomena. It becomes rather more interesting and useful and impactful in terms of societal effects when embracing complexity and trying to analyse issues and facts from multiple perspectives.

Particularly, in the frame of ENJOI project we want to take into account **another important declination** of the relationship between science and journalism that emerged in the second half of the XX century. Philip Meyer started to use the

⁶ For example, see Royal Society of London (1985): The Public Understanding of Science. Also known as “Bodmer Report”, retrivable here: https://royalsociety.org/~media/royal_society_content/policy/publications/1985/10700.pdf

⁷ Brüggemann, M. (2017): Post-normal journalism: Climate journalism and its changing contribution to an unsustainable debate. In Peter Berglez, Ulrika Olausson, Mart Ots (Eds.): What is Sustainable Journalism? Integrating the Environmental, Social, and Economic Challenges of Journalism. New York: Peter Lang, pp. 57–73.

⁸ Funtowicz, S.O., Ravetz, J.R. (1993): Science for the Post-Normal Age Futures, Futures 25(7): 739–755.



technology and methodology of the new social sciences as part of his journalistic method during the 1960s. He coined the term “**precision journalism**” to define a journalistic practice that took advantage of the **quantitative approach** and of a **scientific methodology** to uncover new stories. He wrote: «The new precision journalism is scientific journalism. (In France, the term "precision journalism" has been translated as *le journalisme scientifique*.) It means treating journalism as if it were a science, adopting scientific method, scientific objectivity, and scientific ideals to the entire process of mass communication»⁹. As former physicist Lawrence Cranberg notably wrote «**journalism itself is a science, and ... a properly qualified, responsible journalist is a practicing scientist**»¹⁰. This is more true than ever before when we consider the complex and post-normal environment in which science journalism happens today. That is why **science journalism can be defined as the practice of telling stories about science**, but can also be intended as a **precision, methodologically sound scientific approach to telling stories that involve also scientific aspects, but speak of our society in general**, be it when dealing with migration, with social inequalities, with environmental problems, with the way education should be innovated and much more.

⁹ Meyer, P. (2002): Precision Journalism. Rowman & Littlefield (4th edition).

¹⁰ Cranberg, L. (1989): Plea for Recognition of Scientific Character of Journalism. Journalism Educator (Winter 1989).



3.2 Context: science journalism during Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has clearly shown the need to urgently **improve science journalism** in a thorough and systematic way. To underline the importance of good scientific information and communication, in the first months after the outbreak of Covid-19 **Tedros Ghebreyesus**, Director-General of the World Health Organization, said that we were not just fighting an epidemic: we were also fighting an **infodemic**.¹¹

Virologists, immunologists, epidemiologists, healthcare professionals were urged to give quick and certain answers on a situation with a **high level of complexity and uncertainty**. This exponentially increased the amount of available information and generated confusion, both in institutional communication and in the media (Lasser et al., 2020).

At the same time, the “**internal communication**” among scientists started to become public. To address the need of scientific discussions during the pandemic, several journals prepared a fast track system for evaluating papers, while others decided to publish them without the peer review process. Most importantly, many journals made Sars-Cov-2-related papers freely available for anyone, not just to the subscribers.

While this **open science** approach allowed an incredible scientific progress in a short period of time (Besançon et al., 2020), for some authors it wasn't managed properly at the communication level (Chirico et al. 2020). With the media often uncritically reporting any **scientific opinion**, the infodemic paved the way for the spreading of **misinformation** and **fake news**.

After the first year of pandemic, it seemed clear that this whole situation negatively affected people's **trust in the media**. In many countries, media highlighting disagreement among experts and reporting conspiracy theories contributed to reducing trust in science (Metacalfe et. al., 2020). According to the *Trust in the media 2020* Report, realized by the EBU Media Intelligence Service, in 2020 trust in the news declined 4% points compared to the previous year in Europe. The research, which combined data from the 92nd Standard Eurobarometer and the Reuters Institute Digital news Report 2020, highlights

¹¹Declaration of Tedros Ghebreyesus, Germany, February 2020.
<https://www.who.int/director-general/speeches/detail/munich-security-conference>



that the general trust in the media in Europe (out of 33 countries considered) is quite low. On average, only 19% of European citizens have high trust in the media, while 41% have medium trust and 40% have low or no trust.

While this decrease of public trust in the media is a **challenge** for science journalism, it is also a great **opportunity**. Never in the past had science-related news become mainstream news with such a powerful force and with such a pervasive impact. Almost all kinds of media were “forced” to cover science, and as a result science journalism has carved out its niche.

This is slowly going beyond the Covid-19 domain. For example, the need for a deeply fact-based and carefully crafted science communication is more evident also in relation to the **climate crisis**, as the tragic floods in Northern Europe or the devastating wildfires in some Mediterranean areas have shown during the summer 2021. And more generally, the public awareness of the **importance of science for society** is increasing (Lakomy et al., 2019). As a result, science journalism is becoming more and more a key factor in facilitating **democratic deliberation** and **fighting misinformation**.

This is exactly where **engaged science journalism** should enter the game, and in part already is (as several experiences at the European level highlight - see section 6 of this document). Fostering engagement in the field of science journalism can be a key to **innovating** it. Combining the power of **communities** with traditional reporting efforts can help better address audiences' needs and trigger better media literacy.

Engagement can help innovate the media environment while building stronger **trust** and **openness** in science coverage and make it one of the key assets of the media information system.



3.3 Objective: Media landscape research and interviews

Taking into account the challenging context in which science journalism is called to reshape itself, within WP7 the ENJOI project aims at **exploring how digital media have exploited engagement in covering science in Europe**.

This is the **main goal** of the current segment of our research, which was carried out in parallel with another key activity led by the ENJOI partner ACCC within WP2: identifying a preliminary list of **Standard, Principles and Indicators (SPIs)** to define high quality science communication (see Deliverable 2.1).

WP2 and WP7 will work together to embed the engagement concept (as defined above) into the final list of SPIs. But in order to better define the ENJOI's "engagement philosophy" (which will be ultimately condensed into a **Manifesto for an Outstanding Open Science Communication**) we performed a **media landscape research** with a focus on **engagement in science journalism**.

Our specific objectives were:

- Analyse through a preliminary **desk research** the innovation already happening in European science journalism through the lens of **engagement and user-centered approaches**.
- Identify (with the support of the ENJOI partners) a list of **key executives leaders of very innovative media in Europe covering science**, both specialized science media and generalist with a strong attention to science.
- Perform **semi-structured interviews with 15 journalists** selected from the previous list, to map how these innovative European media applied engagement to different fields, from fact-checking to investigative journalism, from social media to newsletter use, etc.

The insights collected through the desk research and the semi-structured interviews resulted in the current **Digital Engagement Focus Report** (Deliverable 7.1), which will also be adapted to develop a web-version (available on the project website www.enjoiscicomm.eu) and a podcast series.



4. METHOD

Overall, the ENJOI project implements a **participatory methodology**, working together with a variety of science information producers, users and stakeholders to assess high quality in science communication and journalism.

All the partners are setting up a **multi-step iterative approach** to research, co-create and produce SPIs together with recommendations and guidelines that will be condensed into the ENJOI Manifesto.

As a first step, this participatory and iterative approach was implemented within the ENJOI consortium itself to perform the first research tasks.

In task 7.1 (Exploring how digital media have exploited engagement in covering science) all the partners were involved to define a **common framework** for “**innovation**” and “**engagement**”. During the ENJOI virtual kick-off meeting (from 22th to 24th February, 2021) a dedicated session moderated by formicablu was held: using a shared **Jamboard**, all the participants gave their inputs on how innovative uses of engagement could be declined in science journalism¹².

Starting from the workshop results, the WP7 team worked on a **preliminary desk research** to define what we called **engaged science journalism** (see section 3 of this document).

A shared document folder was created to exchange materials within partners and ask for their feedback, in particular on:

- Relevant **literature** to be reviewed, with a specific focus of science journalism through the lens of engagement and user-centered approaches;
- Relevant **people** to be interviewed, working on innovative European media/projects covering science using engagement and user-centered approaches.

It is important to highlight that our desk research about engaged science

¹² A summary of the inputs received is available at this URL:

<https://jamboard.google.com/d/1MmuJ6QZ7P7AOmtna-Or-3AWCtXMiTLFKbJ0-E-WbWDk/edit?usp=sharing>



journalism did not aim at developing a comprehensive literature review (which is the task of other ENJOI's WPs, namely WP2 and WP5). In the case of WP7, the desk research goal was to set the basis for the selection of people to be interviewed. In particular, from the desk research we defined some criteria for this selection:

- Science journalists, science communicators or media outlet in Europe with a strong focus on science explicitly using engagement as a way to increase audiences' trust;
- Science journalists, science communicators or media outlet in Europe with a strong focus on science applying engagement as a methodology;
- Science journalists, science communicators or media outlets in Europe using engagement as part of their revenue model.

At least one of the three criteria should be met in order to be included in the interviewees list. However, we found that an explicit reference to engagement was not so common in European science journalism. This was to some extent expected: engagement journalism as defined in Section 3 of this document is highly spread in the United States, where the engaged journalism concept was born (Green-Barber, 2018), but is much less established and known in European countries.

What we found from a more systematic search was that the definition "key executive leaders of very innovative media covering science (both specialized science media and generalists with a strong attention to science), as drafted in the ENJOI's original proposal, did not apply to mainstream European media. Indeed, most of the innovation in engaged science journalism came from medium or small realities and, in some cases, from projects starting as auto-production and then finding through engagement a well-established revenue model.

Based on these preliminary findings, the WP7 team held weekly meetings to discuss the research outcomes and to "shortlist" the 15 people to be interviewed.

The science journalists/communicators interviewed were part of media, projects or networks from Italy, Bosnia, Hungary, Spain, Netherlands, and



Switzerland. Given the specific expertise of the WP7 team, we had a specific focus on Italian science journalism, which was particularly relevant given the ENJOI's attention to science journalism in Southern Europe. We also include two journalists working at European level.

Besides the criteria mentioned above, we selected **6 main relevant macro-areas** to which engagement could be applied in order to promote engaged science journalism:

- Cross-border journalism
- Investigative and slow journalism
- Fact-checking
- Local journalism
- Social media
- Newsletters

The team then prepared the general format for the semi-structured interviews to be conducted. The main goal was to understand how the interviewees adapted to the process of digital transformation using engagement and user-centered approaches and Open Source INTelligence (OSINT) methodologies to verify and fact check, and how this process was declined to **effect and impact science journalism** on their media platform.

The general questions of the semi-structured interviews, developed within the formicablu team, were:

- What are the main challenges in defining and engaging a specific audience?
- What is the added value of promoting user-centered approaches in journalism?
- From your experience, how can the impact of engaged journalism be measured?
- In the complex modern media ecosystem, what does “audience” mean today?
- Within ENJOI, we would like to propose engagement not only as a key aspect of journalism, but also as a methodology. In this context, *[name*



of the specific media/project] is a very inspiring example. How did you manage to promote sustainable revenue models through engaged journalism?

- The Covid-19 pandemic forced science journalism, and journalism in general, to deal with complexity and uncertainty. What are the lessons learned?

Besides these general questions, specific questions were tailored to the specific experiences of the interviewees. In this document, we intentionally used only a small part of the interviews' material, namely the answers useful to build our concept of engaged science journalism. Further contents collected during the interviews (for example about audience's definition or engagement impact) will feed the ENJOI podcast series, to be launched in the last part of the project.

For what concerns the practical interview flow, people were contacted via email or LinkedIn. The interviews were planned between May 2021 and the beginning of August 2021 and were held via Zoom or Streamyard.

The interviews were processed using an audio transcription software, and all the contents were selected and elaborated to build the second part of this deliverable. As mentioned above, the results will also be adapted to develop a web-version (available on the project website www.enjoiscicomm.eu) and a podcast series.

The described method takes into account the final goal of creating the **ENJOI Observatory** for an Outstanding Open Science Communication. For this reason, all the people interviewed will be invited to **join our network**, in order to feed a shared discussion about good science communication and journalism. The idea is embedding the concepts of engaged science journalism described here within the project itself, building and expanding the **ENJOI community**.



5. INTERVIEWS

We conducted 15 interviews covering the 6 identified macro-areas (see section 4). As shown in Table 1, the science journalists/communicators interviewed were part of media, projects or networks from Italy, Bosnia, Hungary, Spain, Netherlands, Switzerland, and involved professionally at European level.

Table 1 - Science journalists/communicators interviewed within ENJOI Task 7.1

Area	Name	Media/Project	Country
Engagement in cross-border journalism	Brigitte Alfter	Arena for Journalism in Europe	EU level
	Jose Miguel Calatayud	Arena Housing Project	EU level
Engagement in investigative and slow journalism	Peter Erdélyi	444.hu	Hungary
	Alessia Cerantola	Occrp	Bosnia
	Cecilia Anesi	IrpiMedia	Italy
	Alberto Puliafito	Slow News	Italy
Engagement in fact-checking	Rocío Benavente	Maldita Ciencia	Spain
	Karin van den Boogaert	Wetenschap.nu	Netherlands
Engagement in local journalism	Raffaele Angius	Indip	Italy
	Isaia Invernizzi	Eco di Bergamo	Italy
Engagement via social media	Massimo Polidoro	L'isola del Mistero	Italy
	Roberta Villa	RobiVil pages	Italy
	Adrian Fartade	Link4Universe	Italy
Engagement via newsletters	Carola Frediani	Guerre di Rete	Italy
	Priti Patnaik	Geneva Health Files	Switzerland



Sections from 6.1 to 6.6 sum up the main contents of the interviews, with a specific focus on **covering science using engagement and user-centered approaches**. Further contents collected during the interviews will feed the ENJOI website and podcast series.



6. SUCCESS STORIES IN EUROPE

6.1 Engagement in cross-border collaborative journalism

The Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the other most pressing health, political, economic and social issues, highlighted the need for journalism to transcend national borders. Collaborating across the globe enhances the opportunities to produce impactful and in-depth reporting. Science and data journalism can hugely benefit from this cross-border collaborative approach, where engagement is a crucial ingredient for success. We interviewed two key journalists of the [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#), the leading European network supporting cross-border collaborative journalism at the EU level.

BRIGITTE ALFTER, ARENA FOR JOURNALISM IN EUROPE

Short Bio

Brigitte Alfter is a senior German-Danish journalist, director of Arena for Journalism in Europe and lecturer at the University of Gothenburg. Having practiced journalism on local, national and European level, she realised the need for cross-border collaborative journalism structures. Since 2008, she has developed European support and infrastructures for cross-border journalism, and advises on all aspects of collaborative journalism. She combines journalism practice, entrepreneurial activities, teaching/training and academic research. Over the years she has won several international awards – always working in teams. She has authored the handbook on cross-border collaborative journalism first published in 2015¹³ and contributed to several anthologies on journalism practice.

Website: <http://www.alfter.dk/>

About the Arena for Journalism in Europe

The [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#) supports collaborative journalism - journalists working with other journalists across geographical borders, and

¹³ *Cross-Border Collaborative Journalism: A Step-By-Step Guide* - As a reference, we considered the 2019 English re-edition:

<https://www.routledge.com/Cross-Border-Collaborative-Journalism-A-Step-By-Step-Guide/Alfter/p/book/9781138613638>



journalists working across professional borders with scholars or scientists as well as with civil society. The core activities of Arena are planning and organizing the annual [DataHarvest](#) – the European Investigative Journalism Conference; facilitating open networks for information sharing to help journalists to collaborate across borders; educating and sharing of knowledge about cross border collaborative journalism through training, publishing articles, speaking, developing educational materials and advising on cross-border collaborative journalism education.

The importance of engagement in cross-border collaborative journalism

From 2004 to 2008, Brigitte Alfter worked as EU-correspondent for Danish daily [Information](#). At that time, she realized the need to collaborate with other European journalists to better serve her readers in Denmark. This insight translated into the practice of co-operating with sources and reporters in different countries, for example collecting data that were being denied at the time by EU commissioners.

As Alfter explains, working within a team was **need-driven**. Cross-border collaborative journalism made her work easier. Over time, this need evolved into a more structured **method**.

She started working as a freelance with teams of the [International Consortium of Investigative Journalists ICIJ](#), and she developed the growing European activities of the [Journalism Fund](#) - a support structure for in-depth, innovative and independent journalism in Europe. Becoming the Director of [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#), and with her long journalistic experience, Alfter also promoted the importance of engagement in cross-border collaborative journalism at the EU level.

Besides the “traditional” engagement with the audience, Alfter identified another important aspect of engagement to take into account, which is **engagement with other journalists**: “journalists have to carry out research beyond national limitations, otherwise they simply do not do their job properly”, she stated.

To make engagement effective, it is therefore crucial to constantly collect inputs both from the local audiences and journalists, in a bi-directional and reiterative process.



Success story: Farmsubsidy

A success story demonstrating the added value of engaged cross-border collaborative journalism is the project [Farmsubsidy](#), that Brigitte Alfter co-founded in 2005. It is a follow-the-money journalism and data project, that for the first time in the history of the EU brought to light beneficiaries of the annual billion Euro subsidies to the farming sector. The project is a great example of how this kind of journalism can be also **long-term sustainable**: Farmsubsidy attracted different fund over time, being run by DICAR (2005-2007), EU Transparency (2007-2011) and Journalismfund.eu (2011-2017) in collaboration with the Open Knowledge Foundation (2013-current). After more than 15 year it is still active, with the overall goal of facilitating access to information on how the EU spends its subsidies under the agricultural policy to facilitate a public informed debate. The input, information and feedback collected over time by all the involved actors were crucial for the success of the project - showing how engagement (as intended above) is a key element of good cross-border collaborative journalism.

JOSE MIGUEL CALATAYUD, ARENA HOUSING PROJECT

Short Bio

Jose Miguel Calatayudam is a Spanish freelance journalist based in Berlin. Currently, he focuses on investigative journalism and mainly about Europe. His work has appeared in Foreign Policy, Al Jazeera, El País, New Statesman, Internazionale, USA Today, Information and Espresso, among others. From March 2019, he is working with Arena for Journalism in Europe, where he leads the Arena Housing Project, an open collaborative network for journalists and researchers working on housing. He is the co-initiator and the coordinator of the cross-border project Cities for Rent: Investigating Corporate Landlords Across Europe, of which the publication phase started in April 2021.

Website: <https://josemcalatayud.net/in-english/>

About the Arena Housing Project: an experiment of engaged cross-border collaborative journalism



ENJOI - ENGagement and JOurnalism Innovation for Outstanding Open Science Communication

This project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program under Grant Agreement n°101006407
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The [Arena Housing Project](#) is an open collaborative network for journalists and researchers working on housing across Europe. It was created within the [Arena for Journalism in Europe](#) following up on the 2019 DataHarvest conference to facilitate and promote cross-border journalism and research to investigate the transnational dimension of the housing crisis in Europe. The Arena Housing Project generates public resources and provides its network with the necessary online infrastructure to share data and information and to collaborate across borders.

According to Jose Miguel Calatayudam, who currently leads it, the Housing Project is both a pilot project and an end in itself. Within the Arena of Journalism, there was already a strong belief about the need of cross-border collaborative journalism to deal appropriately with complex transnational topics. The following step was aggregating forces around a shared topic with a strong transnational dimension: **housing**. Everyone needs a home (as the Covid-19 pandemic has shown even more) while there are housing crises across almost all the main European cities. Calatayudam and colleagues saw an opportunity to promote cross-border collaborative journalism in Europe about housing, leading to the Arena Housing Project. The main goals were:

- To connect and create a **network** of journalists and other researchers working on housing across Europe;
- To develop the necessary **online infrastructure** allowing the communicative routines and the working practices to keep that network alive and active;
- To facilitate and promote different kinds of **collaborations** within that network, from simply sharing data and contacts, to launching complex cross-border investigations, to everything in between, like the development of shared maps or databases, for instance;
- To have a **community** emerging from that network.

The first communicative channel of the Housing Project was a **mailing list**, which has remained the main one. Over time, they developed and implemented more channels, forums and other applications to open up more ways for people to participate. Calatayudam and colleagues wanted the network to be made of (mostly) journalists for (mostly) journalists. So they tried to engage their network in common or shared projects, like mapping and developing shared databases.



They also tried to implement an **engagement strategy** based on **responsiveness** and **involvement**:

- Trying to answer quickly and providing immediate feedback whenever anyone interacted with the network;
- Identifying those individuals most engaged and encouraging them to stay participative and reactive.

In the last two years, the Arena Housing Project became a real experiment of **engaged cross-border collaborative journalism**, and led to successful journalistic investigations such as the cross-border project [Cities for Rent: Investigating Corporate Landlords Across Europe](#).

Success story: Cities for Rent

As part of the Arena Housing Project strategy, Jose Miguel Calatayudam co-initiated the cross-border investigation [Cities for Rent: Investigating Corporate Landlords Across Europe](#). It was a proactive investigation, in the sense that it didn't respond to a leak or that it followed the news. The team decided on a topic that was in the public interest, wasn't being researched, and required the cross-border collaborative dimension. With that in mind, it was defined that “**corporate landlords**” was such a topic. Corporate landlords are companies that buy, sell and own many houses. There are investment funds that buy, rent out and sell houses purely for profit. And there are companies that buy or build houses to manage them as landlords, and their business model depends on making money out of those houses.

In the last few years, some of these companies have become the biggest landlords in cities and countries across Europe. For example, it was claimed that Blackstone, an American investment fund, was the single biggest private landlord in Europe. The problem was that there wasn't publicly available data to support or deny those claims, and to allow for a properly informed public debate about corporate landlords. Because these are big, multinational companies that operate across borders, the investigation's hypothesis was that they must have been having an impact on the **housing crisis** in European cities.

So, Cities for Rent's goal was to try and find the relevant data about corporate landlords in Europe. All the results are published on the [project website](#) in many European languages. Overall, the investigation shed light on a **real**



economic and social problem, on which it was really hard to collect data. Results of the project showed that many European municipalities were trying to regulate housing markets without being able to know who were the biggest landlords in their cities and how many houses they owned.

Overall, this is an interesting practical example of the complex relationship between science and society (see Section 3.1 of this document). Besides the health consequences, the Sars-Cov-2 pandemic also had high social, economic and cultural impacts, often resulting in the increasing of social injustice. Cities for Rent is a good example of a journalistic piece of work embedding the complex science-society relationship. Moreover, it was realized by applying a rigorous and transparent method - another key aspect for good (science) journalism (see Section 3.1 in this document). In fact, one of the main results of the investigation was the **methodology** the team developed and the way journalists collaborated across European borders to build up from scratch some of those missing databases. This was also acknowledged at international level: Cities for Rent won the European Press Prize Innovation Award, received an honourable mention at the IJ4EU Impact Award and was nominated to the Sigma Awards for data journalism.



6.2 Engagement in investigative and slow journalism

According to the UNESCO's definition¹⁴, investigative journalism is the “unveiling of matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances - and the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public”. In more recent years, a certain kind of investigative journalism was inserted in a broader movement called “slow journalism”. It shares the same values as other slow-movement subsets (the most famous probably being Slow Food), in its efforts to produce a good, clean and fair product. Rob Orchard, British journalist and funder of the The Slow Journalism Company, described slow journalism with these words:

«Some people will have an appetite for a different sort of journalism. A journalism which values journalists. Which puts them at the heart of stories. Which gives them the time to do what they do best. Which follows up on stories after everyone has moved on. Which brings you stories that you didn't know you wanted to read, but nonetheless changed your worldview. And a journalism, which is the most important of all, that isn't trying to be Twitter, because it knows that being right is much more important than being first. We call it Slow Journalism»¹⁵

We interviewed 4 European journalists applying the principles of investigative and slow journalism in Hungary, Bosnia and Italy with a strong focus on engagement. These experiences demonstrate how this kind of journalism can find alternative **revenue models**.

PETER ERDÉLYI, 444.HU

Short Bio

Peter Erdélyi is a Hungarian journalist. He is currently director of business development at the online media outlet 444.hu, which also has a science journalism media platform called qubit.hu. His role includes audience growth, diversifying the business model and funding opportunities, and commissioning

¹⁴ <https://en.unesco.org/investigative-journalism>

¹⁵ Rob Orchard, The Slow Journalism Revolution, TEDX Talk Madrid, 2014: <https://youtu.be/UGtFXtnWME4>



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special content projects about pressing issues in Hungary. He is also responsible for the mid- and long term strategy and sustainability of 444.hu and qubit.hu. Before this, he was an investigative reporter covering stories related to national security, covert foreign influence, corruption, hate groups and the rule of law, with a specific focus on judicial independence. In 2021, Peter Erdélyi became Journalist Fellow at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. His project looked at user-generated revenue models for online media in hybrid regimes.

Website:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/peter-erd%C3%A9lyi-17893959/?originalSubdomain=hu>

444.hu

[444.hu](#) is one of the last independent media outlets remaining in Hungary. It mainly covers public affairs, and its team of journalists won multiple awards for their investigative journalism. It has around 400 thousand visitors a day.

Success story: A new revenue model for the 444.hu investigations

With the Covid-19 outbreak, 444.hu faced a strong crisis. While reader numbers were skyrocketing, the digital advertising market collapsed. Peter Erdélyi had just become the new director, and he had to deal with what he called the “awful math of survival”, which meant: “how many people do we lay off? Whose salary do we cut? What parts of our journalism are we willing to sacrifice to keep our site alive?”

In Hungary, independent media outlets such as 444.hu are penalized: they work in a situation where state actors routinely interfere with the **advertising market**, favouring media willing to align with the government line.

At the beginning of 2020, Peter Erdélyi and his team decided to turn to their **readers**, telling them openly that their survival was in their hands. “If they wouldn’t pay for independent journalism, there wouldn’t be any independent newsrooms left”.

In an incredibly short period of time, they raised **donations**, organised a **crowdfunding campaign** and launched a very basic **membership** scheme. By



autumn 2020, they had reversed all the pandemic pay cuts. By the end of the year, they hired eight new reporters and extended their coverage. In 2021, they're continuing to work on their **new, sustainable business model**.

444.hu (as well as the science journalism media qubit.hu) are moving away from an advertising-based business model to a hybrid model where **financial contributions from readers** play an increasingly important role as political interference in the media market and pressure on advertisers and media outlets increase.

At the same time, Erdélyi and colleagues managed to create a **strong community of readers and supporters**, directly interacting with the reporters (via comments on the articles, surveys, participation to specific events and a closed Facebook group) and **giving their contribution** to the high-quality investigative journalism they are supporting.

ALESSIA CERANTOLA, OCCRP

Short Bio

Alessia Cerantola is an Italian investigative journalist at the Bosnia-based Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP). She was co-founder and board member of the Investigative Reporting Project Italy (IRPI) and IrpiMedia and member of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). She has been reporting from Japan since 2007. She covered environmental issues, sex crimes, corruption and cyber crimes for a cross section of media including the BBC World Service, The Atlantic, The Intercept, the Guardian and The Japan Times. In 2016, she was part of the Pulitzer-Prize winning Panama Papers investigation working in particular as part of a historic collaboration among Japanese media outlets. Her work has been honoured with several journalism awards and nominations, including the Press Freedom Award 2012 by Reporters Without Borders and Unesco, Austria and the DIGAwards.

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Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP): engagement



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journalism as a public good

The [Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project](#) (OCCRP) is a consortium of investigative centers, media and journalists operating in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, Central Asia and Central America. OCCRP is an investigative reporting organization that specializes in organized crime and corruption. It publishes its stories through local media and in English and Russian through its [website](#), which reaches **6 million readers** every month.

By developing and equipping a global network of investigative journalists and publishing their stories, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) exposes crime and corruption so the public can hold power to account.

In the face of rising costs and growing threats to independent media, OCCRP provides media outlets and journalists with a range of critical resources and tools including **digital and physical security** and allows those covering the most sensitive topics to work in teams with trusted editors.

While upholding the highest journalistic ethics and editorial standards, OCCRP develops and deploys cutting-edge tech tools to enable collaborative, secure data-driven investigations. With OCCRP [Aleph](#), an investigative data platform powered by software they themselves developed, journalists can search and cross-reference more than one billion records to trace criminal connections and patterns and efficiently collaborate across borders.

As an investigative reporting platform for a worldwide network of independent media centers and journalists, OCCRP is adopting a new user-center approach: it considers investigative journalism as a **public good**. For this reason, OCCRP developed a tailored **engagement strategy**, connecting the editorial team and investigations to audiences at the international level.

Success story: the impact of engaged investigative journalism

OCCRP's primary basis for measuring impact is **increased accountability**. They measure this in terms of illicitly acquired funds returned to the public sphere; civic actions, such as a protest calling for change; government actions, such as when a government seeks evidence from another government based on an investigation; corporate actions, such as when a financial institution closes a



loophole in the banking system; resignations and sackings, like when a prime minister is forced to quit; official investigations, usually opened by a national prosecutor; and arrests, indictments, and sentences. Since OCCRP began recording impact in 2011, their investigations have contributed to:

- 186 civil actions
- 559 government actions
- 103 corporate actions

OCCRP has a strong **community group** sustaining its investigative journalism. "Support from readers helps OCCRP expose organized crime and corruption around the world. By donating, you'll be directly supporting journalism as a public good" it reads on the OCCRP [website](#).

CECILIA ANESI, IRPIMEDIA

Short Bio

Cecilia Anesi is a freelance reporter and co-founder of the Investigative Reporting Project Italy (IRPI) and IrpiMedia. IRPI is a centre for investigative journalism based in Italy and member of the Global Investigative Journalism Network and the OCCRP Network. She co-authored the investigative documentary on illicit waste trafficking in Europe, 'Toxic Europe', which won the Best International Organised Crime Report Award in 2011 and was nominated in the 2012 Data Journalism Awards by the Global Editors Network. Anesi works in a team that focuses its investigations mainly on Italian organised crime gangs and their transnational ties. As IRPI, she has published about doomed finance, frauds, corruption, environmental crimes and money laundering - exposing criminals through a glocal approach. She has published investigative work on the Italian mafias in Africa, in Germany, in the UK, in Northern Europe and Latin America on regional, national and international media outlets.

Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/ceciliaanesi/?originalSubdomain=it>

IrpiMedia: investigative slow journalism sustained by readers

[IrpiMedia](#) is an independent, non-profit transnational investigative journalism



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online media. Its investigations cover major issues that go beyond national and continental borders, such as organised crime, corruption, environment, surveillance, migration and justice.

IrpiMedia's journalists focus on stories of **public interest**, by carrying out independent transnational investigations with the aim of leading to a more informed **public debate** and a fairer society.

With the Irpi association, IrpiMedia develops and promotes the most diverse forms of investigative journalism by working with journalists in Italy and abroad, breaking down technological and cultural language barriers. Over the years Irpi has also created social and training projects aimed at the academic and professional world.

IRPI also offers members of the public who want to send anonymous tips a secure whistleblowing platform, called [IrpiLeaks](#).

Success story: A no-profit model for investigative and slow journalism

Investigative journalism requires a great deal of time and resources, and many mainstream media outlets cannot afford to carry out this kind of work, especially in terms of time spent on lengthy investigative and verification work. IrpiMedia's aim is to develop and support fact-based journalism - no matter how long it takes or how much it costs. To reach this goal, they developed a **no-profit model for investigative and slow journalism**.

IrpiMedia does not belong to any publisher, owner or other business association, but only to Irpi, which has been an active association since 2012. As such, Irpi itself cannot distribute profits. If there are any surpluses, these are completely reinvested in IrpiMedia's activities to complete or conceive new projects. As a nonprofit, IrpiMedia's work is supported mainly by **donations from individuals, foundations, participation in calls for proposals and grants**.

Every donor and reader, thanks to the financial transparency reports that IrpiMedia draw up and put online every year, are able to know how every single euro is spent. Even in the [donation page](#), supporters can find a breakdown of costs:

- 68%: Newsroom



- Operational costs: 13%
- Fundraising: 8%
- Counseling: 6%
- Administration: 5%

Thanks to this donations model, IrpiMedia is completely **free and without ads**.

ALBERTO PULIAFITO, SLOW NEWS

Short Bio

Alberto Puliafito is the editor and co-founder of Slow News. In 2005 he founded TvBlog, for which he writes the Malaparte column, and in 2007 he founded the independent production company iK Produzioni. He has produced entertainment TV programmes such as Cortesie per gli ospiti, L'Ost, Chef a domicilio, Cuoco gentiluomo, Paint on the road and documentaries on social issues such as Dall'altra parte del cancello and Comando e controllo. He is the author of two books: Protezione Civile SPA (2010) and Croce Rossa. Il lato oscuro della virtù? (2011).

Website: <https://www.albertopuliafito.it/>

Slow News: a successful experiment of engagement in slow journalism

Slow News is an independent online media promoting the slow journalism approach. It doesn't have a publisher and it is not based on any kind of advertising: it only relies on its readers' support - and this is part of its vision of engaged slow journalism.

Since 2014, Slow News created its own community, which has been slowly expanding.

According to Alberto Puliafito journalism should be (first of all) a **service to communities**. Doing journalism well means offering skills to help give everyone the tools to make informed decisions. It means the ability to listen to people's needs, the ability to offer an account of both the problems and the solutions.

Besides the donation system, which keep Slow News alive, readers can engage



with the Slow News team in many ways:

- Asking for a topic they would like to be covered. This option is visible in the project's Homepage, with an easy-to-fill form. "We will answer you with the 'slow' approach and your input will help us produce a new story or investigation", it reads.
- Proposing an investigation. This option is an innovative version of the standard "work with us": anyone can send a proposal filling a very detailed [survey](#), including the budget proposal.

6.3 Engagement in fact-checking

Recent studies show that developing critical thinking is neither easy nor fast. It requires a process where people get to understand how the digital information ecosystem works, and the mechanisms lying behind the production and distribution of news, true or false. While standard fact-checking (which should be at the basis of any reporting activity) can be useful to undermine one single piece of information or one single unreliable source, the wave and surge of misinformation, such as the one we are facing with the infodemic on Covid-19, require a much more comprehensive approach and stronger responses. To address this need, many nonprofit associations or even new media outlets were funded with the aim of reducing the level of misinformation and fighting fake news. We interviewed two journalists in Spain and in the Netherlands who, in very different ways, promote an innovative kind of audience engagement via fact-checking.

ROCÍO BENAVENTE, MALDITA CIENCIA

Short Bio

Rocío Benavente is the head journalist of Maldita Ciencia. She devoted her entire career to science journalism, mainly as an editor at El Confidencial and also as a freelance for the SINC Agency, the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology (FECYT), or the Chair of Scientific Dissemination of the University of the Basque Country. She has been behind Maldita Ciencia since it



emerged within Maldita.es in June 2018. She is in charge of debunking scientific hoaxes, explaining science, health and food issues that go beyond hoaxes but encourage misinformation and also of resolving doubts about these issues raised by Maldita's community. She has given talks and workshops for different audiences.

Website: <https://educa.maldita.es/rocio-perez-benavente/>

Maldita Ciencia: engaging the public in debunking scientific hoaxes

Just like Maldito Bulo, Maldita Migración and Maldita Hemeroteca, [Maldita Ciencia](#) is another section of [Maldita.es](#), a non-profit organisation whose purpose is to fact-check information circulating on the internet, especially on social media like Facebook and Twitter, messaging apps like WhatsApp and platforms like YouTube.

Maldita Ciencia was kicked-off in 2018 with the aim of broadening the range of fact-checking to also include scientific information. It works with 3 main categories of misinformation:

- Hoaxes and unfounded rumours: When information is simply a lie.
- What we know: When at Maldita Ciencia they do not say something is a lie, but that it is not exactly the truth either. This tends to happen when there is a study that is done poorly or is misinterpreted.
- Explanation: 'Maldita explains', Questions that people have been listening to for a long time.

Rocío Benavente and her team monitor false information through different channels, from social media to web search to scientific consultancy. Most importantly, Maldita Ciencia **engages its community in debunking scientific hoaxes**. The audience can make any questions and propose a suspected hoax contacting the team through its website and social media channels. A dedicated WhatsApp number was also created: this exponentially increased the audience's engagement, with hundreds of messages received every day.

KARIN VAN DEN BOOGAERT, WETENSCHAP.NU



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Short Bio

Karin Van Den Boogaert is a Dutch science journalist. She hosted several radio and TV shows (Wereldomroep, Vroege Vogels and Radio1 News). She now continues the same work with her own society Science ON AIR, with which she helps academics to appear in the media. And they can blog themselves on her website wetenschap.nu, an innovative experiment of science journalism and fact-checking made directly by scientists.

Website:

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/karin-van-den-boogaert-b0292550/?originalSubdomain=nl>

Wetenschap.nu: engaging scientists in fact-checking

[Wetenschap.nu](https://wetenschap.nu) is an online platform born from the society [Science On Air](https://scienceonair.nl), both funded by the science journalist Karin Van Den Boogaert.

Science On Air can be considered a virtual showcase of scientists. Researchers can register and present their research in a clear and appealing way, with the support of science communication experts. The platform is mainly addressed to journalists, editors or event organizers looking for scientists to be interviewed.

Wetenschap.nu made a step further: Van Den Boogaert founded it with the goal to create an **open space** for scientists to communicate their research with a journalistic approach. She provides training and support to **“help scientists become journalists”**.

The whole engagement strategy of Wetenschap.nu revolves around **fact-checking**: the contents provided by researchers are always verified and are meant to help fight misinformation and fake news.

Success story: science to fight stereotypes

Among the Wetenschap.nu featured scientists, there are some researchers working at the **Transgender Department** of the [Amsterdam UMC, VU medical center](https://www.umc-amsterdam.nl).

The majority of transgender people in the Netherlands go here, where more



than 100 experts from various disciplines are employed.

In recent years, transgender people have attracted more and more media attention in the Netherlands, for example with TV with programs such as *Hij is een zij* ("He is a she"). But what this experience really entails, both from a social and a scientific point of view, is poorly understood.

According to Van Den Boogaert, Wetenschap.nu helped UMC researchers working on transgender treatments to propose a **new narrative** to the public, fighting stereotypes and promoting an informed debate. The website covered all the main scientific aspects of the transgender journey, from the psychological stage to the hormone treatments and the surgery phase.

Example (in Dutch) by medical doctor Christel de Blok
<https://wetenschap.nu/gender-aanpassende-behandeling-een-intensief-en-zorgvuldig-traject/>



6.4 Engagement in local journalism

For more than a century, most people have taken local journalism for granted. From small rural communities to larger towns, newspapers have been an integral part of local public life. But in the twenty-first century the newspaper industry that has historically provided most local coverage started to decline (Kleis Nielsen, 2015). One of the many challenges of the modern digital media is whether they will be able to sustain new forms of local journalism. We interviewed two Italian journalists who contributed to the success of investigative journalism (with a strong focus on science) at the local level. They built impactful and sustainable investigations/projects using engagement as a key asset of innovation, thus carrying on innovative experiments of **engaged local journalism**.

RAFFAELE ANGIUS, INDIP

Short Bio

Raffaele Angius is an Italian freelance journalist specialized in the use of IT tools for the protection of sources and telecommunications. In 2016 he designed and created RegeniLeaks for the Italian magazine L'Espresso, a platform that collected information and documents concerning the murder of Italian researcher Giulio Regeni and the violations of human rights in Egypt. He still carries out projects to protect the anonymity of the sources, among which the ItaliaLeaks initiative, with which the news agency AGI collects complaints and reports of cases of corruption and embezzlement. He is a member of the Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights, with which he collaborates for the dissemination of tools for the protection of journalistic work and sources. He recently co-funded Indip, a new investigative online media focusing on Sardinia.

Website:

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Indip: betting on local investigative journalism with crowdfunding



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[Indip](#) was created in 2021 in Sardinia from a project by the investigative journalist Pablo Sole. It focuses on local investigations, reportages and interviews, with the aim of providing readers with clear and accurate news stories from and sources.

The magazine embraces the principles of slow journalism (see section 6.2 of this document), a model of journalism inspired by product quality and, above all, a mission of service to the public.

Indip's mission is to work freely, without any kind of imposition: this is why the magazine will have no advertising or advertorials. For the magazine, a fundamental role will be played by **readers**, who, through the [Inleaks](#) platform - with a tool created by Raffaele Angius with technology provided by the Hermes Center for Transparency and Digital Human Rights - will be able to send documents and report any kind of news in an anonymous and protected way.

Indip was supported thanks to a **crowdfunding campaign** on [Produzioni dal Basso](#) - Italy's first crowdfunding and social innovation platform. The project raised 27.300 euros, which allowed Indip to kick-off. All the supporters obtained rewards, such as personalised merchandising and limited edition subscriptions based on the amount donated.

ISAIA INVERNIZZI, L'ECO DI BERGAMO

Short Bio

Isaia Invernizzi is an Italian science and data journalism. He worked for many years at the local Italian newspaper *L'Eco Di Bergamo*, managing the data journalism section. He currently works at IlPost.

Engagement to collect data: the Covid-19 death rate in Bergamo

In April 2020, the local Italian newspaper *L'Eco Di Bergamo* published the story "Coronavirus, the real death toll: 4.500 victims in one month in the province of Bergamo", by Isaia Invernizzi

This investigation is the result of the analysis carried out by *L'Eco di Bergamo* and the research and data analysis agency [InTwig](#), using the data provided by local municipalities. The starting point was a lack of data about the real Covid-19 death rate in Bergamo, one of the Italian cities most hit by the



Coronavirus outbreak at the beginning of 2020. In particular, official figures didn't say that in March 2020 more than 5.400 people had died in Bergamo province, 4.500 of which were due to coronavirus: six times more than the previous year.

The "official" certified deaths caused by Covid-19 in the local hospitals were "only" 2.060, but there were around 2500 people who generically died for "interstitial pneumonia". The investigation was launched to fill this data gap.

In order to verify the increase of total mortality compared to the previous years and collect the missing data, Isaia Invernizzi launched a survey among all the 243 municipalities of Bergamo province: 91 administrations answered the call, representing 607.000 people, which is more than 50% of the total population. The official data enabled *L'Eco di Bergamo* to make an accurate estimate of deaths and infections over every area of the province. Results demonstrated that 4.500 of the overall deaths in March 2020 in Bergamo were due to coronavirus: more than double of the official sources. As Invernizzi explained, investigation is a great example of engagement used in scientific data journalism to collect missing data.



6.5 Engagement via social media

The advent of digital technologies has connected people in different ways and with mixed outcomes. European citizens are quite aware of the impact and effect of digitalisation on their life, according to different Eurobarometers¹⁶. However, these studies show that there is a high demand to act on improving the quality of information and to counteract misinformation and fake news. Europeans are aware of the frequent circulation of low quality information and show an increasing level of distrust towards the media and social media in particular. That's why (science) journalists willing to use social media should make an extra effort to build community groups relying on trust. We interviewed an author, a science journalist and a science communicator having a great impact on social media within the community they created. Their experiences are good examples of how engagement can innovate the social media environment while building stronger trust and openness in science coverage.

MASSIMO POLIDORO, L'ISOLA DEL MISTERO

Short Bio

Massimo Polidoro is an Italian writer, journalist, television personality, co-founder and executive director of the Italian Committee for the Investigation of Claims of Pseudoscience (CICAP). He was the editor of CICAP's journal, *Scienza & Paranormale*, from its debut in 1993 to 2006. In 1996 he became the European representative for the James Randi Educational Foundation. In 2001, he became a member of the European Council of Skeptical Organisations (ECSO), and was nominated as a research fellow of CSICOP, the Committee for the Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. In 2005 he became the first Italian to hold a course on "Scientific Method, Pseudoscience and Anomalistic psychology", as a member of the psychology faculty of the University of Milan Bicocca. Since 2018, Polidoro has been teaching a postgraduate course on science communication at the University of Padua. In 2020, he started his own project called "L'isola del mistero" (the island of mystery).

Website: <https://www.massimopolidoro.com/>

¹⁶ <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/screen/home#p=1&yearFrom=1974&yearTo=2019>



L'isola del mistero: creating a community group on Patreon

Besides his “regular” job as author and journalist, for many years Massimo Polidoro has been sharing many things for free: videos on YouTube (with series like Strange Stories, the Daily Conspiracy, OK, Science!, The Kennedy Case), ebooks, daily posts on Instagram and other social networks to debunk hoaxes, an open newsletter (Avviso ai Naviganti), plus private answers to his followers contacting him on any platform.

In 2020, he realized that all this work could feed an independent project, gathering all the material produced and, most importantly, creating a **community group** in a more systematic way.

So he funded “[L'isola del mistero](#)” (the island of mystery) on **Patreon**, an American membership platform that provides business tools for content creators to run a subscription service.

ROBERTA VILLA, ROBIVIL PAGES

Short Bio

Roberta Villa is an Italian science journalist with a degree in Medicine and Surgery. She has worked for more than 20 years for the health pages of Corriere della Sera and many other Italian and international print and online publications. She has also collaborated with the Italian Association for Cancer Research (AIRC). She is currently a research fellow at Ca' Foscari University in Venice, where she is working on the European project [QUEST](#) for the communication of science in Europe. She wrote several scientific divulgation books. She is very active on social networks where she is experimenting with a simple and confidential approach to dissemination.

Website

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/robivil/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/robivil>



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Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/lavillasenzavirgola/>

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/c/RobertaVilla>

RobiVil pages: communicating complexity and uncertainty

Roberta Villa is one of the best known and more followed Italian science communicators. Her “RobiVil” pages on social media had an increasing success during the Covid-19 pandemic, due to her innovative way of communicating science and fighting misinformation with a very direct style. Working in a context where institutional communication followed a very paternalistic approach, the key of Roberta Villa’s success was trying to **communicate complexity and uncertainty never underestimating her audience**.

Her approach to social media actually started with her personal stories on Facebook - with the hashtag [#casasalaris](#). The switch from personal storytelling to science communication started around the **vaccine debate**. She created her official [Facebook page](#), where the personal and professional styles of communication blended a bit. She also started to communicate via [Twitter](#).

In 2017, with the Lorenzin Law on compulsory vaccination, she realized that too many inaccuracies were circulating. So, while drinking coffee, she shot her first video: it was an unexpected success, so she followed that path. She opened her [YouTube account](#), posting regular videos with her sitting at her kitchen table, a cup of coffee in hand and a drawing of Snoopy in the background, “explaining that as a mother of six she understands that all parents want to protect their children - that's why scientists have examined vaccines with such care, she tells viewers” as [an article on Science reported](#), opposing her style to the top-down approach adopted on social media by virologist Roberto Burioni.

After Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, Villa opened the [RobiVil profile on Instagram](#). It turned out to be the most successful communication channel, with **almost 200,000 followers**. With Instagram, she got out her “bubble” of science lovers and expanded **her audience** - reaching people who perhaps didn't think they could be interested in science. Her **live sessions** on Instagram reached thousands of views in a few hours.

Overall, her communication strategy on social media is based on some key



pillars:

- Always treat the audience with respect
- Never underestimate people's skills, experiences and concerns
- Avoid to approach the audience in a paternalistic way, do not make "lessons"
- Communicate complexity without oversimplifications
- Communicate uncertainty trying to provide tools to interpret the data and information available

This kind of approach made Roberta Villa's science communication effective. In the comments to her posts, "reliable", "competent", "respectful", "kind" are the most frequent words used by her followers to describe her work.

Roberta Villa's experiences also contributed to the European project [QUEST](#) on the quality and effectiveness in science and technology communication (whose results were very important for the work on SPIs carried out in ENJOI WP2 - See Deliverable 2.1). In particular, through a co-design approach, the QUEST team defined 12 **quality indicators for science communication**, with tailored suggestions for [social media](#).

ADRIAN FARTADE, LINK4UNIVERSE

Short Bio

Adrian Fartade is a Romanian-born science communicator, youtuber and writer, living and working in Italy. Passionate about astronomy, astronautics and astrophysics, in 2009 he created the web platform Link2universe as well as the social media channels Link4Universe, where he deals with the latest discoveries in the astronomical field and the development of the astronautical sector. He has been a guest on several television and radio shows and participated in the programme C'è spazio, broadcast on the TV2000 television channel. He has given monologues on space exploration in several Italian schools and theatres. He published three books with the Italian publisher Rizzoli.

Website: <https://www.adrianfartade.it/>



Link4Universe

Within his Link4Universe community, Adrian Fartade is a superstar. The Link4Universe YouTube channel was born in 2009 to invite the general public to follow the complex world of astronomy. Adrian Fartade is now one of the most popular science communicators in the Italian-speaking web, with more than 397,000 subscribers on Youtube and a growing community on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Twitch and Patreon.

Adrian Fartade's **engagement strategy** with his audience was very innovative. A few years ago, he refused the advice of Google's Italian office, which asked him to make shorter videos in order to get more views. He followed his own line, and today a two and a half hour video can reach 100.000 views in a few days.

His whole community revolves around the Link4Universe **live sessions**, commenting live on key events in the world of aerospace (e.g. rocket launches, SpaceX tests, extravehicular activities on ISS, etc.) He combines a very informal approach with an extremely high level of precision and depth in covering astronomical topics. His live sessions can last more than three hours, but people keep following him. Fartade's science communication is characterized by:

- A very direct and informal approach
- A vast knowledge of the aerospace sector - people can see the huge work behind his live sessions
- Professional products (high quality video and audio, graphic, etc.)
- Attention for the details (background, outfit, etc.)
- Excitement during the key space events (some of his followers even created memes on his expressions)
- Listening besides talking: he tries to address as many comments/question he can during his live sessions

Besides being one of the most successful youtuber (lately moving on Twitch for the live sessions), Adrian Fartade is also a theatre actor. Over the years, he was the guest star in several science shows.



6.6 Engagement via newsletters

Journalists Are Leaving the Noisy Internet for Your Email Inbox, titled the New York Times in September 2020. The [article](#), signed by staff reporter Marc Tracy, focused on Casey Newton leaving The Verge (where he had covered the tech industry since 2013) to write a subscription newsletter hosted by the newsletter platform Substack. This is one of the many examples witnessing the changing relationship between readers and journalists, and the new rising of newsletters. We interviewed two journalists who, after a long career in “traditional” media in Italy and India/Switzerland re-invented themselves in self-produced newsletters dedicated to science and technology, building over time **sustainable revenue models**. These experiences demonstrate how engagement via newsletters can increase the **audience’s trust** in science journalism and communication, resulting in readers being willing to offer financial support.

CAROLA FREDIANI, GUERRE DI RETE

Short Bio

Carola Frediani is a former journalist who became a cybersecurity awareness manager for a leading international online retailer. She is co-founder of the Italian media agency Effecinque. She wrote on technology, digital culture, privacy and hacking from 2016 to 2018 for the Italian daily La Stampa. She is the author of several books on cybersecurity. She founded the very successful newsletter Guerre di Rete.

Website: <https://guerredirete.it>

Guerre di Rete: building a community group

Every Sunday, Guerre di Rete newsletter proposes a selection and analysis of news and stories on cybersecurity, politics and networking, surveillance, cybercrime, digital rights, artificial intelligence, from a global perspective.

Carola Frediani launched the first newsletter in 2018 as an experiment. It now counts **more than 9,000 subscribers**, with a very high click rate (more than 50%).



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The success of Guerre di Rete consisted in creating a **community group** around it: the subscribers do not just passively receive the newsletter, but they provide constant feedback via different channels ([website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), email).

Thanks to the readers' support, Guerre di Rete also recently became a **no-profit association** whose aim is to promote culture and information on digital issues.

During 2020-21, the association held a **donation campaign** to allow the development of special contents for the newsletter. The campaign was a great success, and all the [donors](#) were thanked and mentioned on the website.

Carola Frediani highlighted that her choice was to keep Guerre di Rete **free** and **independent**. The newsletter is now fully supported by the donations, but it remains open access and freely available for everyone. Moreover, Frediani refused several offers by mainstream media who wanted to buy the newsletter.

This probably contributed to reinforce the community group around Guerre di Rete, and to enhance the audience's **trust**.

PRITI PATNAIK, GENEVA HEALTH FILES

Short Bio

Priti Patnaik is an Indian independent journalist working in Geneva, Switzerland, for most part of the last ten years. Her areas of interest comprise global health, international trade and illicit financial flows. Prior to Geneva, she has also been a journalist in New York and New Delhi. In 2020 she founded the independent newsletter Geneva Health Files.

Website: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/pritipatnaik/?originalSubdomain=ch>

Geneva Health Files: towards a sustainable model for readers-supported investigative journalism via newsletters

Geneva Health Files is a newsletter tracking global health matters in Geneva. The ultimate goal is to improve people's understanding on how global health is being governed, thereby contributing to the transparency and accountability of actors in this complex field.



According to the founder Priti Patnaik, the development challenges we face today demonstrate the need for **interdisciplinary approaches** to tackle complex matters.

Started as a self-investment, Geneva Health Files aims to become a reader-funded project, in order to propose a sustainable model for readers-supported investigative journalism via newsletters.



7. CONCLUSIONS

This Focus Report gives a qualitative overview of how European science journalists, science communicators, and media outlets with a strong focus on science used **engagement** as a key asset of innovation in **science journalism**.

The results highlighted the importance of engagement in 6 different areas, all crucial for an effective engaged science journalism: **cross-border and collaborative journalism, investigative and slow journalism, fact-checking, local journalism, social media, and newsletters**. All these different domains have at least three common aspects:

1. **Engagement increases audiences' trust in science journalism.** Now more than ever, science journalists need to reflect on the relationship with their audience, in order to (re)build **trust**. This could be achieved through what we called here **engaged science journalism**, which is a great opportunity to improve the quality of science journalism. Never in the past had science-related news become mainstream news with such a powerful force and with such a pervasive impact. During the pandemic, all kinds of media were “forced” to cover science, and as a result science journalism has carved out its niche. But this is slowly going beyond the Covid-19 domain. For example, the need for a deeply fact-based and carefully crafted science communication is more evident also in relation to the climate crisis, as the tragic floods in Northern Europe or the devastating wildfires in some Mediterranean areas have shown during the summer 2021 and 2022. And more generally, the public awareness of the importance of science for society is increasing. As a result, science journalism is becoming more and more a key factor in facilitating democratic deliberation and fighting misinformation, and involving the audience(s) at different levels of media production can highly increase trust in science communication and journalism. The key is making the public an active part of the news reporting process: sharing ideas for a story, calling for ideas among the readers/users, but also inviting users to share their knowledge, to act locally in search of information and stories or to verify numbers and facts. Besides the increasing of trust, this can also result in the improvement of quality in science journalism.



2. **Engagement should be seen not only as a key aspect of science journalism, but also as a methodology.** As many of the interviewees pointed out, the concept itself of “audience” changed a lot in the last few years. Audiences can no longer be considered static, silent and passive. Connectivity and digital transformation demand for a much higher degree of dialogue and involvement at all the communication levels. Going beyond simply listening to the users’ preferences and asking them to actively share knowledge, points of views and sometimes specialized expertise makes journalism more consistent and inclusive. It directly addresses the audiences’ real needs, covers stories with diverse nuances and includes diverse socio-cultural perspectives and experiences. For this reason, engagement should be part of the methodology applied to improve scientific journalism. Special efforts should be put in assessing ways and methods to involve the audiences in the entire production process.
3. When engaged science journalism is successful, it results in **audiences being willing to offer financial support.** In engaged (science) journalism, the audience is part of the media ecosystem in a deeper way: it has a crucial role in establishing a more resilient revenue model. That’s why engaged journalism paves the way towards a more sustainable journalism. This is probably the most innovative and less known insight when it comes to applying engagement methods to science journalism and science communication. For example, 4 of the European journalists we interviewed applied the principles of engagement to investigative and slow journalism in Hungary, Bosnia and Italy. These experiences demonstrate how this kind of journalism can find alternative user-generated revenue models.

These three insights (engagement as trust incubator, engagement as a methodology and engagement to find new revenue models in science journalism) are the main outcomes of this work. These concepts fed the first round of ENJOI Engagement Workshops in Italy, Belgium, Spain and Portugal, where engagement was confirmed to be a key aspect for high quality science communication and journalism.



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