

SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA STARTUPS FROM EASTERN EUROPE



Bosch Alumni
Network

WITH THANKS

SPOTLIGHT ON Media Startups from Eastern Europe has been produced with the generous contribution of the Bosch Alumni Network.

Cover Photo © Paval Hadzinski,
Paval Hadzinski captured the protests in Belarus in autumn 2020 for different media outlets. He regularly posts his work also via [Instagram](#)

Editing by Pauline Tillmann
Layout Design by Helen Hecker



**Bosch Alumni
Network**

The Bosch Alumni Network is a cooperation between:



**Robert Bosch
Stiftung**

iac Berlin



CONTENTS



PAGE 5

FOREWORD

By Lisa Richter
Coordinator *Bosch Alumni Network*

PAGE 6

EDITOR'S NOTE

By Pauline Tillmann
Editor-in-chief of *Deine Korrespondentin*

PAGE 8

WHO LET THE DOG OUT?

By Iryna Vidanova
Co-founder of *CityDog.by*

PAGE 13

BOOSTING QUALITY JOURNALISM IN ROMANIA

By Ștefan Mako
Co-founder of *Inclusiv*

PAGE 19

NON-PROFIT JOURNALISM FOR HUNGARY

By Tamás Bodoky
Co-founder of *Átlátszó*

PAGE 25

BECOMING THE HORROR OF CORRUPT PEOPLE

By Iurie Sanduța
Co-founder and executive director at *RISE Moldova*

PAGE 29

BATTLE BETWEEN INFORMATION AND THE NARRATIVES

By Jakub Górnicki
Co-founder of *Outriders*



FOREWORD



МЫ НЕ ЗНАЛИ
ДРУГ ДРУГА
ДО ЭТОГО ЛЕТА...

ХЛОПАЙ
УСИЩАМИ
И ВЗЛЕТАЙ



In the past few years, there has been a lot of movement in the media ecosystem. This is not only down to dwindling advertising income, but also due to the overwhelming power of big players like Google and Facebook. At the same time, more people are now willing to spend money on independent reporting and initiatives designed to create change in the media industry. While these are usually niche publications outside the mainstream, they still often reach tens of thousands of people.

These projects play an important role in their respective countries as they usually report independently of national interests and rely on alternative sources of funding. In other words, they promote democratic, pluralistic debates and stand up for freedom of expression and freedom of the press. These free, critical, and impartial media channels are of growing importance – especially in countries like Poland or Hungary, where these exact values are coming under increased pressure.

This is one of the main reasons why the five-part project series "Spotlight on Media Start-ups from Eastern Europe" focuses on innovative start-ups from Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Romania and Moldova. The series explores the role they play in these countries' media ecosystems as well for society and democracy in general.

This project was implemented within the **Bosch Alumni Network's** Media Cluster, which brings together more than 1200 journalists and media professionals from across the world, from India, China, the US and Russia to regions like East and West Africa or West, East and Southeast Europe.

Mutual support, communication and collaboration across borders are core values of the Media Cluster and the Bosch Alumni Network as a whole. Within and across its other clusters (e.g. Governance, Civil Society, Science or Peace or Europe), the Bosch Alumni Network connects a diverse range of members from over 100 countries and fosters cross-sectoral exchange. It contributes to an open, just and sustainable world by convening diverse perspectives, enabling knowledge sharing and empowering members to take collective action.

Founded in 2017 by the **Robert Bosch Stiftung**, the Bosch Alumni Network is coordinated by the **International Alumni Center (iac Berlin)**, a think and do tank for impactful networks which advises foundations and other non-profit organizations on their alumni work, helps develop practical solutions in designing impact-oriented networks and initiates new forms of collaboration.

Lisa Richter

COORDINATOR BOSCH ALUMNI NETWORK



FIND

YOUR WAY

Editor's Note

I have been working as a journalist for about 20 years now. As far as I can remember, it has always been common to have a view of the United States and Great Britain in terms of trends in media or journalism. In recent years, it has also become increasingly fashionable to visit our Scandinavian neighbors on research trips as well.

Between 2018 and 2020, I was given the opportunity to work as project manager at the DW Akademie, which changed my mind. I discovered a range of innovative, interesting media startups from the global South. I organized meet-ups with Animal Politico (Mexico), Agencia Lupa (Brazil), New Naratif (Malaysia), Africa Check (South Africa) and many more – and learned that as media makers or managers, we should pay closer attention to events happening outside the US and Europe.

Fittingly, I was also the editor and author of a handbook for digital media entrepreneurs "From Start to Success", published in September 2020 by the DW Akademie. It has since been translated into Spanish and Arabic and can be downloaded for free [here](#).

The handbook is based on interviews with successful media organization founders from Asia, Latin America and the MENA region. This is also what I had in mind when I pitched a 5-part series to the Bosch Alumni Network. I wanted to make media entrepreneurs from Eastern Europe – finally – visible to a broader audience.

I used to work as a freelance foreign correspondent in St. Petersburg, Russia, from 2011 to 2015. In that time, I travelled extensively through post-soviet

countries, reporting for German national public radio about the media situations in Georgia or Ukraine. I travelled to Warsaw in 2018 after reading an article about upcoming media startups there and met a number of inspiring people – including Jakub Gornicki, founder of *Outriders*, who also contributed to this publication.

In our 5-part series, we talked over Zoom, WhatsApp and Signal about the media situations in Belarus, Poland, Hungary, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Romania and Moldova. We were excited to grab the chance to experiment with the messenger platform Signal, for instance, conversing with the media startups we invited and the challenges they face in repressive or authoritarian regimes.

We often received feedback from the participants at the end that they wanted documentation of the conversation, or at least some form of protocol. That's why we spent some of our overall project budget on creating this publication. We invited some of our speakers to tell us more about their key learnings and provide us with a behind-the-scenes perspective of starting and leading a successful media project in Eastern Europe.

We know that it is often much more difficult to start something innovative in this part of the world than, for example, the US, Germany or Sweden. By reading these articles, you should receive a better understanding of the surrounding political and social conditions, while simultaneously developing a constructive, solution-oriented approach to the problems. We aim to share useful experiences, to inspire and encourage upcoming media entrepreneurs – no matter if they are based in the West or East, North or South.

Pauline Tillmann

**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE DIGITAL MAGAZINE
DEINE KORRESPONDENTIN**





THE DOG OUT?

In May 2021, *CityDog.by* – an internet magazine focusing on the Belarusian capital of Minsk – turned nine years old. What originally started as a niche publication now reaches 1.5 million users a month from a city population of 2 million and a national population of 9.5 million.

Although now one of Belarus' leading independent media publications, *CityDog.by* maintains a startup-like spirit of innovation and experimentation, while continuing its mission of making Belarus' capital a better place to live and building a community of active citizens.

A decade ago, founding a new publication in Belarus was a radical idea. The authoritarian government fully controlled TV and radio and heavily subsidized state media. Independent newspapers were economically discriminated

against and politically repressed. This challenging environment only worsened after a crackdown following a flawed presidential election in 2010.

However, the internet was still accessible and affordable for most Belarusians. Independent media practitioners realized this potential early on and took full advantage. Over the last decade, democratic voices have defeated government propaganda in terms of online audience numbers and trust. When something happens in the country, citizens turn to the internet instead of state TV. While the audiences of independent news websites were growing, however, their online revenue remained marginal.

As *CityDog.by*'s founders, we were not new to the media market and knew the challenges it presents. More importantly, we had already made the transition to digital. After our independent print magazine *Studentskaya Dumka* (Students' Thought) was shut down by the regime in 2005, we transformed it into Belarus' first multimedia magazine, first on compact disc and then online as 34mag.net. Although repressed in Belarus, the magazine won several international awards for creativity and innovation.

OPPORTUNITY

Despite Belarus' hostile political and economic environment, the mission-driven team saw an opportunity to launch a new type of online outlet – a publication that focused on lifestyle but was civically-oriented; independent but commercially viable; activist yet targeted an apolitical audience. We sought to create an outlet that would resonate with us – young urban professionals – and become a hub for Minsk's creative class, promoting civic pride and activating local communities. We hoped to make Minsk – a former socialist showpiece – into a city for the people. Nothing like it existed on the market.

The moment was right. The capital was witnessing the birth of a new urban culture led by a burgeoning IT sector and independent cultural

groups. The city itself was changing, with artisan cafes and restaurants, private art galleries, cultural spaces, co-working hubs and business incubators popping up everywhere. These entities hosted film and music festivals, book presentations, art exhibitions and public lectures.

In different districts, residents began self-organizing to protest against runaway development projects that were destroying parks and historical buildings. *CityDog.by* was created not only to report on this transformation but to be an integral part of it. We tried to make this clear in the magazine's title: our editorial team would run around the city, stick our noses into everything new, find extraordinary people and grab hold of untold stories.

EDITORIAL CONCEPT

After shaping the publication's concept, the founders defined their target audience. We created detailed demographic and psychological portraits of our desired readers to understand how best to reach them. In one sense it was easy, as we were targeting people like ourselves: 25-40 year-old active, curious young professionals who loved Minsk and wanted to make it a better place. Almost a decade later, we still use those reader portraits, hanging on our walls, to keep us true to our core audience.

The magazine's fundamental belief has always been that Minsk should be made by and for the people. Therefore, feature articles and storytelling formed the basis of our editorial policy. Creating quality content and developing a unique voice alone were not enough to win an audience. From the start, we prioritized a positive user experience – from website design and navigation to content distribution.

Since *CityDog.by*'s founders had produced earlier publications known for their groundbreaking look, we already had a stable of designers, artists and photographers to develop a visual style for the new magazine that matched its concept. After researching existing online publishing and editing

platforms, the team, including an IT specialist, opted to develop their own content management system which provided greater flexibility for editorial needs.

Understanding the need to closely connect with our readers, the team strove from the start to build a community both online and offline. In a move unusual for Belarus at the time, we simultaneously launched the magazine's website and pages on popular social networks. To create hype for the May 2012 launch, we organized an international short film festival in downtown Minsk.

Later, we partnered with numerous non-governmental organizations and private companies to hold other offline events. We continue to diversify our content distribution channels, which today number eight, in addition to the website itself. Most importantly, we keep listening to and interacting with our readers, seeking their assistance in identifying heroes for our articles or finding bugs in our new tech features.

BUSINESS MODEL

The magazine's innovative concept, targeted approach, visual style, technological savvy and diversified content distribution generated a fast-growing reader base. In under a year, *CityDog.by* was attracting 150,000 monthly users. By May 2015, readership had reached over 315,000 users per month – and kept growing. By May 2018, the website passed the key benchmark of half a million monthly readers. Today, the audience is stable – from 1.3–1.5 million visitors a month, 70% of whom live in Minsk or its suburbs. The magazine also has over 160,000 followers on social media.

Producing catchy content and growing an audience were only part of our success. To become truly independent and sustainable, the magazine needed to generate stable revenue. Nine years ago, most online media in Belarus could not monetize at all, or generated only modest revenue

via banner ads. *CityDog.by* consciously chose to limit its display ads to several prime options so as not to irritate its readers with banner ads, which can often clash with the website's visual style. It was also clear that banners alone didn't even generate enough revenue to cover our editorial expenses.

Instead, the founders focused on a content (native) advertising model. At the time, content advertising was a new concept – *CityDog.by* pioneered its use in Belarus. The founders had experience and connections in the advertising world – since 2006, the team had also operated an ad agency, specializing in innovative digital work. The foundation of the new magazine's business model was the development and implementation of longer-term (3–10 month) specialized content projects that centered on one issue in partnership with private companies. For the client, this type of advertising focused on raising brand awareness and building relations with customers, rather than direct sales.

The team saw it as a way to link their mission with revenue streams, as it facilitated creating and disseminating more quality content on topics that still had a societal impact. *CityDog.by*'s founders reached out to an initial group of advertisers and worked directly with them to understand their needs and fine-tune the model. Ties to a reputable ad agency helped the new magazine to secure the first clients for pilot content advertising projects. However, it took the time and the skills of a professional commercial manager, who joined the team in 2013, to onboard bigger brands. We are proud that *CityDog.by* created a new niche in Belarus' advertising market, a model which went on to become mainstream several years later.

Today, the magazine runs 4–6 special projects a year in partnership with international and local brands. The advertising topics promote local history, urban activism, Belarusian language, modern art, literature, the environment, etc.





CITYDOG.BY TEAM (EDITORS AND MANAGERS) AT THE WORKSHOP WITH CLARE COOK, BUSINESS VIABILITY ADVISOR (UK) IN FEBRUARY 2020.

The model includes some key principles: advertisers and the magazine must share the same appreciation for the featured heroes and topics and act as partners. Most importantly, the magazine preserves its full editorial independence in regard to the content it produces – even the ads. Currently, content advertising projects generate 85 percent of the magazine's revenue. In this way, *CityDog.by* has made significant strides toward full self-sustainability.

TEAMWORK

In order to make this model work, the magazine adopted an integrated newsroom and a small team approach. For every new editorial or commercial project, a dedicated team is formed consisting of a project manager, editor (who tasks journalists and photographers) and a designer, as well as an IT

specialist when needed. For commercial projects, the manager also serves as liaison between the client and the magazine.

Within the outlet's office, there are no walls separating the editorial and commercial departments, as both work hand in hand, united by common values and an editorial policy that ensures the quality of all content. The magazine's team now consists of 15 people, who together publish 4-5 original articles and 7-8 news posts each day. The magazine is fully independent, published by a company co-owned by the founding team.

The founders run the publication together and are actively involved in its operations as managers and editors, with their roles and responsibilities clearly defined. Several years ago, two key staff members also were invited to join the company. The team is

diverse in terms of gender and age, maintains an inclusive decision-making process, and together the founders and employees form a collective of like-minded equals.

IMPACT

CityDog.by is open about sharing its model and know-how with other independent media in Belarus and across the region. Our editors and managers are often present at conferences and serve as media consultants and trainers. We are proud to have contributed to the recent boom in niche and city publications in Belarus. We believe that the more independent and creative media outlets there are, the better for building democracy and an open media market.

Despite the brutal government crackdown and unprecedented repression of peaceful demonstrators after the 2020 presidential election, last year witnessed a culmination of *CityDog.by*'s work. Many grassroots activists and groups whom we had featured in the magazine and whose causes we promoted became leading actors in the new democratic mass movement. Our key demographic, the creative class, plays

a crucial role in inspiring and advancing Belarus' peaceful revolution. The IT sector has helped to build effective digital platforms for the movement. Civil society is on the rise in Belarus and *CityDog.by* is proud to be a part of it.

In addition to its regular activist content, *CityDog.by* publishes daily live updates on the situation following the election of the 9th of August 2020. These updates include broad coverage of peaceful protests, solidarity actions and repression at the country's national, regional, capital and community levels. The updates have proven to be popular and have informed a significant percentage of the capital's population.

Starting any publication involves uncertainty and stress. Running a media startup in an authoritarian country and overregulated market, where any website can be blocked, and journalists can be arrested at any time, is even more challenging. Nevertheless, *CityDog.by*'s team, concept and business model have proven to be resilient. While there is no guarantee that the magazine will not be shut down, one thing is certain – if that does happen, we will not give up and we will start again.



IRYNA VIDANAVA WITH
A DOG SCULPTURE IN
CHICAGO (2018).



BOOSTING

QUALITY

JOURNALISM IN ROMANIA

BY ȘTEFAN MAKO
CO-FOUNDER OF *INCLUSIV*



COMMUNITY MEETING IN
BRAȘOV IN AUGUST 2019.



LAUNCH PARTY WITH PEOPLE WHO
SUPPORTED *INCLUSIV* AT THE
CROWDFUNDING CAMPAIGN.

In 2019, a small team of Romanian journalists and activists raised €104,000 from over 1,600 members to kickstart *Inclusiv*, the country's first membership outlet. The team's proposal met a huge demand from the public, confirming the increasing need for independent journalism in a market with little media diversity and a country still finding its democratic voice.

The project started in 2018 and aimed to strike a balance between the qualitative (but often unviable) reporting of some of the first independent projects and a sustainable business model for a small scale organization looking for national impact.

ȘTEFAN MAKAO
CO-FOUNDER OF INCLUSIV



THE MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN ROMANIA

Romania is a young democracy on the Eastern border of the European Union. After the bloody fall of Communism in 1989, a tsunami of free speech flooded from West to East, bringing with it a local variety of unbridled capitalism. Newspapers, books, radio and television appeared and disappeared in waves, publishing thoughts and ideas ranging from invented shock news and scandal to distinguished and impactful investigative journalism. Nevertheless, large groups of the population were subscribed to several dailies.

The expansion of cable television brought print to a stable output. The end of the first democratic decade found an impoverished audience entertained by news and late night TV shows. The early 2000's brought a little more stability, but also increased political censorship and control over most of the public and independent media.

Thousands of Romanians were pursuing job opportunities abroad, in hope of providing a better life for their families.

Romania was undergoing an economic boom through subsidies from the EU and other international partners by the time it became a EU member in 2007, just months before the global financial crisis hit. The first blow came at the end of 2008, and it was bad: thousands of journalists were sacked and their outlets bankrupted, providing an ideal moment for moguls to collect whatever was left behind by international companies trying to salvage their investments and local patrons unable to keep up with costs.

The result was a shrinking market with an increased monopoly on information, an extremely expensive and powerful tool now in the hands of a few billionaires. The new-found freedom of movement within the EU increased the number of Romanians fleeing abroad to millions, including thousands of

former journalists and media workers. Print outlets died out and the number of issues plummeted, with the largest publication's national circulation today standing at under 100,000, in a country of 19 million (with TV and social media as main news providers).

Investigative teams and feature reporting were the first to feel the sting of plummeting newspaper funding. The first independent outlets in the country started popping up under boiling political and economical pressure, trying to find their own versions of North-Atlantic inspired journalism: first there was an experimental magazine – *Decât o Revistă* (2009), then came *RISE* Project, a collective of investigators from several national outlets (2011), *Delao* – a small group of reporters from a mainstream newspaper (2011), *Casa Jurnalistului*, a small community of young journalists (2012), and several other unsuccessful projects, all of whom were looking for safe haven and better alternatives for their reporting.

Soon enough, these outlets started to gain traction and were piling up awards, beating mainstream media in almost every category with a fraction of the budget, and paving the way for new and more stable projects like *Press One* and *Recorder*, more mixed models backed by private funders and companies.

INCLUSIV, THE YOUNGEST OF THE PACK

Romanian journalism is in far from great shape today, especially economically. However, there is a developing digital free market with little to no oversight and regulation (some slight changes have occurred since the start of the pandemic, but with little visible impact for now). As a member of the EU family, the country has enjoyed increased freedom of speech and economic opportunities in the past decade.

Creating native online projects is relatively cheap, easy and direct, with little to no political interference, although some excessive bureaucracy is still in place and can be discouraging. International

funding was available for most part of the last decade, but as Romania continued to develop, funders refocused their attention to less stable countries in the region.

Problems do arise from time to time, especially when stories that directly impact stakeholders with a lot of political influence break into mainstream media, as was the case with the *RISE* Project, an investigative platform which was abusively targeted by thorough financial auditing after publishing a series of investigations about the former head of the Social-Democratic Party in 2017.

Most problems for media startups, however, arise from the lack of professional tradition, economic predictability and scarce entrepreneurial experience, with media education and management still in very incipient stages. Another issue to overcome is the pervasive complex of inferiority and an almost national mantra of defeatist behaviour that still informs a lot of local initiatives – it can't be done here.

Inclusiv started as a trio of experienced award-winning investigative journalists, all having worked in independent media for about a decade. During our careers, we have either founded or were part of the first wave of independent platforms in our country established soon after the financial crisis dealt a blow to journalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The socio-political developments in Romania and our region have made more people civically conscious, which in turn has directly translated into larger and more engaged audiences for our journalism and an increased willingness to pay for digital journalism.

For us, most of the initial obstacle was to make ourselves believe that our project is doable while conquering our reluctance of interacting with authorities to create an official framework for our organisation as a non-governmental organization. The next step was finding and convincing enough people to support our project before publishing any



stories. We achieved this by creating an extensive two part campaign – this first part a pre-campaign of over 700 one-to-one communications via emails, phone calls, chats and in-person meetings to establish a foundation of early adopters, and a public 6-week crowdfunding campaign with ambassadors and influencers to bring in the rest of the 1,000 members needed to start our project.

PLANNING OUR DEVELOPMENT & THE PANDEMIC

The success of our campaign was partly due to the result of extensive research and partly due to voluntary support from other media and communication experts. The actual development of the project, however, was entirely our responsibility. Soon after the crowdfunding, we started work on several fronts: building a team, our platform, which was launched in October 2019; and

developing new products – investigative features, explanatory videos, a podcast and a newsletter. We also developed our membership program.

While our concept was well-thought-out and struck a chord in a lot of people, it was still extremely broad. This put a lot of pressure on us to respond to different sets of expectations, which made us split a lot of our energy and resources building several different media products as well as our platform and membership program. This inherently led to tension within the team and frequent heated debates about what should be prioritized.

At the moment of launch, we didn't yet have a crisp and clean product to unveil to our members and stakeholders. We were experimenting with content ranging from short social media videos to

hour-long podcasts, while also trying to develop a close relationship with our most involved members through a mix of social events and workshops. In addition, we were also building a small co-working space in order to generate an alternate revenue stream.

The enthusiasm remained at a high level for months, with different types of support pouring in. However, every new idea, proposal or possible resource meant more administrative and management investments and required skills which we didn't have. As I lay out all these checkboxes I realise how poor our prioritization was. A couple of months after launch we were left depleted and frustrated, with internal tensions taking over most initiatives.

Soon after, the pandemic hit, which caught us at a vulnerable time – we only had one revenue stream, from memberships; we didn't have a brand product; and tensions were so high that they eventually led to the split of the team. 2020 was a year of continuous experimentation with just half of our initial support left. We continually downsized and focused more and more on content development, deciding to pursue just one topic.

THE YEAR 2021

The lockdown period overlapped with our membership renewal period. It was bad. We lost

over 55 % of our income in just two months, forcing us to abandon most of our plans. While other outlets managed to thrive, our products were far from valuable enough in order for people to stick with us. Regardless, we managed to publish over 35 stories, sticking to our minimum quota of 3 stories per month.

Since June 2020, we have had several phases of downsizing and restructuring our team from a 6-member full-time crew to 4-5 part-time journalists and one full-time coordinator. 2021 found us with a small team of collaborators and just one full-time member. However, we were unable to stop haemorrhaging money without gaining enough revenue. We decided to drop every quota and only publish stories when they are ready, with no fixed recurrence.

Starting in May, we decided to further optimise our resources by financing stories on a micro-grant basis, instead of paying collaborators on a monthly basis. Our current budget is enough to finance 10-15 stories until the end of the year, hopefully finding enough traction with our audiences and other funders to be able to keep afloat and recover in 2022.

In July we may close down our membership program and focus on grants and donation, as these tools seem to be working with most other



**COMMUNITY MEETING
AS IT USED TO TAKE
PLACE REGULARLY
BEFORE THE
PANDEMIC HIT.**

KEY LEARNINGS

RUNNING A MEDIA STARTUP

Looking back to almost 3 years of building *Inclusiv*, there are quite a lot of takeaways and a couple of things I would do differently (these are not universal laws, so don't use them as rules for your project).

1 Create a good product – focus on building a very good product, before thinking about the brand – be it text/video/multimedia/podcast, ensure that it is a brand product that people will want to consume and get involved with.

2 Find a community – get to the people who love what you do and create tailored programs for them

3 Develop a business model – based on your interaction with your audience and stakeholders

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

FOCUS ON one thing at a time: If I don't have a big budget to hire a lot of people, I need to be smart about priorities; working on one thing at a time makes my next step more obvious and easy to take.

RECRUIT FOR THE PRODUCT: Although I worked with some of the best professionals out there, they weren't always suited for the needs of the project; understanding the needs and finding matching people saves a lot of time, resources and relationships.

HIRE/RECRUIT COMMUNITY MANAGERS: If I want my membership program to work, I need someone to be in contact permanently with my members; it's nice to do it myself, but I can't do everything all the time.

CREATE RULES POST-FACTUM: See how people interact and influence processes, before installing a set of rules and regulations.

MAKE QUICK MISTAKES: Be ready to start over. Linger over investigating causes and appointing blame for every error takes away valuable time and energy that could be used to build good products and processes.



NON PROFIT

JOURNALISM

FOR HUNGARY

BY TAMÁS BODOKY
CO-FOUNDER OF ÁTLÁTSZÓ

The foundation of *Átlátszó* in 2011 was born out of the realisation that investigative journalism in Hungary was under the control of closely intertwined political and economic interest groups.

Before founding *Átlátszó*, I worked for nearly ten years at the country's most popular online news site, where investigative journalism was tolerated but not really supported. I was repeatedly restricted in my work by the publisher or the advertising

department, and towards the end even received comments from journalist colleagues, incensed by the management, that my activities were endangering their jobs.

The activities in question included a story about a big bank which was not allowed to be published on this outlet (I published it elsewhere), a state-owned company who threatened to withdraw its advertisements due to a series of articles I had written about a politician (I let the subject go), and a news site publicly apologising to a prosecutor who was recorded and exposed for threatening witnesses (he was later jailed for something else).

My **last story** published on the website contained a section about Viktor Orbán, the president of Fidesz, being seen with someone in the VIP box of a football stadium. This segment was removed without consultation or explanation after publication – as it turned out later, someone important called the editor-in-chief to arrange it. This was not an isolated incident.

This someone was almost certainly the owner of the news site, an oligarch with interests in banking, real estate and media, who was involved in politics, business and played poker with the same people I wrote exposés about.

WHO HAS THE POWER?

After I failed to secure a contract that would prevent the articles under my name from being subsequently altered without my consent, I resigned. This was greeted with palpable relief by many in the company. At that moment, it dawned on me that the main obstacle to public

service investigative journalism are media owners and the media business. In Hungary, they often place expectations on an editorial staff that are incompatible with my understanding of the role of journalists, though a large proportion of journalists do take this for granted.

Furthermore, political parties will often support and encourage independent and critical journalism when not in power, before doing everything they can to discredit and suppress it on winning the election. This was recently seen with Fidesz, which brought many of my investigative stories to the public in the form of parliamentary interpellations and questions prior to 2010. However, now in government, they only tolerate sycophantic loyalty in the press and spend astronomical amounts of taxpayers' money on **discrediting and silencing their critics**.

In 2011, the solution to this problem was the creation of a non-profit investigative outlet, operating with financial support from reader donations and institutional donors

specialising in supporting the independent press. We decided not to have a capital-rich owner who would use the newsroom as a tool to achieve their business or political goals. Politically, we aim to cross the left-right fault line that sharply divides the country and make a newspaper which would contribute to public debate by researching and publishing facts, data and events that were previously hidden or inconvenient to access, instead of the partisan opinion journalism and public celebrity gossip currently rampant in Hungary. This objective may sound obvious to a Western reader, but in Hungary we were seen as a freak entity for even attempting it.



TAMÁS BODOKY

FIRST IDEAS FOR A NEW PUBLICATION

The first concept of *Átlátszó* was an investigative outlet staffed by professional journalists who actively engaged their audience with its activities. For example, we aim to popularize freedom of information and promote public interest requests for data. This led to our **public online FOI request service Kimittud**, through which more than 16,000 requests have been made, as activists, journalists and even politicians discover its potential.

Another important aim was also to protect whistleblowers - in Hungary, it is often those who report corruption and abuse (or go public with a story) rather than the perpetrators who feel the whip. We have created an anonymous reporting platform called **MagyarLeaks**, where anyone can send information anonymously. Worthy reports will be investigated, verified and published by *Átlátszó*.

Today, many Hungarian media outlets – and almost all of those not funded by the government – run **reader support campaigns**. Ten years ago however, this was such an unusual idea that many people didn't see much future in it and tried to talk

us out of it. After a year of planning, we initiated the project without prior funding: it started out as a simple blog by a pro bono lawyer, Csaba Tordai, and IT specialist Ákos Maróy.

Based on my previous experience, I wouldn't have dared to go ahead without a lawyer, and I soon needed one when the police came knocking on my door. The non-profit publisher was, and still is, registered to my apartment address. The source protection case, which ended up in a hard drive seizure, turned out to be good publicity for the start-up and perhaps even served the public good, as our appeals resulted in **journalistic source protection being enshrined in Hungarian media law** by Parliament.

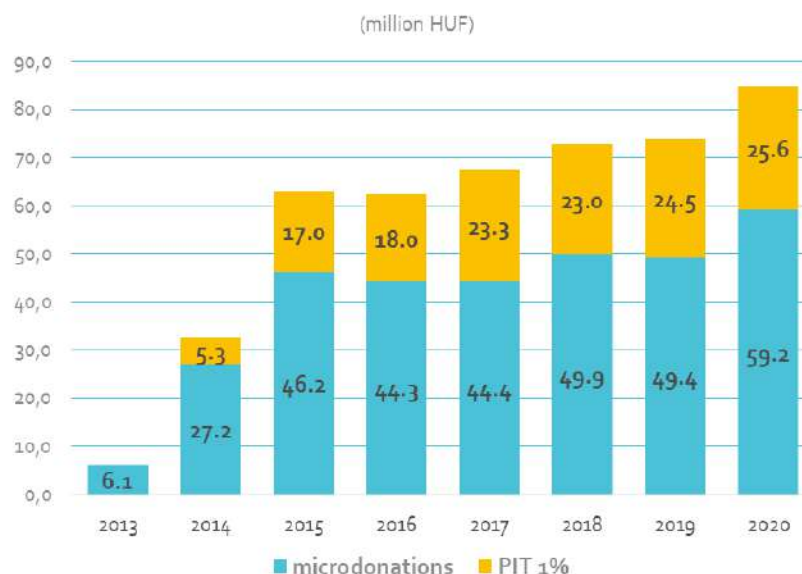
The idea of crowdfunding proved to be a viable one, with a full salary raised from readers at the end of the six-month trial period. We received a positive reception to our first grant application from a program of the Open Society Foundation, founded by George Soros. This provided the ruling party with a good opportunity to start **discrediting and smearing** *Átlátszó* in government-funded media.



TEAM OF ÁTLÁTSZÓ IN BUDAPEST.

An important income source: microdonation and PIT 1%*

2013–2020



MICRODONATIONS ARE IMPORTANT FOR THE HUNGARIAN MEDIA STARTUP.

*PIT: personal income tax. In 2014 and 2015 PIT received by Asimov Foundation, from 2016 by Átlátszónet Foundation, including Benevity & microdonation received by Átlátszónet Foundation, preliminary data

In contrast to the pro-government press, which is opaquely financed by Hungarian taxpayers' money, increased to an astonishing amount over the years, *Átlátszó* maintains financial transparency. From the very beginning, we have published all of our resources - most of our income comes from small donations and income tax contributions from readers, and we have successfully applied for grants from a dozen Western institutional donors over the last ten years.

The project and the income have grown slowly and steadily over the past few years. We grow by about one full-time employee a year - we now have 10 full-time staff working at *Átlátszó*. Beyond the predominantly journalist workforce, we also have a large number of external contract staff, ranging from rural correspondents, photographers, videographers and IT specialists to a legal department that has now grown to no less than three attorneys.

Átlátszó currently runs on around €350,000 per year, with roughly a million unique users a month on our websites and 15% of regular Hungarian

internet users visiting the site at least once a week. Our stories are readily quoted by the foreign and domestic independent press, while the Hungarian pro-government media as a whole is determined to ignore them. The experience of the last ten years has been so wide-ranging that it would be difficult to summarize it.

SUMMARY OF OUR EXPERIENCES

We have learnt that in any media business, however small, the publishing side is as important as the editorial side: as a journalist, you don't feel the administration involved in running a business, and accordingly, the financial administration of *Átlátszó*, the management of staff and the running of infrastructure has caused a lot of headaches and frustration over the years.

Serverfreezes have proven that the IT infrastructure of a critical media organisation is highly vulnerable to sudden spikes in interest in a story or deliberate cyber-attacks, and some of our outdated websites have shown that the mere operation of ideas and services already implemented requires a proportionately increasing effort as time goes on.

In the financial field, it is difficult to deal with uncertainty and the issue of planning future revenues: projects funded by institutional donors are for a fixed period of time, but employees and contractors must always be paid exactly, and a successful project should not be stopped just because its funding has expired.

This is why we primarily rely on **community funding**, as the revenue is not labelled: we want to avoid the trap of grant dependency that many similar non-governmental organizations fall into. We've learned a lot about crowdfunding along the way - such as the fact that our audiences like to reward us for good performance. A high-profile story or a loud scandal always brings a noticeable spike in small donations.

AUDIENCE REACH IS A HUGE CHALLENGE

Reaching a significantly large audience is an increasing challenge in the politically polarized Hungarian media world: ten years ago, Facebook was a reliable supplier of readers, but today the social networking site gets nervous around political content. The volume and reach of other independent media in Hungary is steadily declining, with many news sources being restructured or closed down, while government-funded sites propagate and proliferate.

The scope of independent and critical newsrooms is now largely limited to the actively news-consuming online audience, and new ideas are needed to try to break out of this bubble. As an early adopter of Internet journalism in Hungary, I myself have not believed in print for the past 25 years. Last year we teamed up with a weekly conservative newspaper to print our stories for an audience we simply could not reach otherwise.

In recent years, we have started to record and publish camera drone videos of the estates and houses of many politicians and well-connected businessmen enriched using public funds, thoroughly annoying those in question. This included a businessman, Balásy, who owns

companies which benefit from governmental propaganda campaigns.

TAKING DRONE VIDEOS IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE

According to Balásy, his rights to personal data protection were violated by the video. First, he turned to *Átlátszó*, and when we refused to delete the footage he took action at the National Authority for Data Protection and Freedom of Information (NAIH). According to **NAIH's decision**, Balásy's course of action was unfounded as domestic and international legislation permits the taking of drone footage related to public affairs as part of freedom of the press.

Later in 2020, **a police investigation was launched into our recordings** of combat vehicles stationed on an estate owned by a billionaire friend of the Prime Minister. In the course of the criminal investigation our journalist, Gabi Horn, testified as a witness. The investigation **was closed after no criminal acts were found**.

According to a new law introduced after this case, from January 2021 taking drone videos of private property without the owner's permission will become a criminal offence. The publication of such a video will be considered as a qualified case. Journalists and publishers who make and publish such recordings could even be imprisoned.

Cross-border and domestic collaborations and partnerships are very important to us. We are a member organization of the **Global Investigative Journalism Network** and the **Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project**. *Átlátszó* is also a founding member of Vsquare.org, an investigative journalism project which brings together investigative outlets from Visegrad countries.

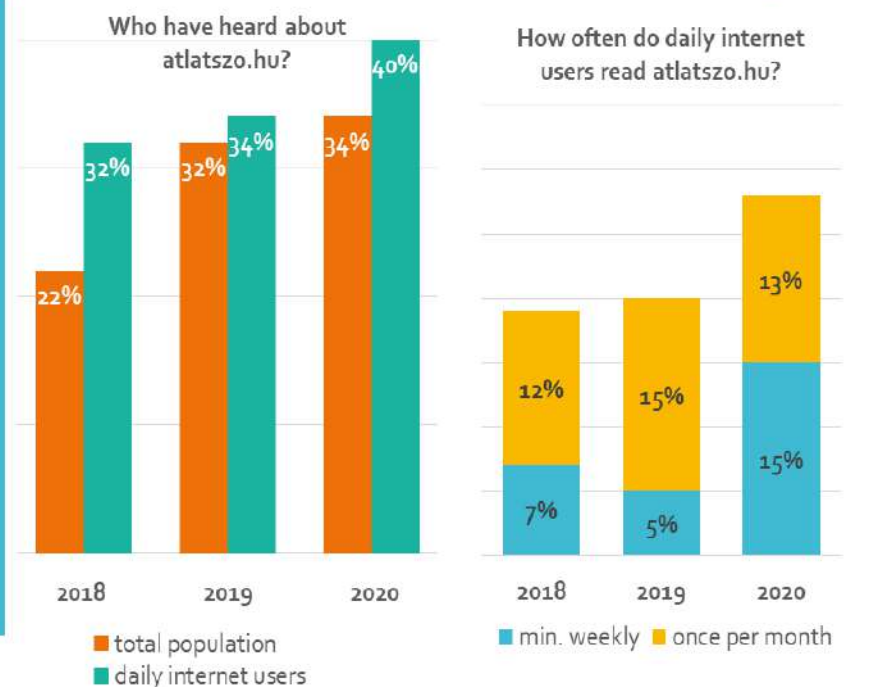
CROSS-BORDER COLLABORATIONS ARE KEY

Many of our stories could not have been written without cross-border collaboration: for example, the Investigative Dashboard helped us out with vehicle tracking data to expose **secret yachts**

Atlatszo.hu awareness

2020

Source: Medián-Omnibusz,
Sep/Dec 2018-2020



AWARENESS FOR ÁTLÁTSZÓ AMONG HUNGARIAN POPULATION.

and airplanes used by the Hungarian governing elite, and the Daphne Caurana Galizia Foundation assisted in finding the beneficial owner – a Hungarian oligarch enriched by state contracts – of a superyacht registered in Malta.

In our legal department, 2020 brought a new phenomenon, known as SLAPP (strategic lawsuit against public participation) suits. These are a series of lawsuits intended to censor, intimidate, and silence critics by burdening them with the cost of a legal defense until they abandon their criticism or opposition.

After we published, together with the Magyar Hang weekly paper, one of our most-read articles proving that Sándor Németh, founder-reverend of the Faith Church, took over majority ownership in opposition-leaning TV channel ATV secretly assisted by an offshore company registered in Liechtenstein, the church initiated several legal

procedures against us, in which five out of six judicial decisions have ruled in favour of Magyar Hang and Átlátszó so far.

Lately, investigative reporting on COVID-19 has been in high demand, especially as most of the Hungarian press did not cover the pressing issues during lockdown. We have learned that if you have enough courage to report on problems during a crisis, your audience will reward you.

The COVID-19-tracker 'Koronamonitor' by our ATLO datajournalism team was by far the most successful data journalism feature we have ever done. The site contains the most complete and diverse statistics and the widest range of graphs, diagrams and maps on the corona outbreak in Hungary, and offers some additional features, including a data explorer and a spread-simulator. This site alone received 1.8 million unique visitors in 2020.

BECOMING THE

HORROR



OF CORRUPT PEOPLE

**BY IURIE SANDUȚA
CO-FOUNDER AND
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
AT RISE MOLDOVA**

The media organization *RISE Moldova* was born from the desire of a group of journalists to publish high-quality, impactful investigations backed up by documentary evidence gathered through modern investigative techniques. Corruption in public institutions, organized crime and money-laundering schemes are our major fields of investigation.

From the very beginning, we set out to join and collaborate with international networks of investigative journalists. In this way, we've become a Moldovan partner in global investigations including #PanamaPapers, #SwissLeaks, #FinCENFiles and #TheRussianLaundromat.

The history of *RISE Moldova* began several years ago. In 2008, I started writing the first investigations. I was aware that Moldova was a country with many institutions severely affected by corruption. The heads of those institutions kept changing, but corruption remained, and people continued to live in poverty as a result.

After several published investigations, I noticed that the articles were having a real-world impact. Some chiefs got fired, our investigations prompted reactions from the authorities, and readers started to follow us, encouraging us to further expose corruption.

In 2013, I participated in the Global Conference of Investigative Journalists in Rio de Janeiro, a biannual event hosted in different locations around the world. There I met several journalists who fought with drug traffickers in Central America.

I heard interesting stories about tracking money through cross-border investigations, open-source intelligence tools, the safety of journalists and exposing international corruption. I also met colleagues from Romania's *RISE Project* and discussed the intention to set up an office in Chisinau and launch a similar project in Moldova.

INCEPTION

On returning from Rio de Janeiro, I moved to register the *RISE Project Moldova* Association with the Ministry of Justice. The authorities refused registration because the English words "*RISE*" and "*Project*" appeared in the name. I re-applied for registration, this time naming the organization "*Asociația Reporterilor de Investigatie si Securitate Editoriale din Moldova*". This translates to "The

Moldovan Association of Investigative Reporters and Editorial Security", thereby keeping the same abbreviated name of *RISE Moldova*.

In March 2014, we were legally registered as a non-profit organization. The list of founding members includes 4 journalists from Moldova and an investigative organization from Romania – the *RISE Project*. After registration, we started to look for funding from various international organizations. Every day, we sent dozens of letters highlighting our status and plans. Most replies from various organizations suggested that we apply for a grant first, or simply answered "thank you for your message".

We soon realized that, as beginners, we lacked a portfolio. We therefore funded the first investigations with money from our own pockets. We also teamed up with OCCRP journalists for a cross-border investigation project titled "The Russian Laundromat". The story

went live in August 2014, to great national and international attention. After this success, a few organizations invited us to attend various meetings to learn more about us and offer their support.

CROWDFUNDING VS. FUNDRAISING

Meanwhile, *RISE Moldova's* team has grown to 10 employees. Over the past 6 years we have completed at least 25 media projects, with a total budget exceeding \$1.9 million. We've collaborated with many donors, including the European Union, USAID, the US Department of State, Internews, BBC Media Action, the US Embassy, the Embassy of the Netherlands, the Open Society Foundations, the National Endowment for Democracy and The Journalism Development Network.





IURIE SANDUȚA.

In recent years, *RISE Moldova* has turned to raising donations from readers as well. We have added the online payment platforms Paypal and Patreon to our website. Some readers send money via bank transfer with references like "Get the thieves to prison!" or redirect a percentage of their income tax to our association.

We work hard to further develop our fund-raising methods by getting readers involved in direct donations. We're trying to get to know them better. Thus, we regularly send them newsletters and ask questions about participation in donor training.

RISE MOLDOVA INVESTIGATIONS

RISE Moldova has been acknowledged nationally and internationally for its impactful investigations. As a result of our investigations, criminal leaders have been arrested and sentenced to five years in prison, heads of public agencies have been sacked, others have attracted police inquiries, a department within the Ministry of Interiors has been shut down for illegal interception of private phone calls, a law has been amended and the Ministry of Education has been instructed to assess the treatment of the young in schools and kindergartens nationwide. These are just some of the outcomes of *RISE Moldova*'s investigations.



WORKSHOP AT THE EDITORIAL DEPARTMENT.

OUR EDITORIAL KITCHEN CONTAINS SOME VALUABLE INGREDIENTS THAT WE USE TO REMAIN CREDIBLE:

- We follow the public agenda and focus on current topics.
- We investigate topics of national and international concern.
- We combine office work with databases and field work with people and sources.
- The information obtained from anonymous sources or whistle-blowers is compared to information from alternative sources.
- When we have a written text, we do not publish it unless we pass every word through a fact-checking process. Every sentence must be backed up by documents or evidence confirming the facts described in the text.

In Moldova there are few newsrooms that fact-check before running a story. We have seen countless times that this fact-checking process is extremely valuable in order to avoid a lawsuit and to release correct data, thus eliminating technical mistakes that may occur during the writing. For example, if we misspell a person's name or add an unnecessary digit to a number, the context changes.

Despite this, both *RISE Moldova* journalists and the team as a whole have been dragged into numerous lawsuits. One particular case was filed by the former president of Moldova, Igor Dodon. He sued us over an investigation into his election campaign, which was funded with money from Russia through offshore companies. This case reached the European Court of Human Rights, where a lawyer for the Moldovan government recommended the judiciary to award victory to *RISE Moldova*.



Our work has also brought us many national and international awards. The Russian Laundromat investigation, which saw the light of day thanks to a collaboration with OCCRP and *RISE Project*, won a Special Jury Prize at the European Press Prize 2015. In 2019, *RISE Moldova* received the Pavel Sheremet Award for "courage in journalism and outstanding achievements", at the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum in Brussels.

INNOVATION

In recent years, *RISE Moldova* has developed several interactive tools and platforms: *RISELeaks* is a secure anonymous communication system, like SecureDrop, where sources send us valuable information.

People of Interest is an interactive database currently under construction. This platform contains the profiles of public figures and their connections. We index the data about companies, legal information files, properties and interests of politicians and officials.

In the coming years, we intend to expand the community of *RISE Moldova* readers by advertising our investigations and creating strong fundraising campaigns.

Ultimately, I believe that a successful start-up requires journalists to identify a problem in their community and try to change things via solutions outlined in a project. The case we plead is to publicly unmask corruption and organized crime, allowing readers and authorities to take action.



BATTLE

BETWEEN

INFORMATION & THE NARRATIVES

BY JAKUB GÓRNICKI
CO-FOUNDER OF *OUTRIDERS*

For years now, the Polish media ecosystem has been stagnant. After the rise of many media empires in the 90s and early 2000s, the market became divided between a few big players, interspersed with rare moments when someone else tried to challenge them – usually without much success. Then, in 2015, the still-ruling Law and Justice party came to power and started many reforms deemed populist and anti-democratic.

CLIMATE

A JOURNEY WITH KENYA'S SHEPHERDS STRUGGLING AGAINST DROUGHT AND LAND DEGRADATION

Faced by a complex intermarriage between land degradation and climate change, the Samburu of northern Kenya have to contend with rangelands that are increasingly unproductive and more frequent droughts.

READ MORE >

OUTRIDERS WEBSITE IN MAY 2021.

The roots of the populist win in 2015 date back to the 2008 financial crisis. While, on the surface, this didn't seem to affect most Poles, it influenced many policy changes by the Civic Platform party, who ruled from 2007 to 2015. They came to power after two hard, emotional years when the Law and Justice were in power.

The nation entered a period of "calmness", and the chance to reform many sectors of society was wasted. Conservatives were dramatically losing popularity, liberals were not doing much at all, and, in April 2010, a plane carrying the Polish president crashed. This was a pivotal moment in modern Polish history.

After this nothing was the same. Immediately, Law and Justice, the party of the late president, began to question the findings of the investigation and created their own theories. And so – weaponization of information began. Even though it took another 5 years for them to seize power, this was the starting point. They began creating their own media, spreading misinformation and attaining a very

engaged audience. In order to do this, you need to start questioning the status quo to a dangerous degree.

It's fair to mention that conspiracy theories provide a foundation for many populists. For example "the birth certificate of Obama" theory was also a starting point for Donald Trump in the US. The final act occurred in the fall of 2015, when Jarosław Kaczyński – in the middle of a huge refugee crisis in Europe – stated in parliament that migrants carry diseases and infections. This was an obvious lie, but also the first example of openly lying in public life without consequences. That statement actually gave Law and Justice a couple extra points, which would win them the 2019 election.

IN BETWEEN NARRATIVES

When we sat down in late 2016 to sketch out the idea for *Outriders*, we looked at all of these factors and tried to find our place. We knew that we wanted to focus on stories which do not physically happen in Poland – yet increasingly shift our public

discourse. The refugee crisis was the best example of this. We also knew that there is basically no seed funding available on the institutional level for journalistic organizations in Poland, something which has not changed to this day.

Furthermore, philanthropy for civic organisations (where we see media) is not common among the Polish elite, as it's seen as a political activity – not particularly welcome among business owners. Given who we were – two outsiders, with a fairly popular travel blog and experience of building up different non-profit organizations – we decided that we wanted to start first with crowdfunding, and later reach out to international donors, relying on their support while we built up our membership. We gathered 25,000 USD from 637 people and started work.

That's because planning is one thing, teamwork second, devotion third and the ability to adapt and pivot – fourth. Just think how many initiatives are crushed at the stage of deciding on a logo or name. What we didn't understand back then was that what we thought was our weakness was actually our greatest strength.

We were outsiders in the Polish media market. We weren't very well known and didn't spend much time in newsrooms. Without this in my resume, I felt a bit ashamed going public and challenging the market in our microscale. Later on, we understood that our ability to create new projects, receive global attention and work with big international players came because we were not limited by the stagnancy of the Polish media market.

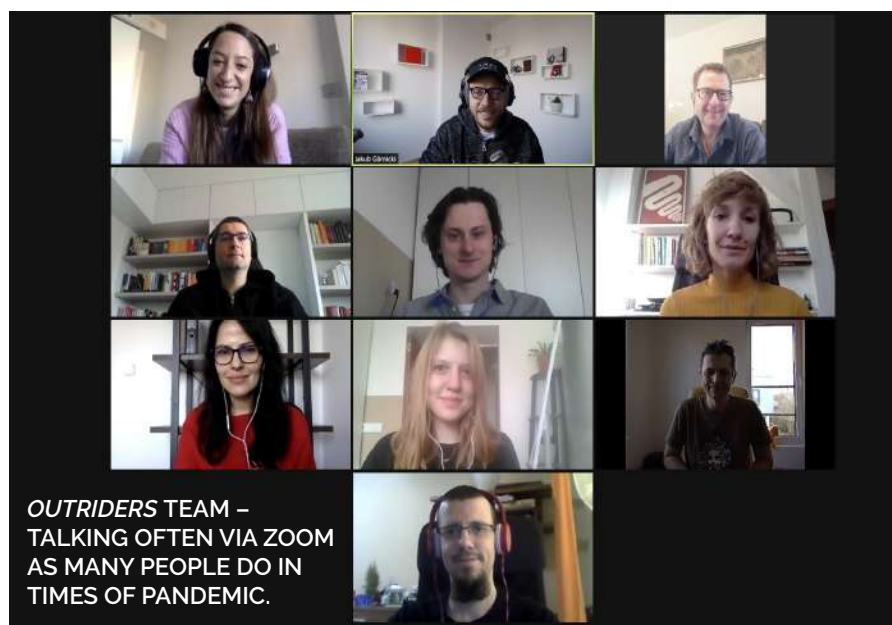
Now, if you're starting to think that we are some kind of wonderkids, I have to disappoint you. We are not. In past years, bigger and more successful initiatives have been born. Greater in terms of reach. More successful in terms of support. But we are after them.

LOOKING BACK TO 2018

Let's jump forward to 2018, when Tomasz Sekielski, a former TV anchor, announced that he was crowdfunding for a documentary about pedophilia in the Polish Catholic church. He used the platform Patronite, which allows people to donate to the media and receive perks for it. The campaign immediately went viral and gathered thousands of supporters.

We took time to assess our own strengths and weaknesses, as well as the market, and felt confident our plan could work. We also met with over two dozen media professionals to criticize our idea before it went public. At the end of a day, when starting up, good execution is more important than a good plan. Quite often, we see "worse" ideas succeed longer than great ones.

When the movie was released in 2019, it was seen by over 20 million people and won all possible film awards in Poland as well as many more internationally. Tomasz and his brother Marek later released another movie and are now fully supported by the community while building up their studio and creating more TV formats. Their



success was a final embodiment of what had been happening on Polish internet for years with bloggers and YouTubers.

INFLUENCERS PAVE THE WAY

Conflict between influencers and journalists is not something very Polish. We see this in many countries. Unfortunately, the two sides instead of talking, prefer to jump at one another. The Patronite platform was initially created for these influencers and became successful thanks to the internet communities who supported their favourite online creators.

The rising influence and reach of YouTubers was noticed by mainstream media who, on one hand, still criticized them, but were also watching carefully. Sekielski then used this for his own journalism. He went for the platforms with his already-established presence and TV experience, didn't try to be someone who he wasn't and used this to draw people's attention to a highly sensitive topic. For those who don't know, the Catholic church still plays an important role in Poland, albeit these days more politically than religiously.

Today, podcasters, creators, YouTubers and reporters have all adopted a more community-oriented communication style and use the same tools to achieve their goals. This brings us to summer of 2020.

THE FALL OF "TRÓJKA"

Poland has a very strong publicly-owned media, which after 2015 became a propaganda machine for the government, especially the TV channels. Radio channels, however, were not falling as dramatically into line. "Trójka", or public radio channel number three, historically known for initiating many music trends in Poland, had a devoted, fair and high-quality team of journalists. It would be fair to say they didn't have a community following, rather more of a cult. When Law and Justice ruled between 2005 and 2007 they tried to take them apart but failed.

The party tried again from 2015 onwards, and finally made it happen in 2020. After orchestrating a scandal, many journalists left and announced the creation of a new radio station supported by Patronite. Within weeks, they had amassed almost 30,000 members and huge amounts of funding. A couple of months later, Radio Nowy Świat (New World) started to broadcast daily, with a team of over 40 people.

Another online radio station was also born – Radio 357. The station was created by another group of former "Trójka" reporters, and launched to similarly huge success. A further case is Dariusz Rosiak, who struck out on his own, creating a podcast based on his former audition which gained thousands of followers as well as winning him the "Journalist of the Year" award in December 2020. A few other reporters also created single podcasts with good levels of support behind them.

All the above points to one thing – that a market shift is now complete. People are willing to support the media on a bigger scale but Poland is still rapidly declining in the Freedom of Press index. State-controlled propaganda is still influential. In early 2021, a state-controlled Petrol company, Orlen, purchased over 20 local Polish newspapers from their German owners. At the time of writing, editor-in-chiefs across the country are being let go and bad things are predicted for the newly-bought media institutions.

After reading all of this, you should have one question: Why would anyone want to start a journalism business?

Journalism is not a typical business where you only have to look at Excel spreadsheets, income and competition. It's closely connected to politics and society. Even if you deem yourself anti-mainstream or non-partisan, your organization will still be influenced by current events. COVID-19 is the best example.

We haven't seen the deeper effects of it yet, but it's fair to assume that as the 2008 financial crisis only

manifested itself sociologically two or three years later, so too will COVID-19. What the pandemic is doing, however, is showing how important access to factual information is, and that media organizations watchdogging those in power are doing a public good.

FIND YOUR WAY

When you enter a polarised society or market as a new organization, the first question you will have to answer is "Can I avoid choosing a side and stay truthful to myself, or will I always need to pick one?". Usually the second answer is better when it comes to fundraising, as it aligns you with a certain narrative. Narratives, though, are not the soul of democracy – they're actually little devils. You need to find your way otherwise you will end up eaten by others and go unnoticed by the public.

I tried to focus on different initiatives to show you multiple possible entry points for a media organization. From grassroots perspectives to recognized journalists and media organizations which are attacked and must restart from scratch. Three different stories – but understanding why they were successful is crucial. Do I have fundraising skills? Am I afraid of crowdfunding? Do I have some initial community? Is the government attacking me? Public support for each initiative had different motives. The communication of each initiative was also different.

GETTING STARTED

Plan how you will get through your first 6 months, and whether the work will be done on a voluntary basis, or you decide to apply for a grant (if you can). The easiest way forward is to visit media sources which inspire you, find their donor, see who supports them and check if they would be a potential match. Some markets attract venture capitalists who are not hesitant to invest in media organizations.

Media companies do not have easy business models. They are sophisticated, usually combining a couple of different ones. Don't hope to just have one – you won't. You may have one when you start but later on you should do everything in your power to change it. Properly understanding your competition and your opportunities is the key to success. Do that before you start. Have dedicated time to refresh your plan every half a year.

In the end the hardest part will be staying afloat. Given how journalism organizations are connected to changing society, within 3 years you will most likely be doing things very differently from when you started. While the purpose and the mission won't change, the how and the what will – you and your team will need to be ready for this.

THIS RECENT WEBCOMIC SHOWS A STORY OF THE GRASSROOTS INITIATIVES THAT WERE LAUNCHED BY THE RESIDENTS OF THREE FAVELAS IN SÃO PAULO TO FACE THE PROBLEMS CAUSED OR EXACERBATED BY THE PANDEMIC. IT IS AVAILABLE IN ENGLISH, POLISH, SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE.



INTERNATIONAL ALUMNI CENTER gGmbH

**Linienstraße 65A
10119 Berlin
Germany**

**Tel. +49 (0) 30 288 85 80 0
info@iac-berlin.org | www.iac-berlin.org**



Geschäftsführer: Darius Polok

**Registergericht: Amtsgericht Stuttgart, Germany
Register-Nummer: HRB 759544**

USt-IdNr.: DE310948849

**Verantwortlich für den Inhalt im Sinne des Presserechts und § 18 MStV/
Darius Polok, Linienstraße 65a, 10119 Berlin**

**Wir sind weder bereit noch gesetzlich verpflichtet, an Streitbeilegungsverfahren vor einer
Verbraucherschlichtungsstelle teilzunehmen.**