

This is the introduction chapter to the ***Special Issue on Cross-border collaborative journalism*** by the journal for ***Applied Journalism and Media Studies*** 8.2 from the 1st of June 2019 that we co-edited. You find the overview over all chapters here: [kortlink.dk/ingentaconnect/2652d](http://kortlink.dk/ingentaconnect/2652d).

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### **Cross-border collaborative journalism: New practice, new questions**

*Abstract:*

*This special issue of Applied Journalism and Media Studies is to shed light on the hitherto under-investigated emerging practice of cross-border collaborative journalism, to define it, conceptualize it and hopefully operationalize it. For this purpose cross-border collaborative journalism practice is defined widely, and contributors come from both academia and journalism practice. This introduction notes the context of the emerging practice, it introduces the articles of this special issue and it points to further research questions.*

**Keywords:**

journalism, journalism practice, cross-border journalism, collaborative journalism, investigative journalism

*By Brigitte Alfter & Stefan Candea*

Talk to almost anyone *about* journalism, mention the words, *Panama Papers*, *Paradise Papers* or *Football Leaks*, and they'll answer with an understanding nod: By 2019, cross-border collaborative journalism is a recognisable element of journalism practice. Significant and globally prominent projects have been published and inspired fellow journalists and academics alike to look further into the field, numerous less prominent projects have contributed to establishing methodology and practice. This special issue is the first of its kind inviting scholars and practitioners alike to contribute not only directly to the description and development of the method (Alfter, 2016) but also to its contextualisation, conceptualisation and deeper understanding (Alfter & Candea, 2017).

### **The larger context**

The development of cross-border journalism coincides with other developments towards networked structures in societies, and with academics describing them. The founding of the first of such networks of journalists, the US-based International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) in the 2nd half of the 1990ies timewise coincides with the publication of the trilogy about Network Societies by Manuel Castells, the Spanish-US sociologist (Castells, 1996, 1997, 1998). Castells amalgamates findings from various disciplines to gain an understanding of globalisation's and digitalisation's effects on our societies, he is widely cited as reference for work with cross-border collaborative journalism (see for example Ilmenau 2018). Yet not without criticism from the social sciences, where his latest work (Castells 2012) is seen to have "overestimated the role of the Internet in society and neglects or downplays the importance of other dimensions of society" and shares into "techno-euphoria" and "techno-determinism" (Fuchs, 2012). Cross-border journalism has developed in the post- Cold War years and many of the early examples are in the Anglo-Saxon investigative journalism tradition, a tradition that is "culturally marked" and likely part of a longer development towards some homogenisation of journalism traditions (Chalaby, 1996). Also, these early years coincide with the rise of computer assisted reporting (CAR) and data journalism with a widespread "techno-euphoria". By the 2nd half of the 2000es, a number of small and larger cross-border journalism collaborations were practiced leading to small scale as well as prominent publications, in Europe the Farmsubsidy.org network is cited as pioneering data and cross-border journalism example (Léchenet, 2014). At the same time, prominent scholars such as James N. Rosenau reach the conclusion that structures can not be understood without the networked individual actor. Rosenau, an American political scientist and international affairs scholar, who studied the turbulences of international political life not least the opposing forces of integration and fragmentation, the foreign and the domestic. He emphasised the "overriding centrality of the micro-level, of individuals, of individuals who, by responding to expectations of their roles, engage in their various pursuits that culminate in macro collectivities." Rosenau explicitly mentions journalists among such individuals (Rosenau, 2008, p. 8). These are but a few examples, of course. However there are many indications that journalists address the same pressing societal challenges as scholars.

### **The academic context**

Scholars studying media and journalism in those years, obviously, also reflect on developments towards a networked, digitised and globalised world, getting ready to study a changing reality. Stephen Reese adapts the hierarchy of influence model that he co-developed with fellow scholar Pamela Shoemaker more than a decade previous, to include a global perspective when studying influences on journalistic content. Like Rosenau, he addresses the micro-macro question and the agency of the individual, and offers the hierarchy of influence model with its newly included global aspects as a way of structuring journalism research, not least for "empirical generalizations" of comparative studies (Reese, 2007). For comparative efforts, the Worlds of Journalism Studies, founded in 2006, is a good example of (Worlds of Journalism). Also in those years, another media scholar, Swedish Peter Berglez, looks into the "qualitative interpretations of news texts" and goes on a quest for "global journalism" and a "global outlook" (Berglez, 2008). When looking at the societal context of cross-border collaborative journalism, the technological context may not be neglected or underestimated. While journalists have worked and indeed collaborated across borders, the technological developments of these years bring about a

“fundamentally new global news culture (...) enabled by digital technologies” (Heinrich, 2011). We will return to the technical aspects later.

### **Why a special issue on cross-border journalism?**

At this stage of cross-border collaborative journalism and research in the field, the challenge is to conceptualise, define and point out trends and dilemmas for further scrutiny. The call for proposals followed the descriptive definition of cross-border collaborative and its four characteristics, where 1) journalists from different countries, 2) decide on an idea of mutual interest, 3) gather and share material and 4) publish to their own audiences (Alfter, 2016), and it assumed Reese’s observation that “producers, users and subjects need not, and often do not, share a common national orientation” (Reese, 2007). Reese’s definition was expanded to include also other differences such as “language, culture, discipline, socio-political background and even the vocabulary of production and consumption.” “Borders” were defined as “barriers to be crossed” (Alfter & Candea, 2017) thus potentially allowing to expand the understanding of cross-border collaborative journalism also to other fields of collaborative journalism. In the tradition of the journal for Applied Journalism and Media Studies, the editors and several of the contributors are active in bridging the chasm between journalism and academia (Barkho, 2017).

The special issue starts with a contextualisation of cross-border collaborative journalism within diverse journalism concepts. Arguing that most present examples of cross-border collaborative journalism appear to be indebted to the muckraking tradition of reporting, Gitte Meyer poses the question, how cross-border journalism could look like if it was practiced within other journalism concepts. By describing the reporter and the publicist journalism logics, she raises attention to such concepts and their different purposes in society.

The second article follows a similar idea: Applying concepts of cultural studies and postcolonial theory, Tabea Graczyk explores how cross-border collaborative journalism can help surmount bias. She also develops a set of recommendations to journalism practitioners.

The third article focuses on the impact of cross-border journalism projects on the transnationalisation of public communication. Did the Panama Papers’ publication pave the way for a networked public sphere with transnational attention and transnational interconnections? Analysing Twitter reactions to the publications, Annett Heft traces patterns of reaction.

Like the previous, the fourth article addresses cross-border journalism’s place in society. The authors, Amanda Gearing and Peter Berglez, argue that the multiple small-scale cross-border projects should collectively be viewed to be at least as important as the prominent projects when it comes to developing a global fourth estate.

Finally Maria Lukina and Chris Demaske carry out a survey analysis of an exchange program for journalism students from Russia and the US. The program was carried out under similar conditions over 15 years thus allowing the evaluation to include also longer term aspects.

### **Further aspects to take a closer look at - and why**

A new development in journalism practice with potentially significant implications for public spheres is likely to inspire further academic research. With this special issue solely focusing on cross-border collaborative journalism, it makes sense at to indicate some further research perspectives related to it. The obvious selection in this practice oriented journal is to questions, where academic research can contribute to a better understanding and thus directly apply to the understanding and

development of journalism practice. With several aspects already touched upon by the present contributors, we would like to indicate further three foci: Networks, technology and finances of cross-border journalism.

An analysis and understanding of networks is crucial, as cross-border journalism by its nature applies networked structures. But while networked structures provide some obvious and necessary solutions, they also bring new interaction patterns and power structures. Comparable to media institutions, networks may practice access control - or indeed network logics may lead to such access control - where some journalists are inside and others outside those networks. This matters for journalism practitioners. On a more general level questions such as gate-keeping, institutionalisation and indeed pluralism should be scrutinised within this emerging networked reality of journalism.

What are the characteristics, what are the intended and unintended consequences of such networks, and what are the privileges at work? White (2008) explains the process of social formation in networks by referring to identities attempting to control. Language, actions, stories are interconnected with networks. Among other useful concepts that could be applied to cross-border networks, White describes the concepts of Arena (network infrastructure, like conferences or meeting places, awards, fellowship programs), Interface (interface for production) and Council (the small group of people at the intersection where Arena and Interface are overlapping). Such loci exist - for example the national, continental and global investigative journalism conferences - all constituting great places to start gathering empirical evidence. Initial research studying the journalists active in the ICIJ teams covering the Panama and Paradise Papers indicates a rather homogenous team when it comes to transnational outlook or indeed ethics (Lück & Schultz, 2018). Another abstract yet to be developed set out to analyse the power structures of international investigative journalism groups (Candea & Krüger, 2018). And what about classic media outlets' competition, when their journalists join cross-border networks. Are networks the new competitive advantage, and if so, what will this do to cross-border journalism (see for example EIJC & Dataharvest, 2018). A better understanding of these network structures - large and small - will help journalists to understand and select networks they find suitable; and it will allow journalism scholars to understand the power structures connected to networked journalism and what this may imply for the journalism produced. Such studies of characteristics of networks should also be translated to teaching material and included in cross-border collaborative journalism education.

The second question to address is the role of technology, its intended and unintended wider effects. Any cross-border network will use some set of tools to host the search and the information exchange for any given group of journalists. The bundle of such tools are seen as virtual offices, described by some of the large networks in the field as "a Facebook for journalists" (ICIJ) or "as the Uber or AirBnB of journalism" (OCCRP). But such solutions are not simple technological tools, they are "governing systems that control, interact, and accumulate" (Schwarz, 2017). The journalists who started to collaborate during the "networked society" of Castells two decades back, are living today in a "platform society" (van Dijck, 2017). The sociology of journalistic networks two decades in the making, intertwined with their technological tools, are creating sociotechnical systems, platforms that demand critical attention. The logic of platform: it has both the "technical capacity of unyielding local control" (micro level) and the "consequential concentrations of global dominance by a handful of corporate actors" (macro level) (Schwarz, 2017). In between these levels, at the first glance there is a level of convenience and functionality. But what is really behind it when we talk about networks of journalists? "The social origin and implications of such technologies are well-camouflaged with

terms such as efficiency, usability, and needs; our products thus subtly elide democracy, legislating society far more effectively than they are legislated by it” (Csikszentmihályi, 2016).

Following German-US philosopher Herbert Marcuse, formerly critical ideas and tools once they become institutionalised and integral to society, they become supportive of power structures they originally criticised, there exists a danger that “the achievement cancels the premises” (Marcuse, 1964). Here particularly the unintended effects of networked structures due to inherent logics should be taken into account, simply because networking is so new to journalism. Awareness of network effect, however, is not only necessary for journalists acting within networked structures, but also for scholars studying them.

The third and last focus for further research concerns the finances of cross-border collaborative journalism. Is cross-border journalism practiced by classic employed journalists or also freelancers, and if so is this reflected in journalism studies? Is cross-border collaborative journalism born out of non-profit journalism - with its drive to “fix” and its apparent capability to transform journalism (Konieczna, 2018, p. 47)? And if so, what does it mean for cross-border collaborative journalism when it is published via mainstream media (Konieczna, 2018, p. 209)? This corresponds with the critique by Benson (2017), observing “competing demands” from foundations “to achieve both economic “sustainability” and civic “impact,” ultimately creating pressures to reproduce dominant commercial media news practices or orient news primarily for small, elite audiences.”

Are legacy media’s adoption of this way of working an indication of cross-border journalism’s mainstreaming? While the funding question is of immediate importance for journalists’ work including decisions on independence and conflicts of interests, scholars will be able to analyse media and indeed network structures and to address questions of institutionalisation and of pluralism.

### **Concluding remarks**

Cross-border collaborative journalism is a relatively young phenomenon that has proven to be a powerful journalism practice suitable for our era. This moment of time, thus, is a particularly interesting one for journalism- and media-scholars to look into it.

We are witnessing a global phenomenon in journalism right now, since cross-border collaborative journalism is shaping our global knowledge. Little scholarship is available so far, and more empirical data is needed to make possible a long term view that would check claims and follow up on them. This field needs the engagement of a multi-perspective and multi-disciplines critical view, signalling possible dangerous aspects and consequences. Such research should be viewed as a way to identify, observe, describe and then to test possible adjustments. In that spirit academic research and journalism practice together can contribute to the necessary deeper understanding of this new approach to doing journalism.

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Note on the authors:

Brigitte Alfter is a German-Danish journalist and author. Having practiced journalism on local, national and European level - the last years as an EU correspondent in Brussels - she realised the need for cross-border collaborative journalism structures. From 2008-2018 she developed a European support- and infrastructure for cross-border journalism including work grants and the annual European Investigative Journalism Conference & Dataharvest at Belgian non-profit Journalismfund.eu. She has practiced cross-border journalism – with the ICIJ and others – and taught journalism at all levels. She combines journalism practice, entrepreneurial activities and research, has authored the handbook on cross-border collaborative journalism first published in 2015 in Danish language and contributed to several anthologies on journalism practice. [www.alfter.dk](http://www.alfter.dk)

Ștefan Căndea is a freelance journalist and co-founder in 2001 of the Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism (CRJI), an investigative non-profit registered in Bucharest. Currently he is enrolled in a PhD on investigative journalism networks at University of Westminster and also coordinates the EIC.network which he co-founded at the end of 2015. Căndea is a member of International Consortium for Investigative Journalism and coordinated the ICIJ Eastern Europe research and reporting Hub for the Offshore Leaks Project called "Secrecy for Sale", the largest cross-border investigative collaboration at that time. He taught investigative journalism techniques at Bucharest University and was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard University.