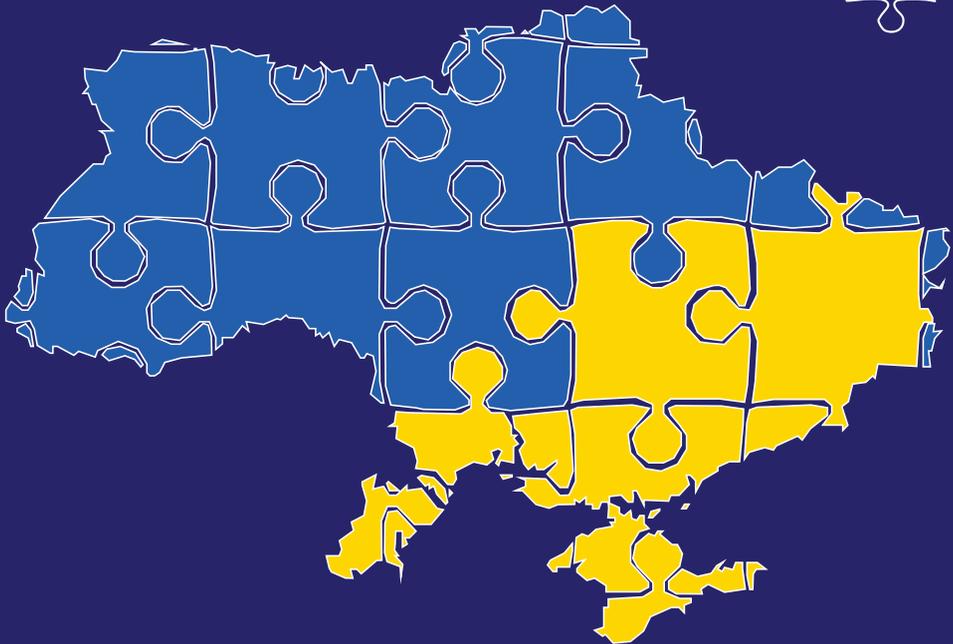# REVITALIZING
UKRAINIAN LOCAL MEDIA

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REVITALIZING
UKRAINIAN LOCAL MEDIA

RESEARCH AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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of Contents

Policy Paper: Media Recovery in Ukraine –Joanna Krawczyk & MDF

Preface

The "Revitalizing Ukrainian Local Media: Research and Recommendations" publication represents a collaborative endeavor aimed to addressing the critical challenges facing local journalism in Ukraine. This project, initiated by Correctiv and the Ukrainian Media Fund operated by German Marshall Fund of the United States, underscores our commitment tصo sustaining independent local mediarough a community-focused development model.

The Media Development Foundation played a pivotal role in this study of the core research team. We extend our profound gratitude to their knowledgeable researchers, whose in-depth understanding and insights into the Ukrainian media landscape were fundamental to this work. Leveraging on-site Ukrainian expertise is crucial for devising solutions that are both effective and sustainable, ensuring that local media can withstand and adapt to the evolving landscape.

This work was made possible by the generous financial support of the North Rhine-Westphalia state government. We appreciate their contribution, as well as the efforts of policymakers and public funding initiatives essential for rebuilding independent local media in Ukraine.

The importance of supporting local media and independent outlets in Ukraine cannot be overstated, both in the immediate aftermath of the war and as the country moves towards their recovery. We believe that local media should be recognized and treated as key actors in the recovery

period, possessing the capacity not only to provide crucial information but also to build social inclusion, support local identities, and foster resilient societies. A robust local media network is the foundation of a strong civic engagement, and transparent and accountable political system.

This study aims to transform local publishing initiatives into sustainable, community-centered media. It includes a comprehensive analysis of the Ukrainian local media landscape, business models, and donor funding impacts. The proposed roadmap, grounded in the theory of change, serves as a strategic guide for stakeholders committed to rebuilding Ukraine's media sector

The findings and recommendations in this publication underscore the need for joint action from all stakeholders. Policymakers in Ukraine must establish a National Media Support Fund, strengthen legal protections for journalists, and promote media diversity and pluralism. Civil society organizations and media support entities should advocate for press freedom, provide technical assistance, and support local media through community engagement. International donors and governments must integrate media support into broader recovery plans, recognizing the media as a critical sector for Ukraine's recovery and democratic transition.

From our point of view, the role of independent local media is crucial for all reconstruction efforts. These media organizations will provide the public eyes necessary to fight mismanagement. They will offer the support needed to implement good governance. They will serve as enablers and mediators for public debate.

Coordination is key to our success. By aligning efforts, we can create a robust and supportive ecosystem for Ukrainian media. This integrated approach will ensure media outlets not only survive but thrive, contributing to a more informed, resilient, and democratic Ukraine.

Make no mistake: revitalizing Ukraine's local media landscape requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders. By implementing these recommendations, we can build a media environment that supports transparency, accountability, and civic engagement, essential for Ukraine's democratic transition and recovery. We believe that together, we can achieve these goals and help Ukraine build a brighter future.

Thank you for engaging with this important work. Together, we can foster a thriving media landscape in Ukraine, built on transparency, accountability, and informed public discourse.

Joanna Krawczyk,
Ukrainian Media Fund / German Marshall Fund of the United States

David Schraven,
Correctiv
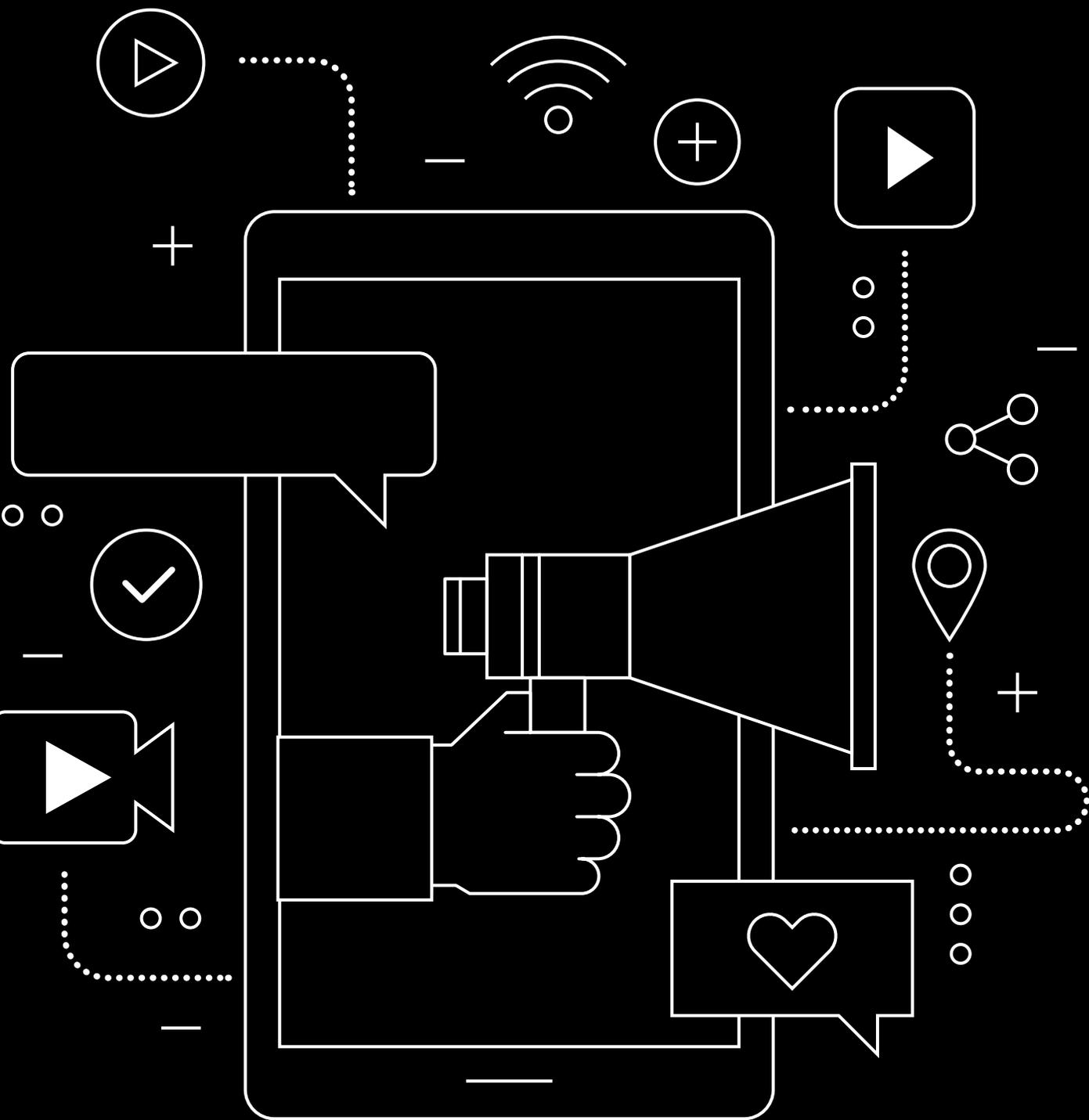
Revitalisation
of the Ukrainian
Media System
in the Local & Regional Space

Strategy Paper by the Media
Development Foundation,
Ukraine & CORRECTIV, Germany

Introduction

One of the most recent research reports by the Media Development Foundation in Ukraine, published in February 2024, outlines the urgency of the rise of news deserts in Ukraine and the growth of the entire local districts (or the whole regions) into informationally unhealthy areas [1]. The tendency signifies that some local communities might have limited access to sufficient information about public safety, healthcare, politics and governance, education, transportation, economic development, environment, and civic initiatives. During wartime, this tendency may weaken national resilience and recovery. It may also adversely affect Ukraine's democratic transition, nourished by broad public awareness and informed decision-making.

While significantly impacted by the war and war-related factors, the news deserts phenomenon in Ukraine is also part of a global tendency. In particular, the new study "Uncovering news deserts in Europe. Risks and opportunities for local and community media in the EU," published by the Centre for Media Pluralism and Media Freedom in February 2024, indicated the fragile situation for local media across the EU. Discussed in the European Parliament on March 5, 2024, the report recommended 1) providing financial support to local and community newsrooms and journalists and 2) putting in place a regulatory framework, such as clear definitions of local and community media, to guarantee institutional support [2]. News deserts are also spread across the US [3].

In view of the situation and the urgency of war-related factors in Ukraine, this study aims to answer the research question: How might the media development in Ukraine, some parts of which are categorized as news deserts or are at risk of transitioning into that category, be impacted so that the local communities could benefit from new or transformed local publishing initiatives?

To answer this question, the Strategy Paper will:

explain the logic and characteristics of the Ukrainian local media landscape, media market peculiarities, business models, and understanding of private and public media brands' development on local and regional levels in Ukraine;

clarify the peculiarities of local journalism by defining current models for community journalism in Ukraine at times of war and fragmented reconstruction;

categorise local media outlets in Ukraine based on their business models and other characteristics impacting their performance and operational capabilities;

identify key market entry hurdles, development limits, as well as innovation drivers and possibilities in times of war and economic hardship for different regions in Ukraine;

describe the role of the donor funding for Ukrainian media based on available data;

develop the roadmap for providing the impact using the elements of the theory of change (elements of Input-Output-Outcome-Impact-Methodology (IOOI)), in particular, for how a small initiative of local news publishing could be supported and transformed into a sustainable community-centered media.

The Strategy Paper derives key takeaways from the Research Paper [a] that provides the underlying information on community media development, such as the baseline understanding of community media, characteristics of community-centered media under the European and Ukrainian context, a data-based explanation of existing business models for local media outlets in Ukraine, and presents the case study of community media outlets in Eastern, Central, and Western Europe that hold relevance for the development of community media and overcoming the news deserts phenomenon both in Ukraine and the European Union. Putting a clear understanding of the notion of community media in place is one of the most

underlying undertakings for both the EU and the Ukrainian civil societies to address the phenomenon of news deserts and the fragility of community media initiatives. The differences in understanding of community media goals and purposes in Ukraine and the EU might have been impacted by various cultural, economic, and political factors; however, the war-related factors are of the utmost relevance and significance for the purposes of this paper. Among them:

more than two years into the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia and the constant exposure of local publishers to war-related risks;

the urgency of resistance to Russian war-related cultural and political influences on the local level;

additional critical information needs of local communities in Ukraine associated with factors of full-scale war, internal displacements, and humanitarian aid;

the ongoing transition of the country to democracy and EU membership that puts additional pressure on local watchdog organisations, including community media;

the significance of charitable, crowdfunding, and civil society initiatives for Ukraine's resilience, society's resources Organization and recovery. The above factors influence the present and future transitions of the Ukrainian local publishing initiatives into sustainable community media outlets during Ukraine's resilience and recovery. At the same time, the EU local publishers' practices and experience are of the most relevance and priority for the Ukrainian in-war and post-war recovery. Timely addressing the issue of news deserts by supporting community media in Ukraine might benefit its future steps towards democratic transition, EU membership, and overcoming the consequences of war.

1.2 Community Media Models in Ukraine

Based on the Research Paper by the MDF as a part of this study [a], a significant portion of the Ukrainian local media can be Organization as community-centered media organisations, according to such criteria as:

- Objectives of the media Organization;
- The ownership and control of community media;
- The content is locally oriented and produced;
- The production of the content;
- The audience;
- The financing.

The strategy for various community models depends on the informational health status of local communities and the whole regions of Ukraine. Careful analysis of all representative media outlets should be the basis for decision-making that will benefit future reconstruction. At the same time, based on the models presented in the table, the key factors might be considered:

- Maturity of community media since supporting media organisations rooted in the communities is crucial for democratic development and informational health of communities;
- Role of volunteers and community members in the media since it is one of the most advantageous aspects of community journalism for democratic transition;

- The cross-communal, cross-regional, and trans-border cooperations, given the size of the country and the need for local journalism to nourish the local impact of democratic decision-making and also since the successful local governance reform in Ukraine had given rise to local voices before the war started; also it is possible to facilitate the connection between Ukrainian local media organization and a local media outlet from another country (especially in case some of them shared similar socio-economic perturbations - Kryvbass and Ruhrbergbau, for example, both has been through mining operations on a mass scale, mining protests, rapid desindustrialisation during the war and/or social identity being based on being 'the tough miner region';
- The ability to adapt to changing environments and war efforts, helping to support public safety at the local level

Table 1. Characterizations of Community Media Models in Ukraine

Community Media Model	'Mature' Community-Centered Media	Startup Community Centered Publisher	'Young' War-Time Digital Local Newsroom	Cross-regional Local Newsroom	Cross-communal Local Newsroom	Other Types of Community Media
Media's Age	More than 5 years; rooted in the community	Varies; some startups are older, and some launched after February 24, 2022	Launched after February 24, 2022	Varies, most are 'mature'	Varies, most are 'mature'	Varies
Objectives	News and investigations relevant to the needs of the community members	News and information relevant to the needs of the audience within the community and outside	Timely news reporting, various war content, no investigations	Information relevant to more than one community in different regions of Ukraine; may include occupied territories	Information relevant to more than one community; may include occupied territories	Information targeted in various ways at specific groups of people (for example, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people, etc.); other hybrid types of media (for example, local branches ('hubs') of public mainstream war-oriented media informing communities about primary safety issues)
Ownership	Private	Private; volunteers may contribute	Private; volunteers may contribute	Private	Private	Mostly private
Content	Locally oriented	Not exclusively local, depends on the audience	Not exclusively local, depends on the audience	Locally oriented, covering more than one community across different regions	Locally oriented, covering more than one community within the same region	Locally oriented, specified
Production	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; volunteers and freelancers may be included	Professional; volunteers and freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included
Audience	Local	Wide	Wide	Regional	Local	Local
Financing	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, sometimes Reader Revenue
Role of volunteers and community members	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience
War-related changes in the model	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special cross-regional war content	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special cross-communal war content	Change in content, donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information
Examples of local publishers	"Echo Chervonohrad" (West of Ukraine); Sieverodonetsk-online (East of Ukraine)	Thebuchacity (North of Ukraine); Vilnohirsk.in.ua (Center of Ukraine).	Kordon.media (North of Ukraine); Donbas.frontliner (East of Ukraine), 360war.in.ua (South and East of Ukraine).	Intent (South of Ukraine); Rayon.in.ua (network of local media across West, North, and South of Ukraine)	"Varosh" (West of Ukraine), PMG.ua (West of Ukraine), MOST (South of Ukraine), Free Radio (East of Ukraine)	Some of the community-centered regional and local branches ('habs') of Suspilne (Suspilne Sumy as an example)

1.3 Development of Public and Private Media Brands in Ukraine

In Ukraine, most private media outlets that operate at the local and regional levels either belong to private owners or are based on NGOs or their associations. However, it should be noted that there are also branches of Suspilne Media – a public joint-stock broadcaster's agency with 100% of its shares belonging to the state [b]. Suspilne Media generates content in digital, radio, and TV formats. It is divided into 24 regional branches covering almst every oblast, including the Donbas region (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) and the Autonomous Republic of Crimea [c]. These regional branches have separate websites and Social Networks (Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, Viber, and Telegram). Also, Suspilne Media has a Mobile App on its national level.

Focusing on Dnipropetrovsk oblast, Suspilne Dnipro publishes regular news on its website and social media: Telegram [d], Facebook [e], Instagram [f], and the YouTube channel [g]. Also, in case of a blackout or mobile phone outage, local FM radio (and Medium Wave AM Broadcast, since they could be operational in case of total collapse) channels Ukrainian Radio, Radio Promin', and Radio Culture (Pavlohrad, Nikopol, Kryvyi Rih, Zhovti Vody, and Dnipro city) can be set up.

The case of Suspilne Media and Its regional network Is an example of proactive media brand building. Suspilne Media maintains its editorial independence even with state funding due to a checks-and-balances system and internal policies. Its reportages and interviews with influencers reached a new level of quality and attracted many viewers [h]. The audience trusts the media because of its reputation and highest journalistic standards [4].

These factors have contributed to building a solid media brand, directly connecting with audience retention and audience support. This support can be divided into financial and non-financial. Financial reader revenue is based on

donations, subscriptions, and other means of transferring funds. Non-financial contributions are crowdsourcing, social media support, and media brand promotion among subscribers [5].

Local and regional media see organizational development as part of the development of the media brand, as outlined in the Financing of Online Media study [will be published soon]. Developing and implementing a brand strategy inevitably requires financial resources, which newsrooms often need more for such a 'non-priority' item. However, in the medium and long term, a well-built brand will lead to both new audience growth and increased engagement of the core audience.

Local and regional media use basic and affordable approaches to communicate their brand and increase community visibility. An excellent example of a regional media outlet that has rebranded and strengthened its brand is the Odesa-based independent socio-political outlet Intent [i]. The rebranding, which began with a change in the media's name, boosted their expansion to the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions and soon to Crimea. The name change triggered a full-scale invasion: the previous name, 'Izbirkom,' had a Russian language origin, which the audience could interpret ambiguously.

'Russia has pushed us hard not to allow anything Russian-language to remain.' – Valery Bolgan, editor-in-chief of Intent, comments to Mediamaker [6].

The editorial team may publish news later than others but provides verified information with an opinion. In addition, their editorial policy is public, posted on the website, and based on ethical and professional standards.

Another example of effective brand building is the independent Lviv-based investigative media outlet NGL. Media [j]. In 2023, they changed the name of the media outlet, as the previous name was indicative of belonging to the nationwide investigative community – Nashi Groshi (Our

Money). Different newsrooms have been established under Nashi Groshi's name in different regions of Ukraine. After the name change, the media outlet became more recognizable among the audience. This decision was made possible due to the developed strategy, which the MDF supported as part of the Emergency Media Assistance Fund program in 2022. After all, decisions about rebranding and marketing a new brand will require additional funding.

The partners' reputation Is also essential for NGL's positive brand. Media: they work only with media and partners with a strong reputation and provide transparent reports [k]. They also actively work with various reliable communities and groups where they distribute their materials. Such cooperation increases the credibility of the materials and ensures the media's independence, which inevitably impacts their brand.

The strategy for community media brand development might include:

• Verifying the editorial independence of local publishers to ensure democratic progress and independent media development in Ukraine;

• Providing assistance to community-centered brand development of media organisations that improve the informational health of communities by ensuring the critical informational needs of local communities.

• Facilitate the establishment of partnerships, both intra-national and inter-national. The media organization can boost its trustworthiness by association with other established organizations and/or media development programs or NGOs.

• Help with audience research regarding audiences' perception of media brands in their region and their media consumption habits. It is possible that media Organization with established editorial independence is either too young, too small, or too slow compared to other news sources.

1.4 Ukrainian Media Landscape: Content Production Differences at the Regional Level

1.4.1 Government-controlled territory of Ukraine

For more than two years of war and partial reconstruction, news has remained the leading content format of local media. This is evidenced by the data from the annual surveys of the state of regional media in Ukraine conducted by MDF: in 2022 and 2023, about 80% of local and regional media surveyed reported publishing news as their primary content format. The respondents to the annual survey (local and regional media) in 2023 produced, on average, about 20 news pieces per day and 16 non-news pieces per week [7].

On the one hand, the news feed informs the population about essential events in the war and life on the home front. On the other hand, it brings significant online media traffic, mainly because it contains sensitive content that triggers Ukrainian society.

Local media clearly intends to continue developing long and short video formats in 2024 — 62% of the editorial teams surveyed in the annual MDF 2023 survey want to continue working with video. However, all surveyed media have concluded that the audience quickly gets tired of long videos, so there is a demand for short formats such as YouTube Shorts, TikTok, and Reels. Captioned videos and emotional videos on TikTok are rapidly gaining popularity.

The biggest obstacle to creating video formats is the need for more professional videographers. Newsrooms also need more financial resources to hire a highly qualified videographer, and some newsrooms need professional filming equipment.

The local and regional media covered by the MDF study have lately emphasized the production of various kinds of analytical materials to fulfill their watchdog function. In particular, they reported on monitoring budget expenditures and the work of local governments, investigating public procurement, auditing public data, etc.

Although investigations are an important content format for local authorities to control the reconstruction process and use local budgets, they are labor- and cost-intensive to produce. That is why only 22% of the surveyed local and regional media said they had published investigations during the year.

A small proportion of the media outlets produced explainers, stories, interviews, streams, reportages, and podcasts.

Andriy Dikhtyarenko, MDF's chief content expert and editor-in-chief of the Realna Gazeta Luhansk regional media outlet [1], mentioned to MDF that the reduction in reporting and investigations may be caused by self-censorship. He claimed journalists are afraid of the consequences of publishing sensitive content and content related to security, internal military, political decisions, essential infrastructure facilities, etc.: inadvertent coverage of these things can lead to administrative or criminal prosecution or public condemnation. As Andriy Dikhtyarenko added, journalists are less likely to go to the war zone, which may be due to physical danger in the frontline/temporarily occupied territories, limited access to combat areas, and the risk of male reporters being mobilized.

Another crucial factor contributing to the low number of reports is the lack of information. In relatively "rear" regions, authorities could deny access to information more often than administrations from "frontline" regions. At the same time, the media working for the target audience from the occupied territories generally lack information. All of the above obstacles are reflected in the low number of reports and the overall content. Andrii Dikhtyarenko considers this a dangerous trend for the Ukrainian media landscape, as it causes the media to lose touch with the audience and fails to show what is happening.

Concerning the content, war-related topics have become the most popular in the last two years: news from the frontline, shelling, hostilities, occupation, and soldiers' obituaries cover a large audience from different regions of Ukraine. At the same time, the audience is interested in military and corruption investigations.

Representatives of local and regional media also believe that the content topics differ depending on the region where the media are based. For example, media outlets in the East and South of Ukraine produce more content about military events because they are closer to the frontline. These media outlets try to create more meaningful and conceptual materials about events on the battlefield, shelling, occupation, and investigations into the actions of traitors. The media in the East and South of Ukraine also often raise the issue of de-occupation of the occupied regions of Ukraine: demining, restoration of infrastructure, return of people, and humanitarian aid. Although these are primarily forecasts, it is crucial for residents or evacuated citizens to feel that the government is not neglecting them and is addressing these issues to resolve the situation.

Media audiences across Ukraine slowly return to day-to-day topics such as utility services, local incidents, etc. This is partly because the audience might be tired of the war events, MDF researchers conclude, based on surveys and interviews with media representatives. In the "rear" regions (West, Center, and most of the North), regular topics about community life are more interesting, as the structure of their primary local audience has not changed significantly.

A notable aspect of the content of Western, Central, and Eastern media outlets is an increased focus on materials about IDPs, their needs, and their integration into society. Also popular is content describing personal stories of IDPs and other vulnerable groups who have been affected by the war in one way or another.

The data collected also shows that the audience of local and regional media is interested in the history and ethnography of the community or region covered by the media. Moreover, the audience is interested in debunking myths about the formation of national and ethnic identities of the regions. Interest in their culture, history, and traditions is growing across the country, particularly in the East and South, as these regions have been more heavily russified and exposed to Russian propaganda. Today, the media are among the actors in shaping national identity and preserving historical memory.

The strategy for content production in government-controlled territories might include:

- Assistance to the watchdog role of community-centered media, in particular, investigations and local authority accountability regular checks by community media;

- Ensuring access to critical and war-related information for all communities, in particular, those lacking informational health;

- If possible, provide upscaling of best practices by local media actors on communication with local civilian and military authorities;

- Providing assistance with safety issues for media organisations covering the war.

1.4.2 Temporarily occupied territory of Ukraine

Speaking of content aimed at the audience in the temporarily occupied territories, MDF's research conducted for the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence revealed that the most popular format is short videos with recommendations for survival: how to leave the occupation, how to obtain the proper documents, where to find humanitarian aid and resources for survival, etc. The interviewed online media experts pointed to this format and topics based on analyzing their audience indicators. They also noted that short videos are viewed by older people, which was not the case before.

News about life and the situation in cities under occupation would be in high demand by displaced people in the government-controlled territory and refugees abroad, but this topic is currently off-limits for a number of reasons: first, it is hazardous to provide information by informants who are in the occupation; second, there is no access to information provided by Ukrainian local authorities, as these bodies are either captured by the occupation forces or relocated to the government-controlled territory, and officials do not cooperate, probably due to increased security risks and military confidentiality. Media outlets that used to produce content about and for the regions currently temporarily occupied by Russia are now reconsidering their content formats and topics.

The strategy for content production in temporarily occupied territories might include:

- assistance with producing short videos with recommendations for survival for citizens by the media working with temporarily occupied territories;

- support solutions aimed at reaching audiences on temporarily occupied territories, or organize brainstorm sessions/hackathons on this if possible.

1.4.2.1 Dnipropetrovsk Oblast in Focus

It is worth focusing on the content when analyzing the media market in the Dnipropetrovs'k region. For this purpose, we have chosen one of the most prominent media outlets in the region, Pershyi Kryvorizkyi (based in Kryvyi Rih) [m], specifically, the news feed for March 22, 2024. On this day, the media made 47 news publications, which were categorized on the website into the following thematic sections:

• War in Ukraine - 15 news items (consequences of massive missile attacks across Ukraine, air defense work to destroy enemy missiles and drones, information about the environmental threat from enemy attacks in the Dnipro region, assistance from international partners);

• Society - 12 news (about social assistance and administrative services, debunking fakes, informing about the sowing campaign in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, etc;)

• Kryvyi Rih - 9 news items (city events such as the resumption of water and electricity supply, weather forecast, city budget expenditures, etc;)

• Emergency events - 9 news items (e.g., news about a crime, schedules of emergency power outages, wanted person);

• Ukraine - 1 news item (national news, such as information about power outages in 7 regions of Ukraine);

• Culture - 1 news item (Literature club in Kryvyi Rih);

• Sports - no news for the selected period;

• Economy - no news for the selected period.

News about the events of the Russian-Ukrainian war has the most significant contribution, while there are almost no thematic materials about the economics, sports, culture, and national policies. It is worth noting that the territory of the Dnipropetrovs'k region is close to the frontline, and its population has hosted numerous internally displaced persons. Some settlements (Nikopol, Marhanets, and others) directly border the occupied territories and suffer from enemy shelling almost every day. This explains the audience's demand in Dnipropetrovsk oblast for news about the war (although the interest in war is a national trend).

1.5 Role of Grants in Informational Health of Communities and Strategy for International Group of Donors

According to The Donor Landscape of Media Support in Ukraine research conducted by Lviv Media Forum [8], there is a list of donor organisations that have served support for the Ukrainian media outlets during the last two years.

Table 2. A List of International Organizations with Presence in Ukraine

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
Internews Network	internews.in.ua	• Local free press access to information • Advance systemic inclusion of marginalized voices • Filling critical gaps in quality content • Supporting the ability of people to critically engage with news and information
European Endowment for Democracy	www.democracyendowment.eu/thematic-areas.html	EED supports local media - including bloggers, digital platforms, satirists and other innovative news and information outlets - to grow as independent and quality communication channels as a mechanism to ensure media pluralism and access to independent and alternative information.
IREX	www.irex.org/region/europe-eurasia/ukraine	• Citizen Engagement and Reform Communication • Community Engagement Exchange • Community Solutions • Ukraine Media Partnership Program (UMPP) • Strengthening Media Literacy in the Ukrainian Education System • United Community
National Endowment for Democracy	www.ned.org	• Strengthening the institutions and procedures of electoral democracy to ensure free and fair elections • Encouraging the gradual consolidation of liberal democracy by measures that strengthen the rule of law, protect individual liberties, and foster social pluralism • Supporting groups who work to establish a functioning free press as well as institutions that promote political accountability, economic transparency, responsible corporate governance, and civilian control over the military

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
USAID	www.usaid.gov/democracy/supporting-vibrant-civil-society-independent-media	USAID promotes civil society, labor rights, youth and independent media strengthening in order to advance development.
Deutsche Welle Akademie	akademie.dw.com/en/who-we-are/s-30788	Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer; projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information.
Prague Civil Society Centre	www.praguecivilsociety.org/about	Grants provide flexible resources to local groups, coalitions and movements so they can launch or grow civic projects, and to independent media so they can build new platforms and expand their audience
European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)	https://www.ecpmf.eu	• Promote, preserve and defend media freedom • Cross-border investigative journalism • Freelancer support
Civil Society Organization «Initiative Center to Support Social Action «Ednannia»	ednannia.ua/en/programs	• Civil Society Sectoral Support Activity • EU4Civil Society Sustainability in Ukraine • EU Emergency Support to Civil Society Project - Supporting local philanthropy
The Fix Foundation	www.thefix.foundation	Free press and innovative media support.
International Renaissance Foundation	www.irf.ua/en/programs/	• Strengthening Ukrainian Voices for International Support for Ukraine • Resilience, Recovery and Development of Territorial Communities
U.S. Embassy in Ukraine	ua.usembassy.gov/education-culture/grants-opportunities/media-development-fund-program/	• Fortifying independent journalism in Ukraine, particularly in the regions most affected by the ongoing conflict • Enhancing accountability in the utilization of recovery funds amidst Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine • Sustaining independent reporting, safeguarding press freedom • Promoting accountability in governance, thereby contributing to the resilience of Ukrainian society

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT)	mict-internation-al.org/	Fellowship for Critical Voices – work with over 400 journalists and media makers, offering support in 7 areas relevant to maintaining critical voices in crisis regions.
Institute for War and Peace Reporting	iwpr.net/what-we-do	War crimes covering.
Thomson Reuters Foundation	www.trust.org	• Strengthening local and national journalism • Improving media ethics and standards, and combatting misinformation • Exploring and shaping the future of the profession
Solidarity Fund PL	solidarityfund.pl	Defence of free speech and the access to objective and reliable information for democratisation.
n-ost	n-ost.org	• Enhance European media coverage of Ukraine by promoting cross-border journalism, fostering a lasting journalistic network and amplifying Ukrainian voices and perspectives • Climate Journalism • Empower journalists to unlock authentic narratives and promote diverse representation within the media content through a queer feminist perspective
International Press Institute	ipi.media	Promoting the conditions that allow journalism to fulfill its public function, the most important of which is the media's ability to operate free from interference and without fear of retaliation.
The Ukrainian Cultural Foundation	ucf.in.ua	• Support for individual creative activity of artists and cultural leaders • Support for projects aimed at increasing regional cultural diversity, including the cultures of the indigenous peoples of Ukraine in the life of Ukrainian society, support for artists and cultural institutions in the frontline and de-occupied territories
Goethe-Institut	www.goethe.de/ins/ua/de/kul/mut.html	Media literacy and countering disinformation.

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
Pact ENGAGE	www.pactworld.org/country/ukraine	Support local pro-reform civil society organizations working to promote government transparency and accountability and civic involvement.
Reporters Without Borders	rsf.org/en	• Concrete solutions and launch international initiatives • Assist journalists in danger
ERIM Equal Rights & Independent Media	erim.ngo	• Media and information literacy • Assistance and capacity building to media organisations, journalists, media lawyers and civil society organisations focused on media freedom • Media development
NDI	www.ndi.org/eurasia/ukraine	Promotion of issues and tools for democratic decision-making process.
Chemonics	chemonics.com/projects/promoting-unity-in-ukraine/	• Promote a democratic, prosperous, and unified Ukraine • Strengthen inclusive Ukrainian identity based on pluralistic civic values • The Partnership Fund for a Resilient Ukraine (PFRU) program
SIDA	www.sida.se/en/sidas-international-work/countries-and-regions/ukraine	Support to independent media, civil society, environmental work and social reforms.
Czech Embassy in Ukraine	mzv.gov.cz/kyiv	Vaclav Havel Journalism Fellowship.
Media Development Investment Fund	www.mdif.org	Investing in independent media and extensive expertise in media viability.
People in Need	www.peoplein-need.net/what-we-do/migration-awareness/our-offer-for-media	Fair and balanced coverage of migration and foreigners, forming of migrant's image through media coverage.

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
Heinrich Böll Stiftung	ua.boell.org/en	• Promoting democracy and the development of civil society (developing the tolerant political culture of participation, encouraging decision-making on the local and national levels; cultivating an inclusive critical discussion on historical and social issues; expanding the green movement based on left-liberal ideas) • Gender Democracy (raising the awareness of the education community, and mainstreaming gender issues, including LGBT issues, in public discourse)
United Nations Development Programme	www.undp.org	• Strengthen the resilience of Ukrainian media outlets by providing financial and technical assistance to help them maintain their operations and continue reporting on the war and its impact on the country • Providing training and resources to help journalists and media professionals adapt to the changing media landscape and improve their online presence • Promoting media and information literacy among Ukrainians by providing educational programs and resources to help people critically evaluate the information they consume • Development of community media initiatives • Support the recovery of Ukraine's media sector within the UN Recovery Framework
International Media Support (IMS)	www.mediasupport.org/what-we-do/	• Safety of journalists (trainings, practical measures, advocacy) • Local solutions to global problems • Support of independent filmmakers and film institutions
Free Press for Eastern Europe	www.fpee.info	• Education in new media • Fostering cross-sectoral collaborations between media and scientists • Developing collaborative responses to global challenges to independent press

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
WAN-IFRA	wan-ifra.org	• Protect the rights of journalists and publishers to operate a free media • Support to independent media in their efforts to fight an intensifying information war • Promote a sustainable business ecosystem for the news, safeguarding media integrity, ensuring the safety of journalists, and upholding press freedom for global democracy
European Journalism Centre	ejc.net	• Grant funding for freelancers and facilitates research opportunities to support solutions-focused development journalism • Promotion of climate journalism • Support cross-border watchdog journalism etc
Open Media Hub	www.thomson-foundation.org/projects/open-media-hub/	Strengthen independent media and professional journalism: delivered in-country workshops for media managers, active production sessions on critical topics with editorial staff and set up a journalist exchange scheme all aimed at supporting the creation of high-quality television and video production.
JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile	jx-fund.org	• Providing immediate financial and logistical support to Ukrainian media professionals who have fled the country, enabling them to continue their work quickly and flexibly in exile • Offering advice and assistance to help Ukrainian media outlets develop sustainable models for their work in exile • BoostYourMedia: Ukraine Incubator – providing individualized support to 10 Ukrainian media outlets with international audiences and hybrid editorial teams • Connecting the Dots research grants, with a focus on data-based and investigative reporting, as well as multimedia storytelling

Organisation	Website	Relevant field of support
DT Global	dt-global.com	• The EU-funded EU 4 Independent Media - strengthening independent journalism and media in Ukraine by supporting fact-based, gender-inclusive, and reliable public interest journalism • USAID-funded Media Program - empower local media to expand Ukrainian citizens' access to high-quality news and information, counter malign influence, and support European integration
Council of Europe	www.coe.int/en/web/kyiv/freedom-of-media-in-ukraine	• Align Ukrainian media legislation and practice with European standards. Key objectives include building a financially sustainable and editorially independent public broadcaster, strengthening community media, enhancing media actor safety, and ensuring transparency in media ownership and operations • Action Plan for Ukraine - strengthening media capacity, promoting ethical and conflict-sensitive reporting, and enhancing media coverage of elections

1.6 The Need for Foreign Development Aid at the Local and Regional Level

Research data from the Media Development Foundation on the informational health of local areas and communities has shown that all regions of Ukraine (Western, Central, Central, Northern, and Southern) are fragile in terms of spreading news deserts and lack of funding.

While physical proximity to the frontline and direct war-related risks might be crucial factors that explain the media landscapes of some communities in Ukraine during times of war, other factors, such as historical, socio-economic, and political, play out significantly as well. Further analysis and impact on the areas the most endangered of becoming news deserts or already categorized as new deserts is of the highest priority and relevance for media development in the country.

Informational Health of Western & Central Regions and Frontline Regions of Ukraine

■ Not healthy or partially healthy   ■ Healthy

Western & Central Regions: 46,9% / 53,1%
Frontline Regions: 61,8% / 38,2%
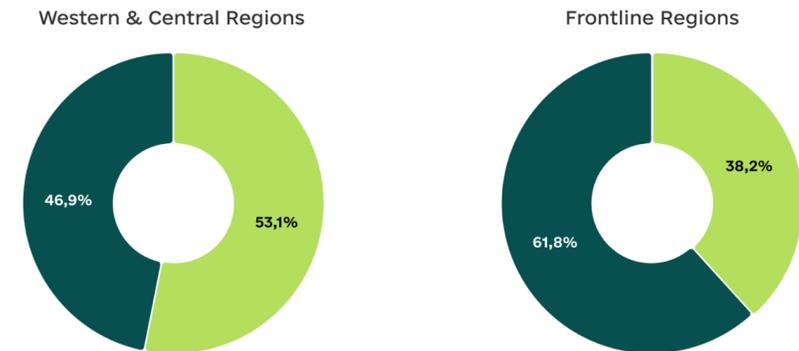
Categories "not healthy" and "partially healthy" were combined into one; results are calculated based on data from the News Desert in Ukraine MDF's study (2023-2024)

Pic. 1. The comparison of informational health between frontline and rear regions of Ukraine by the Media Development Foundation

In terms of funding, the collected data has shown that Western and Central regions of Ukraine received the lowest levels of foreign development aid, in particular eight western oblasts (Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Khmelnytskyi, and Chernivtsi) and five central oblasts (Vinnytsia, Poltava, Kirovohrad, Cherkasy, and Dnipropetrovsk). These oblasts may be referred to as "rear" areas due to their relative distance from the frontline.

According to the research findings, foreign aid in grants constituted 45% of the revenues of Western Ukrainian local newsrooms and 50% of those in Central Ukraine as of the end of 2023. In contrast, other parts of Ukraine had significantly higher shares of donor funding in the reported revenues: 73% for Northern Ukrainian local publishers, 87% for South Ukrainian local publishers, and 93% for those in Eastern Ukraine.

At the same time, the lower levels of reported grant support are supported by the data on the risk of funding loss as defined by local newsrooms themselves. The surveyed local publishers in Western Ukraine mentioned the risk of funding loss much more frequently, contrary to those in the Eastern parts of Ukraine. This data might indicate a considerable level of disparity among different parts of Ukraine regarding the risk of funding loss: the difference between the West and the North is up to 24%.
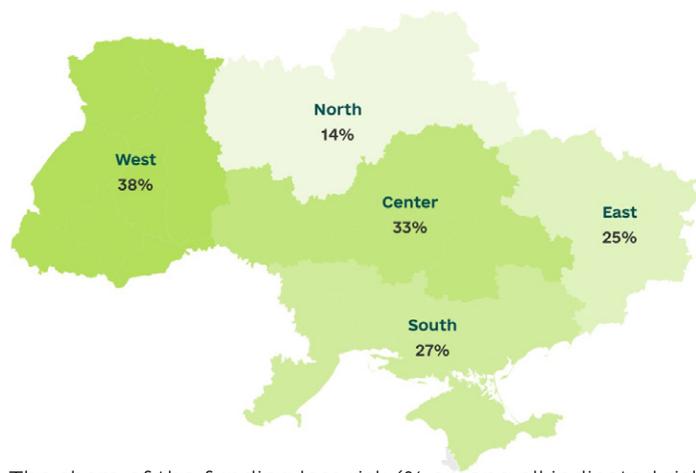
Pic. 2. The share of the funding loss risk (% among all indicated risks at each region) by Media Development Foundation

Based on the collected and analysed data, strategy for the group of international donors supporting Ukraine might consist of such elements as:

1) attention to the long-term institutional capacity support programs for local newsrooms that significantly contribute to the informational health of their communities and entire regions;

2) further analysis of the role of long-term institutional support as opposed to short-term aid in the form of grants-for-projects and emergency grants for local media outlets could contribute to understanding the situation in Ukraine's media landscape. The findings of Media Development Foundation surveys have shown that long-term institutional programs could provide local media outlets with more sustainable funding in times of crisis and opportunities for building long-term financial and growth plans. On the contrary, short-term assistance and constant competition for new donor funding opportunities may have negatively impacted the development of some small media organisations;

3) further analysis of informational health and timely updates to the existing research findings as the basis for targeting foreign development aid. Due to the war-related factors, defining the level of informational health of the local districts and communities is crucial for both media development and national resilience;

4) providing assistance and support considering the informational health of local areas and communities. Depending on the region's status, some areas, such as unhealthy regions or news deserts with limited access to critical information, might need media launch and relaunch programs. Conversely, support for existing organisations and initiatives might be necessary for informationally healthy areas to prevent them from transitioning into informationally unhealthy ones. For partially healthy regions, a combination of both

approaches might be beneficial. Therefore, considering the informational health of local districts and communities in Ukraine (healthy, partially healthy, and not healthy regions) and targeting foreign development aid programs according to the region's health status might maximize the assistance's positive impacts on media development in Ukraine.

1.7 The Ukrainian Local Media Market Logic and Hurdles

A series of research reports by MDF showed a critically high level of uncertainty about financial planning in times of war and also helped to identify the main risks and trends in 2023-2024. The key ones were the growing financial clustering of media outlets and the hastened and chaotic development of some editorial teams because of the constant involvement of new grant projects and their short-term nature.

The financial crisis for Ukrainian independent media outlets remains high in 2023. At least 233 media outlets ceased to exist during the full-scale invasion, many of them print newspapers [9]. The increase in the number of donor and charitable funding opportunities does not have a linear impact on the financial support of independent online media outlets, as it is influenced by many other factors in the media market.

Donor support in times of war and financial crisis has helped local independent editorial teams in Ukraine to survive. However, development aid has become one of the most significant factors in Ukraine's media development. The key characteristics of the 'grant' market in the media development sector, according to MDF's Financing of Online Media research [will be published soon]:

1. There are different hurdles for grant-supported media outlets. For some local publishers, the purpose of receiving donor support was to survive and meet basic needs, mainly salaries. The search for grant opportunities was constant, and the administrative burden of reporting and constant new commitments was high. Some other local publishers had a little more stability in their work with donors.

2. Accelerated and chaotic growth of some media organisations through project grants. The constant need to find new grants has become a regular agenda for most editorial teams. For some of them, project grants aimed at implementing a specific project have become an opportunity to maintain their existence. Nonetheless, such grants impose additional administrative obligations on the teams and change existing areas of work or even suspend them altogether. Project grants were sometimes combined with training and hiring new staff. Sometimes, editorial teams combined several projects at the same time.

3. Reported the short-term nature of grants and the lack of institutional funding that could allow the media to develop in one direction.

4. Exhaustion of editorial teams persistently functioning in survival mode. Mobilisation and staffing issues, saving funds on office rent, introduction of remote work, and the constant need for donor support have put some media outlets in what some have called a "war for funding." Some outlets noted that the workload on their teams was much greater than they could handle, primarily because of a lack of staff and the inability to plan long-term personnel policies and invest in the training and development of specialists involved in short-term projects.

"Before the full-scale war [pre-2022], we did not pay much attention to cooperation with donors. There were small projects for content production from time to time for the amounts of UAH 60-100,000 once a year or something. All the funds went to the authors' fees, and they were used as an incentive for people to get a slightly higher salary. And we were getting good content. Whereas now we are more dependent on donors,"
Media from the Western Ukraine, 2023

"I am looking for opportunities to attract grants to pay something extra to journalists as bonuses. Because the salary they get can only cover some basic needs. If we manage to get grants, I can pay from UAH 3-10,000 extra,"
Media from Southern Ukraine, 2023

5. The war-related workload of specialists in the local media outlets did not decrease in 2023. The level of crisis remained high. At the regional level, donor support for most editorial teams has become the only way to ensure the level of salaries established in the regions. Media outlets are also unable to provide their employees with remuneration that is aligned with the complexity of the work they do. This also applies to those editorial offices that do not receive grant support and yet operate in the high danger zone in Ukraine's East and provide access to information from these areas close to the combat actions.

1.8 Theory of Change for Community Media Development in Ukraine

According to the United Nations Development Group, a theory of change is a method that explains how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to specific development change, drawing on a causal analysis based on available evidence [10].

The key principles of developing the theory of change, according to UNDG, are: 1) it should be developed consultatively to reflect the understanding of all relevant stakeholders; b) it should be grounded in, tested with, and revised based on robust evidence at all stages; and c) it should support continuous learning and improvement from program design to closure [10]. For the purposes of this research, the latter component uses the timeframe of not a particular program but rather the period of partial reconstruction during the ongoing full-scale war in Ukraine and possible post-war reconstruction.

The key steps for developing a theory of change are:

1. Focus on the change that is planned to be contributed,

2. Identify what is needed for the desired development change to happen,

3. Establish and make explicit the related key assumptions underpinning the theory of how change happens and the major risks that may affect it,

4. Identify partners and actors who will be most relevant for achieving each result, taking into account the related risks and assumptions [10].

The model of the theory of change might include the plan in the form of:

1) goals (the combination of the above-mentioned steps),

2) strategies (activities that are expected to lead to goals),

3) outcomes (expected results from the recommended activities),

4) constant reflection (reviewing the logic, relevance, context, and assumptions made) [11].

The generalised model of the theory of change for the purposes of this research includes the following elements:

Starting Point

High exposure of local communities in Ukraine to the risk of growing into informationally unhealthy areas and spreading the news deserts in time of war

Four Goals

→ Preventing news desert and ensuring the informational health of communities

→ Supporting development of community-centered media

→ Aiding the partial and post-war reconstruction processes in Ukraine

→ Democracy promotion in Ukraine nurtured by consistent independent local media development

Strategies

→ Outlining the most relevant understanding of the notion and roles of community media and developing framework for community-centered media based on communities´critical information needs

→ Work on possibilities to aid local communities and their local publisher with key stakeholders:

- Civil society watchdog organizations working with communities and local newsrooms

- International donors providing development aid for Ukraine

- Existing local independent media outlets and local communities

→ Providing assistance for chosen communities at risk aimed at community media development, according to the informational health status

→ Aiding local newsrooms crucial for informational health of the communities, according to their most pressing needs

→ Using the experience of European community media for aiding Ukrainan media development and reconstruction

Outcomes

→ Advanced understanding of the notion of community media and its role in the society relevant for the Ukrainian context of partial reconstruction in times of war

→ Key stakeholders informed of the informational health of communities and contribute to the possibilities of assistance

→ Assistance provided for existing local newsrooms at risk and those covering critical informational needs, according to their needs

→ Cases of European community media outletsare used for media development and transformation in Ukraine

Reflection

All changes in local media landscape, informational health statues of communities and other factors are monitored and included into the model

Impact

→ Local communities benefit from the development of community media and transformation of communities' informational health status and critical information needs

→ Number of local districts categorised as news deserts decreased

→ Sustainability of community-centered media outlets increased and can be measured using indicators of financial and operational sustainability

→ Democratic transition and local decision-making nourished by strong community media landscape

Pic. 3-6. The theory of change presented in regard to

In the Policy Paper, the analysis of the Ukrainian context of local media development, as well as the investigation of sustainability and hardship patterns in European community media outlets, will allow us to fill the model with steps necessary to answer the key research question – how the media development in Ukraine, some parts of which are categorized as a news desert or are at risk of transitioning into that category, might be impacted so that the local communities could benefit from new or transformed local publishing initiatives.

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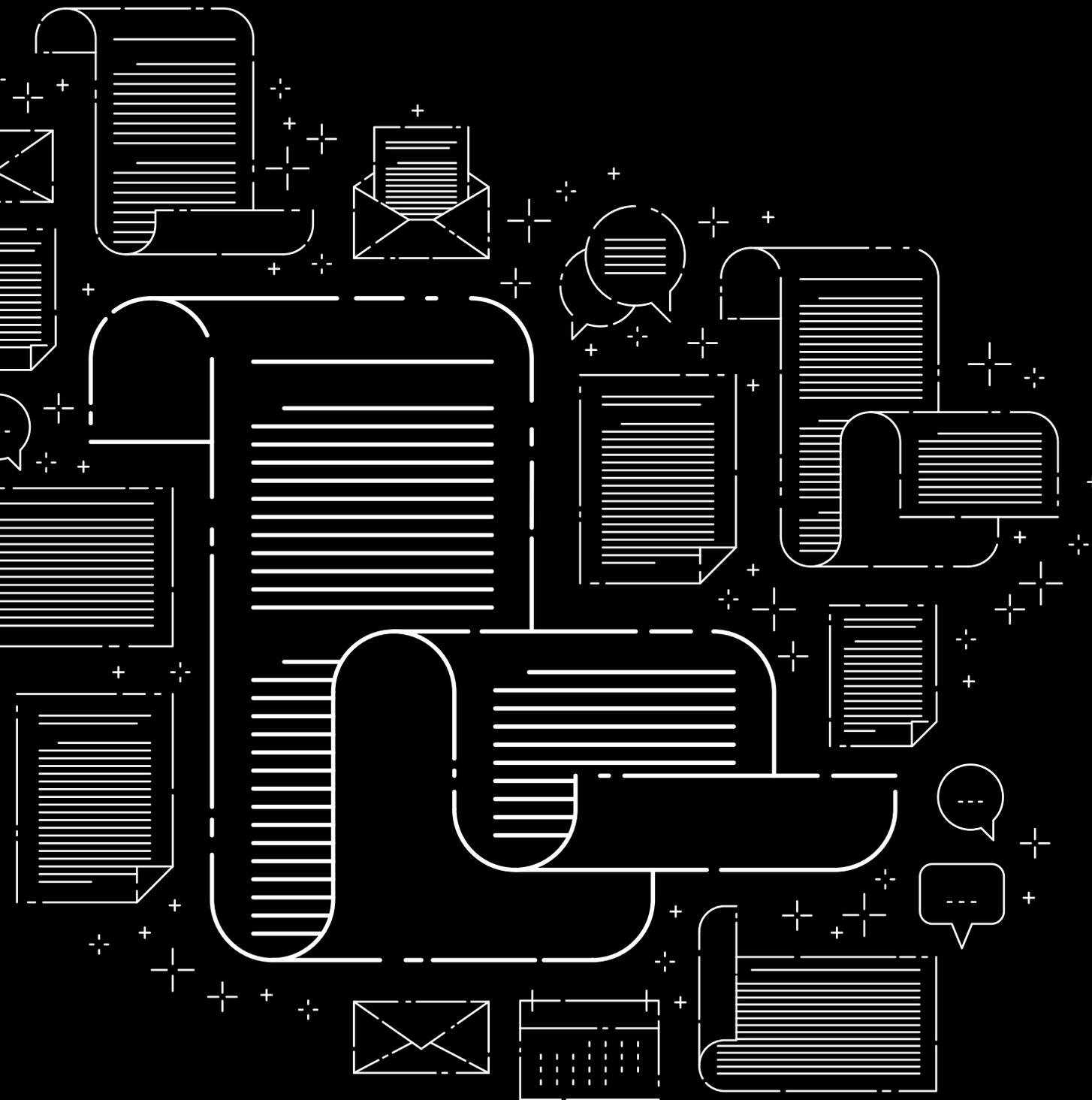
Community-Centered Local Publishing Characteristics

& Informational Wellbeing of Communities

European and Ukrainian Experience of Community-Centered Journalism 2023-2024 Research Paper by the Media Development Foundation, Ukraine & CORRECTIV, Germany

Summary

The Research Paper brings together the European (sample of EU members and EU candidates) and the Ukrainian community-centered local publishing in 2023-2024. It allows to look into some of the commonalities, such as the issue of the informational health of communities and the global phenomenon of news deserts, as well as the common hardships in funding and ensuring the financial sustainability of community media. It also explores the key characteristics of the efforts of local media building in Ukraine in times of economic crisis, democratic transition processes towards EU membership, and overcoming the consequences of the ongoing full-scale war that severely endangered the Ukrainian journalism.

The report reveals the various approaches to understanding the notion of community and community-centered media. While the case study of nine community media outlets across Europe suggests numerous creative reader-focused forms of engaged journalism centered around local communities as a primary form of community media, the Ukrainian sample of independent local publishers reveals the different types of community-centrism. Since the war-related factors accelerated the volunteer and audience mobilisation, local newsrooms have taken steps towards reimagining their communities, in some cases in terms of local areas, especially since the local governance reform had been successful in raising awareness before 2022, in some cases in terms of keeping different dispersed audiences active and consolidated to fundraise for the army and humanitarian purposes, and in some cases in terms of finding creative solutions for building engaged audiences to hold local authorities accountable and combine watchdog functions. Overall, efforts to improve the informational health of communities in crisis circumstances of in-war and post-war reconstructions in Ukraine using the lessons learned from the EU community media struggles aim to significantly impact the country's resilience and recovery.

Introduction

After more than two years into the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, the landscape of Ukrainian local journalism has witnessed a considerable shift. Numerous editorial teams experienced significant losses of people as many relocated abroad, joined the military, or enlisted in the Territorial Defense Forces, losses of certainty and financial stability, and losses of long-term planning possibilities. A number of media outlets (more than 200 overall) have ceased to exist either due to physical damage done to their communities (they were occupied or destroyed) or due to a dire financial situation following the collapse of local ad markets.

Exposure to the risk of growing into informationally unhealthy areas has become one of the most pressing issues for many local areas in the country. The risk signified that local communities might have had limited access to sufficient information about public safety, healthcare, politics and governance, education, transportation, economic development, the environment, and civic initiatives. Those communities that do not receive enough verified information about local issues and events can be categorised as news deserts, a global phenomenon that relates to the European Union[1], United States [2], and, according to recent 2024 research by the Media Development Foundation, to the situation in Ukraine [3].

In view of the situation and the urgency of war-related factors in Ukraine, the Research Paper will:

1) outline the most relevant understanding of community media based on the existing academic and non-academic publications;

2) provide characteristics of community-centered media under the European and Ukrainian context;

3) explain the peculiarities of local journalism, including existing models for community journalism in Ukraine, at times of war and fragmented reconstruction based on a series of research reports by the Media Development Foundation;

4) provide a data-based explanation of existing business models for local media outlets in Ukraine as well as regional characteristics of the local media landscape of Ukraine;

5) give details of the level of digitalisation on the regional level in Ukraine;

6) categorise local media outlets in Ukraine based on their business models and other characteristics impacting their performance and operational capabilities;

7) present the case study of community media outlets in Central and Western Europe relevant to developing community media and overcoming the news deserts phenomenon in Ukraine and the European Union.

Answering the above questions will help to provide recommendations in response to the study's key research question: How might the media development in Ukraine, some parts of which are categorized as news deserts or are at risk of transitioning into that category, be impacted so that the local communities could benefit from new or transformed local community-centered publishing initiatives. The analysis presented in the Research Paper serves as a basis for the Strategy Paper [a] and Policy Paper [b].

2.1 Ukrainian Community-Centered Local Publishing Landscape: Research Design

For the research on the state and characteristics of local media in Ukraine, a survey was conducted between November and December 2023 among 37 independent local media outlets. The sample was selected on a non-randomized basis from independent local media outlets cooperating with international donors providing development aid for Ukraine. One of the key selection criteria was adherence to journalistic standards and independence of media organisations from external influences. MDF's research department determines the independence of media outlets by checking the beneficiaries and people involved in the media for political and business interests, assessing the amount and nature of tenders and public procurement with which the organisation works, and ensuring that media organisations adhere to professional standards.

The case study method was used for the analysis of the local media landscape of Ukraine, including business models, media brand developments, and media market characteristics: in-depth interviews were conducted with nineteen local editorial teams (twelve for the research on the state of local media and eight for the research on the financing of local newsrooms). The interviews were led by the Media Development Foundation research team and were finished during the period from November 2023 to March 2024. Some of the key findings were derived from three recent research reports by the Media Development Foundation:

- The State of Local News in Ukraine 2024 [4];
- Financing of Independent Nationwide and Local Online Media in Ukraine 2023: Salaries and Trends [will be published soon];
- News Deserts in Ukraine [3].

The above-mentioned studies display the key characteristics of local Ukrainian publishing presented in this report.x

2.2 European Community-Centered Media Development: Case Study of Nine Local Publishers

The case studies are based on interviews with nine local community-centered media outlets in Central and Western Europe (the EU members and candidates for EU membership) conducted for the purposes of this report. The research team used semi-structured guides to determine the specifics of how entrepreneurial journalists are setting up new community-centered publishing initiatives to fill information gaps in their towns or regions.

The purpose of the case study is to include deeper views of the practicalities of founding and running an independent local media outlet and the role of community-centered approaches for the journalism and revenue model.

The respondents were selected based on several criteria to create a group that was as heterogeneous as possible to present a variety of different approaches.

Among the criteria:

1) inclusion of only one case study per European country to take into account the different characteristics of the media markets in the respective countries;

2) the variety of duration of the media outlets' existence to compare newsrooms that have been established on the market for a long time (e.g., Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach or Vilaweb) with those that have only recently been founded (e.g., Mecseki Müzli and Iaşul Nostru) and those in between, who are on the edge of becoming self-sustainable;

3) the variety of business models with the aim to integrate examples of different revenue mixes and newsrooms whose business model is already self-sufficient and those that are not yet;

4) the variety of models of community engagement in journalistic and organisational processes at the local level.

The pre-selection with the above-mentioned criteria was based on preliminary research based on Project Oasis Europe [c], which provides a database for independent media organizations in Europe. The final result of the respective case study was based on the transcripts of the interviews and research in other freely accessible sources, such as case studies about those newsrooms (or particular community-centered projects of those newsrooms) published in recent years.

The list of the European community-centered media outlets included in the case study:

- The Bristol Cable, UK
- Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach (Germany)
- Dublin Inquirer (Ireland)
- Iașul Nostru (Romania)
- Magločistač (Serbia)
- Mecseki Müzli (Hungary)
- Mensagem (Portugal)
- Tsüri.ch (Switzerland)
- Vilaweb (Spain)

The case study of European community-centered local publishing, combined with the extensive analysis of the Ukrainian local media landscape, has become a basis for developing recommendations for community-centered media development in parts of Ukraine.

2.3 The Notion of Community Media: European and Ukrainian Context

For the purposes of the research paper, the complexity of the notion of community journalism will be explained through the frameworks of community journalism as 1) a development tool for human development and 2) a community actor for community strength and resilience.

Community media are usually represented as:

1) media organisations that serve communities,

2) local alternatives to mainstream broadcasting, occupying smaller positions than mainstream nationwide broadcasters in the country,

3) media organisations that link civil society and communities,

4) media organisations that link various democratic struggles on the local level [5].

At the same time, they represent a significant input in development processes, democratisation, and awareness raising as well as resilience building. According to the 2011 article by Stefania Milan titled "Four steps to community media as a development tool," there are a number of key arguments to support community media as a development tool:

1) At the process level, as a channel of participation: community media may represent the 'voice of the voiceless', enabling citizens to raise their concerns; as open-access media they represent a instrument for the exercise of democracy [6].

2) At the symbolic level, as a means of empowerment, giving people the possibility to take initiative on the local scale, they show that change is possible. They represent a way to exercise and express the imagination and to translate this imagination into practice by voicing it. Through the filter of community media, what starts out as an individual becomes a collective experience; in this sense, community media contribute to creating shared meanings and interpretations of reality and to highlighting opportunities for change [6].

The types of community media can be summarised as:

- community newsroom providing print newspapers (might be combined with digital forms)
- community newsroom providing digital sources in the form of website, webpages, social media;
- community radio;
- community television (least common form).

The relationship between community media organisations and communities might be explained through three dimensions that define what roles community media could play in society [7].

Based on the article by Wilson Lowrey, Amanda Brozana, and Jenn B. Mackay, dimensions of relationships between community media and communities:

Revealing community structure

The degree to which a media outlet helps make a community's institutions, facilities, resources, and spaces more visible, accessible, and easy to use.

- Providing clear, relevant mobilizing information, according to the needs of a community;
- Participation in local institutions and use of "local assets" facilitate social and civic engagement;
- Reinforcing identity of ethnic communities within a larger geographic community (inclusion in general);
- When media solicit messages from trusted experts and community leaders, media messages have a strong impact on community members' perception of their involvement in the life of the overall community;
- Community residents' attention to surveillance of political and civic institutions, leaders, and issues, particularly in newspapers and Websites (less so in TV and entertainment information), leads to stronger civic engagement and increased political knowledge.

Listening=pluralism

- The degree to which the media outlet seeks, fosters, and allows diversity of viewpoints.
- News organizations that more thoroughly research or are more in touch
- with the daily social and cultural patterns of specifically targeted audiences tend to produce messages that are better received, understood, and remembered.
- The way news stories are framed can have an impact on the degree to which marginal groups in a community feel they are visible and have choices.

Leading=cohesiveness

The degree to which the media outlet strives to integrate viewpoints into a cohesive representation that is intelligible to community members.

- News reports can help a community find solutions by connecting problems and problem solvers and by portraying events as part of major discourses.
- Repetition of messages and consistent focus on particular issues lead to a stronger perceived cohesiveness of a community's agenda.
- Framing news and issues so community members perceive themselves as distinct, and even under external threat, leads to greater social cohesion of a community [7].

Thus, community news media are media organisations capable of fostering the process of community:

a) reveal, or make individuals aware of, spaces, institutions, resources, events, and ideas that may be shared, and encourage such sharing;

b) facilitate the process of negotiating and making meaning about the community [7]

Based on the described relationships between community media and communities, community journalism might be described as a process, as a continuing effort rather than as a static goal. The complex nature of this process suggests news media outlets do not simply practice community journalism or not practice it. Rather, media outlets engage in some degree of community journalism, as measured by the types of practices they follow and the intensity with which they follow them [7].

The main forms of journalism that may be used by various types of community media include four broad categories:

1) news journalism,

2) investigative journalism,

3) feature journalism,

4) opinion/analysis.

These types then branch out into a variety of different niches, styles, and techniques, with specialties ranging from politics and crime to sports and entertainment.

In recent years the practice of "engaged journalism" has gained ground among some journalists, particularly in local media. Engaged journalism aims to close the gap between the newsroom and the audience by viewing journalism as a conversation and to varying degrees, involving the audience in the reporting process [7]. More broadly, 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." [8]

Among the instruments of engaged journalism, community media may use:

- **Community dialogue**

Everything from Yes-or-No-Polls on Instagram to bigger projects like the Citizens Agenda [d] before local elections. For instance, Bristol Cable, United Kingdom, has been using online surveys in their community for years. With this approach, Bristol Cable could get a better understanding of the information needs of their respective community [e]. Vilaweb uses several WhatsApp groups to regularly get in touch with readers and experts on various topics, e.g. for fact-checking or enriching their reporting. Without

exception, every newsroom we spoke to for this study engages in dialogue with the community. Even if the dialogue in some cases only consists of lively email correspondence or an annual feedback survey - it is above all the mindset of being prepared to enter into dialogue with the community that makes the difference here. How strong this dialogue is depends on many other factors, e.g. the size of the team or the community strategy. Many community newsrooms also create a physical space for the community. This can be café (see Mensagem) a co-working space (Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach) or running a bookshop in front of the editorial office (Vilaweb).

• crowd investigations

A particular and more standardised form of community dialogue, where those affected by a certain topic share knowledge, essential data, and insights and thus create the basis for a journalistic analysis and possibilities to take action. What distinguishes it from community dialogue is that answers provided by participants can be directly verified by reporters who do the evaluation.

For instance, in the project "Who Owns Hamburg?" by CORRECTIV (2018), participants were asked to upload their rental contracts to verify their answers [11]. Because thousands of people participated in the crowd investigation, the journalists got a good insight into the city's housing market.

Another project in this category is the "Active Travel Collison Tracker" from the Dublin Inquirer. This tracks collisions or near-collisions in Ireland involving bicycles or pedestrians. The data is crowd-sourced with citizens reporting those accidents, which then appear on a public map.

• events

Tend to open up collaborative space in a very direct and understandable way for the community members. For example, for Tsüri community media in Zurich, Switzerland,

events are an indispensable part of their focus months. During the focus months, the editorial team focuses on a specific topic, for instance. the housing market or the effects of climate change in the city. At events like the Tsüri pitch nights, the community can get in touch and discuss the pressing issues with experts in the respective fields [f]. Another example is Bürgerportal community media in Bergisch Gladbach, Germany, where community members can take part in educational events and learn, for example, how they can get involved in local politics [g]. For engaging community members Viernull, a local community media from Düsseldorf, Germany [h], regularly invites their community to a social event called "Büdchenabend," where they open their office for a get-together with drinks and snacks. In 2022 the editorial team of Tsüri opened a pop-up bar for a month, to bring their community together for drinks and socialising [f]. Karla, a community media outlet from Konstanz, Germany, met with community members for lunch weekly until the end of 2023 [9].

• community members work as journalists

The rarest form of community journalism practices allows one to cooperate directly with community members. For example, Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach trained community members with some expertise to voluntarily cover topics they couldn't cover due to their small editorial team. For example, such initiatives covered local sports or the local carnival scene. At Kohero, a nationwide community media in Germany covering, among others, topics of migration and refugees, journalists were trained to tell their own stories and thus contribute perspectives [i]. Another example is the City Bureau in Chicago, USA, which trains community members to document public meetings held by local authorities, making those documents available for journalists to use in their reporting [j].

2.4 Sources of Funding in Community Media: European Experience

A community media is usually financed through a revenue mix. These revenue mixes are usually built around reader revenue as a baseline, even though other revenue streams - grants, advertising, sponsoring, paid content, and many more - may have a larger revenue share. While traditional media have known and practiced reader revenue for a long time, we see a much more differentiated form of it in community media. The spectrum ranges from subscription models, where the main product is behind a paywall, and readers buy access to it, to donation-based models, where all content is freely accessible, and readers support the media voluntarily.

While subscription models with a hard paywall seem hardly any different from the old subscription model that has been used by daily newspapers for decades, community media might implement community journalism practices or involve subscribers in the paywall model. For example, at Republik (a nationwide community media outlet in Switzerland), subscribers become cooperative members and can use their voting rights to make decisions for the company [k].

On the other end of the spectrum, there are donation-based models in which the content is freely accessible to all readers. Members pay voluntarily because they want to support the mission of the newsroom. It is, therefore, more comparable to supporting a charity organisation. Although donors do not receive any content with their contribution, they often receive exclusive access to the community, for example, a member newsletter or invitations to member events; they can help with investigations or become volunteers in other ways. Models like this are also called membership, a term that the Membership Puzzle Project, a research project founded by New York University and De Correspondent, established and adopted widely by the industry [l].

Our case studies from the sample of European community media outlets showed that grants tend to play a significant role in community media's business models as well. For example, Mecseki Müzli from Romania can only sustain a team of three people because of grant funding (in addition to paid newsletter subscriptions and sponsorship) [10]. Bristol Cable also relies on grants, not only as core funding but also for particular research projects [e].

One more thing that distinguishes community media's business models from mainstream media is that many community media position themselves as impact-driven public-interest organisations. This significantly influences business models, be it because of the legal categorisation of the company as a non-profit or, above all, because of the different measurements of success. For many community media, impact is more important factor in measuring success rather than economic indicators. We expand more on the positioning as impact-driven in the next chapter of this report.

2.5 Operations and Governance in Community Media: Differences from Mainstream Media

Operations in community media are often handled differently than in traditional broadcasters. The reasons for that are relatively small size but also the agile and often very creative way of working.

Due to the small size of their teams, community media is often forced to assign multiple roles to individual team members. It is, therefore, not unusual for journalists to be responsible not primarily for journalistic work but also for organizing the community, driving community engagement, and taking on operational tasks or tasks that drive revenue.

While this is also the norm in other, non-community-centered, small, independent media, something else distinguishes community media. In many community

media, there is a tendency to involve community members in decision-making processes that affect operations and governance.

This can lead to a situation where even the company's legal form is geared towards collaboration with the community. For instance, the Bristol Cable (UK) is organized as a cooperative [e]. This guarantees community members the right to vote, which they can exercise at an Annual General Meeting. It is not only critical operational decisions that involve the community (for example, in the past members were asked to decide, if The Bristol Cable should take grants from Google), but also the election to the Board of Directors and thus active participation in the governance and operational processes.

2.6 Community-Centered Media in Times of War: Ukrainian Experience

For the purposes of the analysis of the Ukrainian local media landscape, we use the framework of informational health of local districts as the baseline. According to the results of a recent study by the Media Development Foundation, a significant portion of Ukrainian local districts (regions) lack verified and independent information about themselves. Of the 11 oblasts covered by the study, Luhansk and Dnipro oblasts have the least independent media outlets (3 and 7, respectively).

In the case of Luhansk Oblast, many media outlets have simply ceased to exist due to the temporary occupation. Therefore, all the media outlets that serve the critical information needs of Luhansk Oblast residents are currently operating as internally displaced outlets outside their home oblast. The same goes for all the districts marked on the map as "partially healthy" or "healthy" but under occupation [3].

Status:
- healthy
- not healthy
- partially healthy
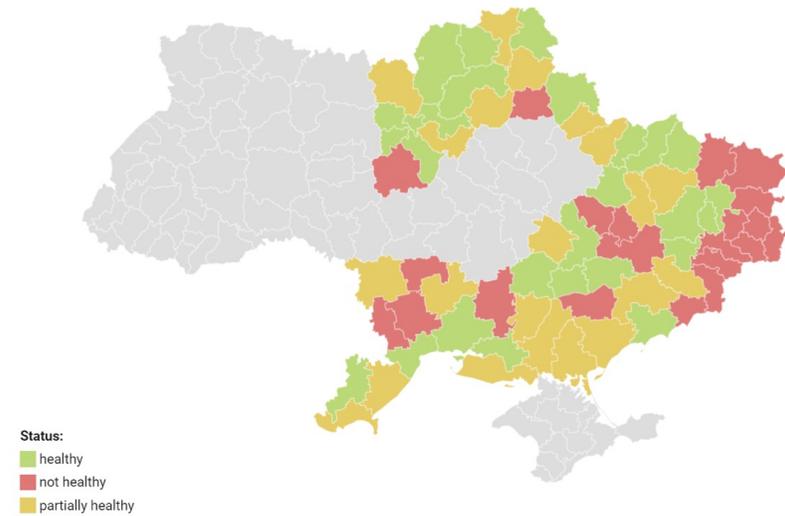
Pic. 1. The map of informational health in 11 oblasts of Ukraine by the Media Development Foundation [3]

The initial assumption of the study on the informational health of local communities is based on the fact that communities need information about the fullest possible range of situations and services to make informed choices. There are eight critical information needs:

Emergencies and Public Safety;

- Health;
- Education;
- Transportation;
- Environment and Planning;
- Economic Development;
- Civic Life;
- Political Life.

For communities, the full-scale invasion of Ukraine has impacted all the above-mentioned categories, in particular for those territories most affected by war. The long-lasting consequences of war apply to both communities and the media serving them.

For most local media outlets, their operations and safety were significantly impacted by the war. According to the Media Development Foundation's survey of 37 local editorial teams, the key challenges for local editorial teams were the shortage of employees, psychological stress, lack of funds, and lack of or insufficient access to information [11].

Key war-related issues faced by local independent media

Respodents could choose multiple answers.
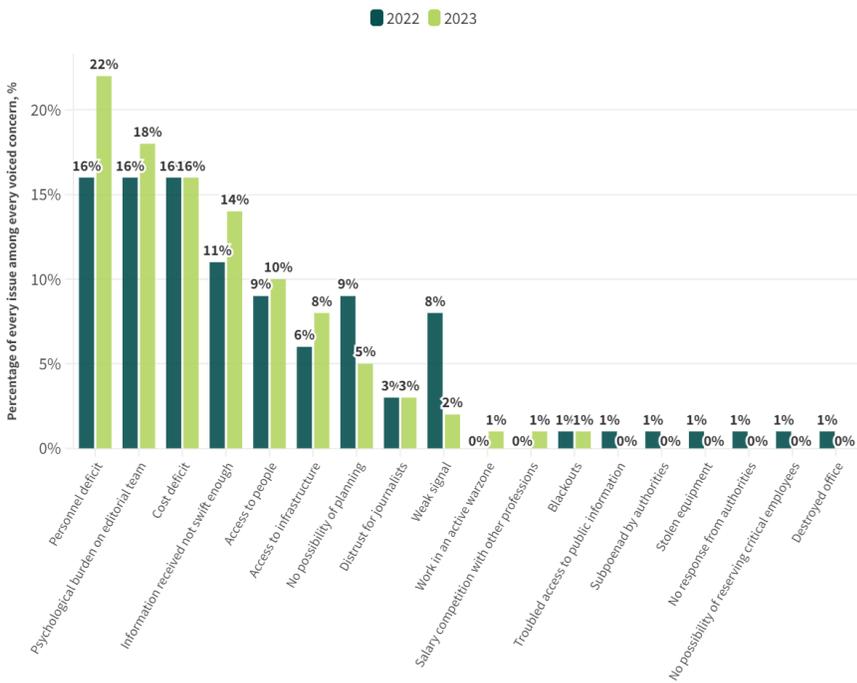
Pic. 2. Key war-related issues faced by local independent media by Media Development Foundation

The direct war consequences for media include:

1) journalists victims of the war (Reporters Without Borders documented more than 100 journalists who have been killed, injured, kidnapped, taken hostage, tortured, or caught up in bombings);

2) media shutdowns (233 Ukrainian media outlets have had to close since 24 February 2022, according to Reporters Without Borders and National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU));

3) displacement of journalists and damage to media infrastructure;

4) increased risks to press freedom and safety.

At the country level, the economic crisis (GDP fell by 30% in 2022 – World Bank) and the rapid increase in development aid have impacted local media development. OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) stated that the amount of foreign development assistance directed to support Ukraine in 2022 was US$28.7 billion, which is almost 22 times higher than in 2015 when Russia's military intervention started. This made Ukraine the world's largest recipient of donor assistance in 2022 (OECD, 2022). For local media outlets, foreign development aid in the form of grants, institutional support, and emergency aid has become the most significant source of funding in times of war [11].

Thus, impacting the local media development in Ukraine using the framework of informational health of communities, spreading news deserts, and the need for community-centered media outlets in times of war is concerned with factors on three levels: level of community, level of local media outlets, and ultimately level of country.

2.7 Ukrainian Local Media Landscape: Community Media Models

As mentioned earlier, the term community media is very broad and refers, in the first place, to a diverse range of forms of communication: electronic media such as radio and television, print media such as newspapers and magazines, and electronic network initiatives which embrace characteristics of both traditional print and electronic media [12].

According to the 2003 article "Community Media Research: A Quest for Theoretically-Grounded Models" by Nicholas Jankowski, community media models may consist of such components as:

1. **Objectives of these media:** for example, to provide news and information relevant to the needs of the community members, to engage these members in public discussion, and to contribute to their social and political empowerment.

2. **The ownership and control** of community media is often shared by local residents, municipal government, and community-based organisations.

3. **The content** is locally oriented and produced.

4. **The production of the content** involves non-professionals and volunteers, distribution of the content may be via the ether, cable television infrastructures or electronic networks like the Internet.

5. **The audience** of such media is predominantly situated within a relatively small, clearly defined geographic region, although some community networks attract large and physically dispersed audiences.

6. **The financing** of these media is essentially non-commercial, although the overall budget may involve corporate sponsorship, advertising, and government subsidies [12].

The community media models are also a part of wider processes within communities that influence the models directly or indirectly. Such processes include:

- **communication networks** within communities that usually consist of 1) national and regional media, 2) community media, 3) digital community networks, 4) interpersonal networks;

- **Characteristics of the communities themselves,** such as 1) population size and homogeneity, 2) history, 3) urban/rural dimensions, 4) social, political, and cultural issues, 5) relation to the surrounding region;

- **Involvement of community media in digital community networks:** participation, functionality of such networks, exposure, and use. The characteristics of a community media influence its ability to fit into the community media model. Such individual characteristics may include community ties (place, structure, process), social, political, and economic interests, demographics, economic well-being, etc.

Thus, identifying the community media models is a complex and multifaceted undertaking. In a situation when other factors are involved, such as a prolonged war effort, the community media models can include various additional components, ranging from economic factors due to the war-related economic crisis to 'wartime creativity', in order to work with the audience in crisis circumstances and provide additional public safety services.

Based on the survey (37 local publishers completed the questionnaire) and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 12 local editorial teams in Western, Central, Southern, Northern, and Eastern Ukraine that allowed us to compare and contrast the organisational development of local newsrooms, focusing on the publishers' exposure to the various risks in times of crisis, we outlined the latest war-related changes to the local journalism landscape across the country and looked into current community media models in Ukraine.

Table 1. Community-Centered Media Models in Ukraine based
on the sample of independent local publishers: 2022-2024

Community Media Model	'Mature' Community-Centered Media	Startup Community-Centered Publisher	'Young' War-Time Digital Local Newsroom	Cross-regional Local Newsroom	Cross-communal Local Newsroom	Other Types of Community Media
Media's Age	More than 5 years; rooted in the community	Varies; some startups are older, and some launched after February 24, 2022	Launched after February 24, 2022	Varies, most are 'mature'	Varies, most are 'mature'	Varies
Objectives	News and investigations relevant to the needs of the community members	News and information relevant to the needs of the audience within the community and outside	Timely news reporting, various war content, no investigations	Information relevant to more than one community in different regions of Ukraine; may include occupied territories	Information relevant to more than one community; may include occupied territories	Information targeted in various ways at specific groups of people (for example, ethnic minorities, internally displaced people, etc.), community-centered local branches of some public publishers
Ownership	Private, volunteers may contribute	Private; volunteers may contribute	Private; volunteers may contribute	Private, volunteers may contribute	Private, volunteers may contribute	Mostly private, volunteers may contribute
Content	Locally oriented	Not exclusively local, depends on the audience	Not exclusively local, depends on the audience	Locally oriented, covering more than one community across different regions	Locally oriented, covering more than one community within the same region	Locally oriented, specified
Production	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; volunteers and freelancers may be included	Professional; volunteers and freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included	Professional; freelancers may be included
Audience	Local	Wide	Wide	Regional	Local	Local
Financing	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, Reader Revenue	Revenue Mix: Grants, Advertising, sometimes Reader Revenue
Role of volunteers and community members	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience	Donations, reader revenue, creative ways of interacting with the audience

Community Media Model	'Mature' Community-Centered Media	Startup Community-Centered Publisher	'Young' War-Time Digital Local Newsroom
War-related changes in the model	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special war content, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis
Examples of local publishers	"Echo Chervonohrad" (West of Ukraine); Sieverodonetsk-online (East of Ukraine)	Thebuchacity (North of Ukraine); Vilnohirsk.in.ua (Center of Ukraine).	Kordon.media (North of Ukraine); Donbas.frontliner (East of Ukraine), 360war.in.ua (South and East of Ukraine).

Cross-regional Local Newsroom	Cross-communal Local Newsroom	Other Types of Community Media
Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special cross-regional war content, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis	Donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, special cross-communal war content, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis	Change in content, donations increase, additional social media engagement for providing public safety information, reimagining the community as an audience it times of crisis
Intent (South of Ukraine); Rayon.in.ua (network of local media across West, North, and South of Ukraine)	"Varosh" (West of Ukraine), PMG.ua (West of Ukraine), MOST (South of Ukraine), Free Radio (East of Ukraine)	some of the branches (hubs) of Suspilne (Suspilne Sumy as the example)

Although we use the notion of community media based on its ability to contribute to local communities, the war in Ukraine has changed our ways of engaging with them and added new dimensions to our understanding of what the community is for local publishers. For a number of local publishers, the community has become associated more with reader revenue and audience in a broader, non-geographical way.

Community engagement has become a trend since many media see the benefit of strengthening the capacity of their editorial teams by developing their communities of audience members.

In a full-scale war, local media communities mostly play the role of an active audience core, supporters, and agents of media values. This means that such a community can influence:

- The selection of topics;
- Formats of materials;
- Evaluate the quality of published materials;
- Unite for further cooperation.

At the same time, the work with such communities of audience tends to be rather non-professional, volunteer-based. According to The State of Ukrainian Regional Media in 2024 MDF's annual report, only 3 out of 37 surveyed media outlets systematically and professionally work with community building, i.e., with a stable subscription or community of supporters [11].

The audience support analysis, conducted as part of the Financing of Online Media at the National and Local Levels in 2023: Salaries and Trends MDF research also showed a high level of community involvement and a variety of crowdfunding methods, mostly non-professional volunteer-based efforts.

2.8 New Dimensions of Community-Building in 2022-2024 in Ukraine

Based on the community media models, we specified characteristics of media engagement with audiences using the community-building approach. According to the most recent local publishers' efforts, the media's engagement with community-based audiences can be categorized into the following groups:

- Building a community-based audience as a source of editorial revenue
- Community-based audience mobilization for fundraising for the needs of the army or vulnerable groups (IDPs, people with disabilities, veterans, etc.)
- Community-based audience clubs for the formation of an active civil society
- Building a platform for connecting audiences to develop local solutions
- Engaged audience.

2.8.1 Building a community-based audience as a source of editorial revenue

Usually, there is a small amount of revenue from audience support, considering how financially challenged the audience is during wartime and their willingness to pay for digital media. However, there is a segment of the audience that wants to contribute to the support of their local media. Therefore, this model has potential.

"[When encouraging audience donations] we do not set specific goals, because we conducted a survey and know about the difficult circumstances of the audience. We understand that we will be able to cover only small current needs of the editorial team with donations," **1kr's editor-in-chief commented to Mediamaker** [13]**.**

Only 2 media outlets out of 32 that responded to the Financing of Online Media at the National and Local Levels 2023: Salaries and Trends MDF research, significantly impacted the financial support of editorial teams in the regions - up to 20% of total revenues.

"We have a sponsors' club, and there are about 50 people in this community. They donate 4-7 euros each. Some people donate 23-118 euros. We are not developing the club during the war. No one has unsubscribed - only one person who went abroad and no longer has a Ukrainian card." **Media from the Center, MDF research 'Financial Support for Online Media', 2023**

"In 2022, our audience supported us a lot with donations. Now donations amount to 6-8 thousand dollars a month in total." **Media from the South, 'Financing of Online Media' research by the MDF, 2023.**

9 out of 37 media outlets surveyed in the MDF's State of Ukrainian Regional Media in 2024 report engaging their audiences to financially support their media outlets. To do this, they use one-time donations, for instance, on the website, a link to the Monobank "jar" (the most common banking tool for fundraising in Ukraine). 6 out of 37 newsrooms use dedicated crowdfunding platforms: Patreon, Buy Me a Coffee or sponsorship on YouTube [11].

An example of a media outlet that is targeting the community to support the operation of the newsroom is Echo Chervonohrad, based in Lviv region [m]. The media outlet declares a plan to reach 100% funding from reader support.

"By supporting Echo Chervonohrad, you are enabling an independent media outlet to work. The more you support us, the more and better we can work. And the better we will understand that our 24/7 work is important to you [....] And you will also help us to do a lot of activities that we plan to do, but lack of resources does not allow us to implement them." - **the editorial team of Echo Chervonohrad writes.**

2.8.2 Community-based audience mobilization for fundraising for the needs of the army or vulnerable groups

Some media outlets do not want to compete in attracting funds from audience with fundraising for various needs of the Ukrainian army and vulnerable groups (IDPs, people with disabilities, veterans, etc.), which are more important for the country's and society's resilience in this war.

"People donate to the Ukrainian Armed Forces and our team does the same. That is why we are not raising funds through this stream now." Media from the East, MDF research on Financing of Online Media, 2023

"It is not fair to ask for money from the audience if we can raise it from other sources." Media from the North, MDF's research on Financing of Online Media, 2023

Therefore, the media can themselves organize or promote local fundraising for the army, thereby acting as agents and mobilizing their communities. In this way, the media builds mutual trust. For example, the hyperlocal media network Rayon.in.ua often publishes such fundraising campaigns, and its audience quickly covers them [14]. The Zakarpattia-based media outlet Varosh organizes auctions to raise funds for the Armed Forces of Ukraine [15].

2.8.3 Building engaged audience

In Ukraine, local media are interested not only in increasing their audience, but also in boosting the activity of their current audience. Therefore, the media build communities to receive feedback on the media's work and the opportunity to influence the content, thereby increasing audience engagement.

Representatives of the GLUZD media outlet identify the impact of their book club meetings on the work of the media: after the club was launched, its audience became more engaged and began to interact more actively with

the newsroom [16]. For instance, activity on social media has increased, as active members of the club are more likely to share the posts there. There are regular book club members, which strengthens the media brand.

"It's a great opportunity to see your audience and even attract a new audience." – Iryna Blazhenko, GLUZD journalist, comments to Mediamaker.

The Cherkasy-based regional media outlet called 18000 has also recently launched a "Suporters Club" [n]. By subscribing monthly for any amount from 2.36 euros, a person receives:

1) access to a private Telegram chat with the editorial team, where he/she can be the first to know the editorial plans and vote on the topics of future materials;

2) invitations to future offline meetings held by 18000;

3) branded merchandise;

4) regular newsletters from the team.

The editorial team aims to communicate closely with its audience on how to develop the media and what topics are most relevant to the city's residents.

This model allows the media to analyze the preferences of their audience in depth on a sample of them. Anastasia Rudenko, editor-in-chief of the media outlet in Donetsk and Luhansk region "Skhidnyi Variant," said in an interview for the MDF research for the Baltic Centre for Media Excellence that their editorial staff gathers their audience for offline meetings to collect feedback on the media's work.

This point of view was strengthened by the comments of another media that responded to the MDF research for the Baltic Center for Media Excellence: offline events will draw attention to the media, increase their audience, find new contacts of potential advertisers and partners, and build the network between local media.

2.8.4 Community-based audience clubs for the formation of an active civil society

Ukrainian regional and local media practice forming community clubs from their audiences. For example, the local Sumy media outlet Tsukr launched the Tsukr Club to facilitate interaction between the editors and contributors, as well as interaction between contributors themselves. Each supporter has an online account (authorized on the website) [o].

Participation in the club provides for various types of rewards for a person's willingness to be involved in co-financing [p]. The subscription fee starts at 1.18 euros per month. Then the supporter receives an email newsletter and access to a private chat with the editorial team. There, the team shares insights, and supporters are the first to learn about important news.

"In essence, we involve people in achieving the mission we are pursuing - to make Sumy a safe and sustainable city, to develop an ecosystem where the government, community, and business communicate with each other. We are moving out of the mode where people just donate money to us, and we are trying to communicate with them more and reward them in some formal or informal way," commented Dmytro Tishchenko, founder of Tsukr, to Mediamaker.

Another example of a community club is the GLUZD media outlet based in Kolomyia, Ivano-Frankivsk region [q]. This is a classic readers' club where offline subscribers of the media gather to discuss Ukrainian literature. The media outlet describes such meetings as the formation of civil society in the city.

The Skhidnyi Variant, a Donetsk and Luhansk region media outlet, uses donations to fund the "Community of Recovery" rubric, which shares the experience of relocation and integration of internally displaced people and businesses [r]. In this way, the media outlet forms a community around a socially important topic - support for IDPs.

The local media outlet Varosh declares that it forms a community of responsible citizens who are ready and able to influence and take responsibility for changes in Zakarpattia [s]. Their mission is to unite those who believe in and create a prosperous Zakarpattia. For a donation, a person is invited to the regular gatherings with the editorial team online and offline and gets the opportunity to suggest topics for publication, branded merchandise, and access to private events.

Kharkiv-based media outlet Lyuk offers support through Buy me a coffee [t]. In addition to the basic benefits, the media outlet also invites its community to a city tour. In this way, the media unites people around the culture and history of the city.

2.8.5 Building a platform for connecting audiences to develop local solutions

In some cases, local publishers use the capacity of the community to serve as a platform for gathering active citizens to generate ideas and develop proposals for certain social changes. For example, the media outlet Tsukr (Sumy), together with Sumy State University, organized the Student Ideas Forum "Sumy: Reinvent": 100 participants and 20 invited experts, speakers, entrepreneurs and local officials exchange ideas and experiences that could make Sumy a more comfortable city [17]. The Zakarpattia-based media outlet Varosh also organizes public events to promote its region[18].

The examples show that such events are quite possible and important for finding inclusive democratic solutions. Nevertheless, the model of media as a platform for community-based local decision-making is unpopular, as local media often lack the financial capacity to organize large-scale events that can bring together different stakeholders.

2.8.6 Dnipropetrovsk oblast's Local Media Landscape

For the purposes of this research, the independent media outlets in the Dnipro region that were identified as such in the News Deserts in Ukraine study were analyzed to determine how they engage their audience and whether they form a community.

Classification of gathered data and grouping media into different categories based on their performance and operational capabilities:

Media	Experience in community building
1kr	According to the description of its activities, the media outlet presents itself as a community media and relies on audience support, among other revenue sources.
	There is a separate page with all the necessary information to make a donation and thereby become a member of the media community. There are single and monthly donations.
	Community support is turned into the production of additional materials. For a donation, one can get branded merchandise that identifies the contributor as a member of the community. For a donation of $10 or more on Patreon, a person has the opportunity to influence the choice of topics for publication.
	"We unite those who think critically and want to change Kryvyi Rih" - 1kr editorial team.
	The media outlet also has a Telegram chat where anyone can join, communicate directly with the editorial team, and discuss city news.
	The media outlet mobilizes its audience to participate in civic issues, such as choosing new street names around the city.
Nikipol.City	There is a button to make a donation to support the newsroom. There are single and monthly donations.
NikopolNews	There is a page with essential information to make a donation to support the editorial team. Donations can be made using Ukrainian bank accounts or international transfers.
Zhovti Vody. City	The media outlet organizes fundraising campaigns to support the Ukrainian army.
Litsa	It only collects donations to pay the salaries of the media outlet's journalists.
Suspilne Dnipro	The regional branch of the state-owned media outlet is funded by taxpayers; no community activities are identified
Ukrainske Radio	The regional branch of the state-owned media outlet is funded by taxpayers; no community activities are identified

2.9 Watchdog Role of Community-Centered Local Publishers in Ukraine

Following the full-scale invasion by Russia, Ukraine has had an unspoken societal consensus on coverage of sensitive issues. Media then ceased any criticism of local and central authorities to signify national unity in the wake of the enemy army standing before several regional centers. The authorities then also tried to collaborate with media organizations with a sort of 'tabula rasa' mindset — whatever discords they had don't matter now. Investigative journalists have undergone some transformation to come out as war crimes investigators, OSINT-analytics, and advocates for foreign aid.

This consensus came to an end in late 2022 when it became clear that the invasion was going to be a prolonged one and so the need arose to check the war effort for inconsistencies, authority abuses, and military misdemeanors. By early 2023, Ukraine had seen a number of journalistic investigations both on local and central levels. Arguably, the most famous one from that time period is the piece by Yuri Nikolov [19], an investigative journalist, on procurement abuse regarding contracts for food for military personnel. Since then, there were a number of investigations heavily publicised by the media that have received enormous feedback from the public — the situation with the Hrynkevychi family [20] (they have been government military contractors for decades embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars), the case with then-employee-of-the-President's-Office Kyrylo Tymoshenko [21] (who've been driving automobile given by General Motors as an aid for humanitarian and military purposes), illegal surveillance posed onto journalists at the company party [22] (perpetrators have been employees of Security Service of Ukraine, who've been identified by those journalists themselves).

However, the opposite is also true. As was indicated in the 2023 State of Local News in Ukraine report [4], self-censorship is an issue for smaller media operations and local-level reporters. As was stated in that report:

"A typical manifestation of self-censorship in local media involves a reluctance to independently raise topics that could potentially displease local military administrations or result in accusations of an unpatriotic position or conflicts with defense and law enforcement agencies."

The issue being that while on martial law, media organizations are restricted in posting sensitive military information, and the definition of 'sensitive military information' potentially could change with the local military administration decision.

So, media outlets have been finding out how to navigate different restrictions and requirements for accreditation from military authorities:

"...we are looking for options to comply with the standards, taking into account the restrictions on receiving information from officials. We do not write (or write very rarely) about court cases involving military people. We have increased self-censorship, rationalizing it as "do no harm" (publisher from the East of Ukraine)

The ability of media outlets to navigate through this proved to be an effective strategy, as now the consensus is that media should hold local and central authorities accountable, especially regarding budgetary actions.

We can observe that a whole watchdog 'beat' has been developed in local media, as publishers from all over the country report on governmental procurements, especially through the Prozorro system [w] and official responses to journalistic inquiries [23]. Local independent media are susceptible to public opinion, hence the heightened attention to even the smallest budget abuses. The war context also enables organizations to frame their investigations[24] as matters of local and/or national security.

2.10 Ukrainian Local Newsrooms' Funding Models

According to the recent research by the Media Development Foundation titled "Financing of Independent Nationwide and Local Online Media in Ukraine 2023: Salaries and Trends" [will be published soon], local online media outlets' funding models consist of key clusters, such as:

- donor support,
- commerce,
- audience support.

A survey of 25 local media outlets showed that about 76% of online media outlets have 70% to 100% donor funding in their funding models, 12% have 75% to 90% of their revenue from commerce, and 4% have significant audience support (reader revenue) at 20%. In 8% of local media outlets, the business model has equal parts of donor support and commerce.

Sourses of Funding of Local Newsrooms in Ukraine 2023

Funding models include the key components, such as donor support, commercial funding and reader support, including donations
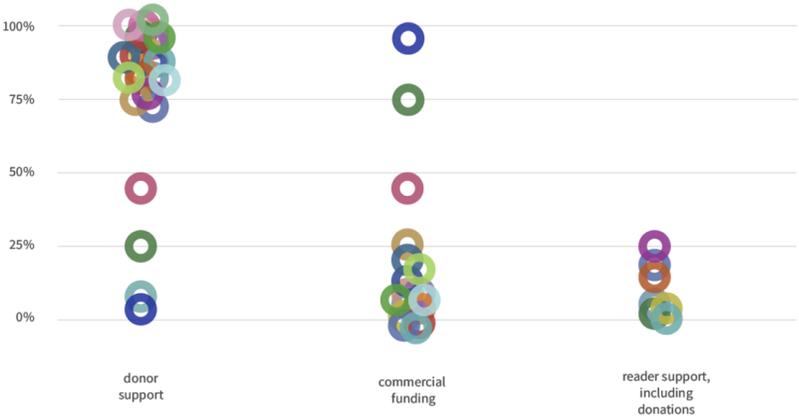
Pic. 3. Local Online Media Outlets' Funding Models in Ukraine by Media Development Foundation

2.10.1 Commerce

Only 12% of local media outlets, out of 24 surveyed media outlets were financed by commercial activities in 2023. The share of commerce in such media outlets ranged from 75 to 90%, along with donor support and/or audience support.

In 8% of local media outlets, the business model contained equal shares of donor support and commerce. Our sample shows that the local media outlets that effectively use commerce are mostly located in the West of Ukraine. Editorial teams from other regions indicated that the share of advertising in their models ranged from 1% to 20% (editorial teams from Central and Southern Ukraine).

While our sample shows that the local media outlets that effectively used commerce were mostly located in Western Ukraine, the number of such local newsrooms was critically low (3 newsrooms out of 24 that described their business models in detail). Additionally, the outlets from the West stressed that the advertising market did not work in the first half of 2022 and began to recover in the second half of 2022; however, it remained limited and inadequate at the local level as of the end of 2023.

Among the key factors that determine the above-mentioned situation are:

- The economic crisis (GDP fell by 30% in 2022 – World Bank). Although there has been an increase of GDP by approximately 5% in 2023, it remained far from pre-war economic levels;

- A full-scale, non-regional consequences of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, in particular, concerned with a market economy, people's displacements, staff shortages, and other factors;

• The rapidness of both war-related above mentioned changes and global trends in the media landscape of the country, such as the need to include advertising managers and journalists in local editorial teams to handle advertising materials, and the need to rapidly respond to the trends of online media transformations, such as use of video-formats and new social media formats by small local teams with limited possibilities and finances, etc.

Among various commercial strategies, advertising remains the main commercial tool in local media outlets. The outlets from Western Ukraine stressed that the advertising market did not work in the first half of 2022 but began to recover in the second half of 2022. In an in-depth interview, one editorial team from Western Ukraine indicated that advertisers' needs changed in 2023, with more demand for advertising on social media, primarily Telegram, as opposed to advertising on online media websites.

"I haven't seen a single convincing crowdfunding success story. Everyone says that the advertising model has outlived itself, but I can't find another one yet, as long as this one feeds us," Media from the West of Ukraine.

2.10.2 Donor Support

During 2022-2023, small local media outlets have critically increased their dependence on donor support because of the full-scale war and the consequences of a shrinking advertising market. A survey of 24 local media outlets showed that about 76% of online media outlets have between 70% and 100% donor funding in their models. Most media outlets noted their dependence on grant support after the outbreak of the full-scale war, primarily because of a critical shortage of resources for remuneration and low salaries.

"Before the full-scale war, we did not pay much attention to cooperation with donors. There were small projects for content production from time to time for the amounts of UAH 60-100,000 once a year or something. All the funds were allocated to the authors' fees, and they were used as an incentive for people to get slightly higher salaries. And we were getting good content. Whereas now we are more dependent on donors," **Media from Western Ukraine**

"I am looking for opportunities to attract grants to pay something extra to journalists as bonuses. Because the salary they get can only cover some basic needs. If we manage to get grants, I can pay UAH 3-10,000 extra," **Media from Southern Ukraine**

The war-related workload of specialists in the local media outlets did not decrease in 2023. The level of crisis remained high. At the local level, donor support for most editorial teams has become the only way to ensure the level of salaries established in the regions. Media outlets are also unable to provide their employees with remuneration that is aligned with the complexity of the work they do. This also applies to those editorial offices that do not receive grant support and yet operate in the high danger zone in Ukraine's east and provide access to information from these areas close to the combat actions.

"Other local media outlets that survived are now actively receiving grants, and these grants are often quite significant. And we understand that our colleagues can offer a salary of 1.5 times, and sometimes 2 times, higher for the amount of work they do (for example, one article a week). The content that my journalist creates in one day, a journalist in a grant-funded media outlet will create in a week and will receive 2 times the salary," **Media from Eastern Ukraine**

2.10.3 Reader Revenue

There are a variety of ways local media outlets raise funds, primarily through community outreach. Even though audience support as a main source of funding was reported by only 2 of the 32 surveyed media outlets, it had a significant impact on the financing of local media outlets. Overall, community outreach was a key characteristic of 2022-2023 in Ukraine.

Generally, reader revenue can be divided into two types: financial and non-financial support. Financial support provided by readers primarily includes financial resources: donations, subscriptions, and transferring funds through various means. Non-financial support encompasses crowdsourcing, social network support, and media brand ambassadorship among readers.

According to the 2023 State of Local News Report by the MDF, 44.2% of the surveyed media receive some form of revenues from readers. The reader revenues are most commonly provided through Patreon and less often through PayPal, bank transfers, membership subscriptions, or YouTube sponsorships. One media outlet also mentioned that they added a "buy us a coffee" option to the English-language version of their site. A media outlet from the south shared their successful experience of receiving audience financial support amounted UAH 100,000 for correspondents' travel to the de-occupied territories.

Some 14% of surveyed local publishers have a financial support option from readers but do not develop this feature, as it does not yield expected revenues. Some 23.3% of media outlets indicated that they have no experience in engaging with readers revenues, although they assume that readers would provide some support (at least non-financial). Non-financial support (such as active engagement on social networks and personal messages, and active participation in surveys) was mentioned by 9.3% of respondents.

Other media outlets (9.3%) indicated that they transferred financial donations provided by their readers to volunteers for the military purposes and to support residents of the frontline areas.

"We have a donors' club, and there are about 50 people in this community. They donate UAH 100-300 each. Some people donate UAH 1,000-5,000 UAH. We are not developing the club during the war. No one has unsubscribed, except for, maybe, only one person who went abroad and no longer has a Ukrainian card," **Media from Central Ukraine**

"Our readers supported us greatly with donations in 2022. Now donations are US$6-8,000 per month in total," **Media from Southern Ukraine**

A large number of media outlets reported a share of audience support of 1-2% due to their work with communities (organising charity events and working with Patreon and Buy Me a Coffee). At the same time, during in-depth interviews, some local media outlets noted that they do not urge their audience to support them with donations but instead raise funds for the army.

"People donate to the Armed Forces of Ukraine, and our team does the same. That is why we are not raising funds through this channel now," **Media from Eastern Ukraine**

"As long as we don't run out of money, it would be unethical to ask the audience for money if we can raise it from other sources," **Media from Northern Ukraine**

Overall, the planning strategies employed by local outlets can be summarised by three trends:

- Greater efforts to attract grant funding, particularly institutional grants;
- Enhanced advertising activities;
- More work with communities, new waves of crowdfunding.

"We wish to obtain a long-term institutional grant. We would also like to optimise the commercial department and sell more advertising," **a media outlet from Central Ukraine**

The planning strategies are supported by low long-term planning capacities due to the lack of financial reserves. Most local media outlets have a reserve of resources ranging from 0 to 6 months (most often no more than one month period). Some self-sustaining local publishers that rely on advertising revenues rely less on financial reserves and development aid in form of grants (about 12% of surveyed local editorial teams). Still, for the majority of local publishers, the primary support of finacial reserve are funding provided by international donors, thus they constantly seek new funding opportunities.

"We are facing a huge shortage of staff; people are scarce. We have the biggest problem with videographers (with a salary of UAH 11,000). I have only 1/3 of the necessary number of correspondents," **a media outlet from Northern Ukraine**

Based on the study of 2023, some of the main financial risks for local editorial teams were identified:

- limited opportunities to engage with the advertising market;
- chaotic development of editorial teams due to the short-term nature and constant involvement of new grant projects;
- exhaustion of editorial teams due to the constant pursuit of funding opportunities;
- excessive administrative burden associated with grant support, particularly for small local media outlets
- lack of long-term institutional funding to enable long-term planning of activities;
- low salaries among media workers at the local level;

- the expanding gap in remuneration between large national media outlets and smaller editorial teams;
- a staff crisis related to the level of remuneration and other factors during the war.

Most independent editorial teams might prioritise addressing these risks, and their actions in response to them will shape the financial transformation of the independent online media market in 2024.

2.11 Role of Foreign Development Aid in Local Publishing in Ukraine

Prior to the full-scale invasion, the majority of the surveyed media outlets were not actively involved in systematic fundraising. However, grant funding has now become the primary component of editorial budgets and the primary channel for media monetization. For 2022-2023, it was typical for the media outlets to have almost no grant support before the full-scale invasion. 55% of media outlets did not receive grants or its share in the budget was up to 10%. 26% of media outlets had 11-50% of their budgets covered by grants. Before the full-scale war, only 19% of editorial teams covered more than half of their expenses with grants.

In 2022, in order to save independent journalism, donors launched many support programmes for local media outlets, so the media mostly switched to this type of funding, and the indicators became the almost mirror-image opposite. In 2022, only 6% of media outlets had 0-10% of grant funding, 26% of media covered 11-50% of their budgets with this type of funding, 13% had 51-79% of their budgets covered by grants, and 55% were funded by donor funds at the level of 80-100%. The situation did not change significantly in 2023. The number of media outlets funded almost entirely by grants has slightly increased (it is 60% now). Several media outlets also moved from the 11-50% category to the 0-10% category.

Share of grant funds in independent local media revenue

Respondents have pointed out a share of donor founding out of a whole media budget. During analysis we've grouped responses in 4 intervals.
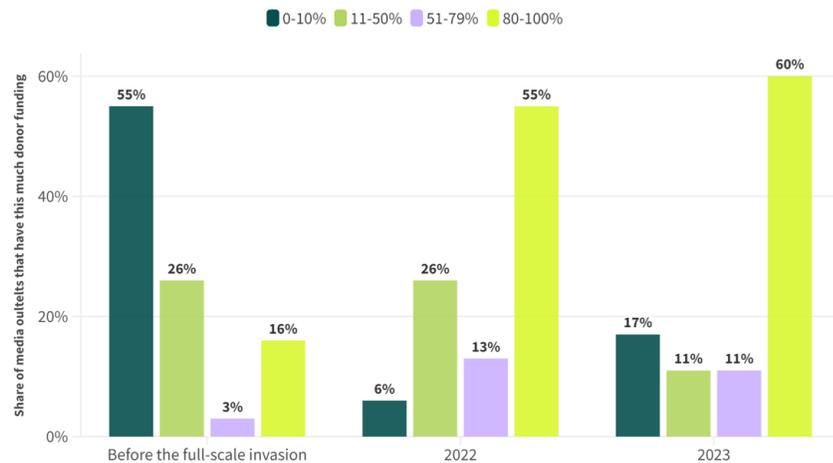
Pic. 4. Share of grant funds in independent local media revenue by Media Development Foundation

Over the second half of 2023, 38% of media outlets have not changed the dynamics of grant funding. The number of editorial teams who claim that revenues are increasing is approximately equal (32% of the sample) with those who believe that they are decreasing (30%).

Those who notice an increase in grant revenues attribute this to the following reasons:

- Started working more systematically with grants and writing more applications – 4 media outlets;

- Gained experience in grant writing – 3 media outlets;

- Hired a separate grant manager – 2 media outlets;

- Started cooperation with specialised media organisations – 2 media outlets.

Those who declare a decrease in donor funds in the outlets' budgets explain this by the following factors:

- High competition in the grant market and low chances of winning the competition – this was explained by the words "almost everyone applies for all grants" – 6 media outlets;

- A decrease in the interest of grantors and their unsystematic support – 4 media outlets;

- Challenges of specific regions and oblasts – 3 media outlets. For instance, financial transactions are currently blocked in Zaporizhzhia Oblast because of the European Union sanctions (EU Decision 2022/1908), even in non-occupied territories. We are aware of similar cases in Donetsk and Kherson oblasts. Another example of regional challenges is the lesser attention of donors to the media outlets in the "rear" areas.

In some cases, the media also mentioned the lack of a qualified team, for example, individual grant writers, as well as the editorial team's transition to complicated institutional grants.

MDF's research shows that donor support for independent local media outlets in Ukraine was mainly focused on the following things in 2023:

- Salaries for the team and its expansion;

- Hardware and software;

- Certain content or project: media outlets noted that funds allocated for projects often go to external specialists, such as freelance writers, and do not affect the level of staff salaries;

- Somewhat fewer editorial teams reported receiving assistance with rent or other operating expenses;

- Only a few media outlets received assistance with employee accommodation rent.

2.11.1 Distribution of Grant Funds by Region

We were able to identify differences in the financial situation of the media outlets depending on the region of coverage. During the in-depth interviews, respondents emphasised that media outlets from Ukraine's West, Centre and North regions are currently finding it difficult to compete with the outlets from the East and South for grant funding. The reason for this is that donors are shifting their focus to frontline areas or those most affected by the war. The East of Ukraine has the most grant possibilities from donors and the best chance of survival and development for the media outlets. When it comes to grants that do not focus on frontline issues, support for the east is also prioritised, followed by interest in support for the south. Meanwhile, the west and the centre, which are in the "rear", have the least chance of winning a grant.

Quantitative indicators confirm the data from in-depth interviews. The share of grant funding in the outlets' budgets differs depending on the region of coverage. The summary of the trend – the farther the media outlet is from the front line, the less donor funds are allocated to its budget. The lowest share of grant funding is in the budgets of media outlets from the West and Centre of Ukraine – 45% and 50%. The North of Ukraine has a slightly higher share of grant funds, namely 73%. The highest figures are in the media outlets from Ukraine's East and South: 93% and 87% respectively.

Grant funding of independent local media covering different regions of Ukraine in 2023

Respondents defined a share of donor funds in their media budget.

Region	Average percentage of grant funding
West	45 %
Center	50 %
North	73 %
South	87 %
East	93 %

Pic. 5. Share of grant funds in independent local media across regions of Ukraine by Media Development Foundation

Thus, according to the reported information by surveyed local publishers, various project grants were available for the "rear" regions, hovewer these were often narrow topics, such as coverage of IDPs, which are not always relevant to the media outlet's profile. While such project funds were in demand in 2022 as editorial teams worked non-stop and took on any job to survive and help their audiences get verified information in an unstable environment, now the media consider such funding less relevant. Editorial teams have mostly stabilised and focused on specific activities, so they are now trying to attract institutional support from donors, which is almost non-existent in the grant market.

2.12 Digitalisation of Local Media Publishing in Ukraine

According to Digital 2024 Ukraine report[25] 79.2% of Ukrainian population has some sort of internet connection, which is a step up from 75.5% of a previous year. Cheap Internet connection [26] certainly helps with a great number of users despite constant attacks on telecom infrastructure and energy deficit caused by destruction of electricity generators. According to another source Gemius, analytics company with insight into Ukrainian internet usage[27], the percentage is lower (as Gemius reports the number of Real Users as 26.2 million, whereas Digital gives a figure of 29.6 million), yet it is high enough to speak about good internet penetration. Also, at least 80% of internet connected population [28] uses it on a daily basis, which informs media consumption decisions of a general audience, as at least half of the country is more likely to go online for a breaking news piece or general information.

This in turn condition the situation where print newspapers are on a decline. At least 233 media outlets have ceased to exist during the full-scale invasion, large number of them being print newspapers[29]. For print newspaper to continue operations, one need to account for price of a final product, circulation numbers, advertising market, and retaining qualified personnel[30]. In smaller towns or districts situated far away from major roads, survival of independent local print newspapers is highly challenged as of 2023-2024.

2.13 Insights from a Case Study of nine European Community Media Outlets: Summary of Key Characteristics

With the newsrooms that we have included in this report, we have tried to cover as wide a range of models and approaches as possible. Nevertheless, we are aware that there are many more that are not included in this report. Because the analysed landscape is still very volatile and innovative, there can hardly be any two newsrooms that are the same.

In order to be able to compare the newsrooms analysed, we defined categories in advance on the basis of which we interviewed the newsrooms. We paid particular attention to the governance structures, the respective model for engaged journalism, the journalistic products and the revenue streams. Another important category for us was to tell the respective founding story of the newsrooms in order to be able to derive recommendations for future start-ups. We also analysed the most important success factors and the biggest challenges for the newsrooms.

Our small selection shows that the direction taken by the newsrooms often depends on the experience, expertise and preferences of the founders but also on external influences. Because those newsrooms are normally deeply rooted in their community, they tend to make use of the resources and support available there. They are also very agile, constantly taking on opportunities that are opening up, instead of following an exact strategy. While this of course varies greatly, there is a common ground that lies in focussing on the needs of their community (read more about that in Community / Engaged Journalism Model).

Because the whole ecosystem of independent journalism is still a space of innovation and experimentation, there are just a few examples of local newsrooms across Europe that can be called sustainable, stable or even growing yet. Prominent examples not included in this report are Manchester Mill in the United Kingdom or RUMS in Germany, while from the ones included Vilaweb, Mensagem or Tsüri.ch can be mentioned.

The big question that has become apparent in our investigation of newsrooms is how other newsrooms can adopt methods and innovations that work well for those sustainable newsrooms. Transformative research could play a major role in empowering more newsrooms to observe and replicate lessons made. Research and practice working hand in hand could help to build an innovation engine which ensures that innovations and models that work are adopted by the entire industry and can in turn be further developed.

Summary of European Community Media Cases

Name	Country	Points in Press Freedom Index by Freedom House	Who we interviewed	Founding year	Team Size	Revenue streams (in order of importance)	Core Product (s)	Core Community engagement formats
The Bristol Cable	United Kingdom	91/100		2014	10	Grants, Membership, Advertising	Website	Callouts, Events
Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach	Germany	93/100	Georg Watzlawek (Founder)	2009	3 FTE	Membership, Advertising, Sponsorships	Daily newsletter	Events
Dublin Inquirer	Ireland	97/100	Lois Kapila (Founder)	2015	5 FTE + freelancers	Subscriptions, Grants	Website, Newsletter, Print edition	Collaborative investigations, Development of Civic Tech, Events, Whatsapp groups
Iașul Nostru	Romania	83/100	Alex Enășescu (Founder)	2021	3 freelancers / consultants	Grants, membership, advertising	Weekly Newsletter	
Magločistač	Serbia	57/100	Mirana Dmitrović (Founder)	2015	3 FTE	Grants, Crowdfunding campaigns (2021, 2022)	Website	
Mecseki Müzli	Hungary	65/100	Ervin Güth (Founder)	2021	No team	Grants, membership, sponsorships	Weekly newsletter	Audience Content Loop
Mensagem de Lisboa	Portugal	96/100	Catarina Carvalho (Founder)	2020	13 FTE	One major donor, Grants, Donations, Sponsored projects	Website, Social Media Channel, Newsletter	Reader dialogue via newsletter, Events, Pop-up newsrooms, Community Meetups, Focus groups, Yearly feedback survey, Readers contributing articles
Tsüri.ch	Switzerland	96/100	Simon Jacoby (Founder)	2015	10 FTE	Membership, Events and Sponsoring, Advertising	Daily newsletter	Events
Vilaweb	Spain	90/100	Vicent Partal (Founder	1995	30 FTE	Membership, Advertising	Website	Annual assembly, Thematic WhatsApp groups with experts

2.14 Community Journalism Characteristics

2.14.1 Self-definition/ Mission

All newsrooms included in this report have shown that they are strongly mission- and impact driven. It stands out that, although they all have different approaches to it, their reason to be is to somehow improve the lives of members in their communities. Therefore, all of them have adopted some kind of solutions-focused approach to reporting, trying to be constructive about or even solving problems with and for their communities. By enabling participation in many forms, amplifying the voices of people in their communities and fighting disinformation they try to strengthen their respective local democracies.

Taking this into account you could argue to look at those newsrooms more as social enterprises or impact startups that want to redefine media, than classic media organisations. By addressing areas where people lack access to local news and opportunities to engage with what's happening in their communities, these organisations not only inform but also empower communities, fostering a sense of civic engagement and solidarity that strengthens the social fabric. Because of these efforts that sometimes go far beyond traditional reporting, those newsrooms often find themselves on the fence between being a civic society organisation and a media organisation. Although this is rarely a problem for their own self-image, it does present them with challenges to the outside world because the approach is not only met with a great deal of scepticism it can also be a problem in terms of legal status, e.g. in Germany, where journalism is not yet recognised as a charitable purpose in the tax code.

Nevertheless being impact-oriented or filling a gap was always the main driver for the newsrooms included in this report. E.g. Magločistač is deeply committed to inspiring change through their reporting, motivating citizens and officials to take action beyond mere awareness. Similarly,

Mensagem de Lisboa is meticulously tracking the impact of their stories, whether they lead to policy changes or community action. Tsüri.ch's mission from the beginning was to build a newsroom that addresses a younger audience with in-depth local journalism, simply because they felt it was badly needed in Zurich. The Bristol Cable started with the mission, to radically reimagine how local journalism is produced and funded.

2.14.2 Products

All newsrooms portrayed in this report adopt a digital-first approach. However, some, like Bristol Cable and Dublin Inquirer, recognize the value of print as a means to reach diverse audiences.

For most of the newsrooms, newsletters have become a very central product. The reason for that which stands out and was mentioned by several participants is that newsletters allow newsrooms to have a much more direct relationship with their audiences, making them less independent on algorithms of Social Media platforms and their goodwill for local news. With newsletters, newsrooms can build their own reach and retain the most power over the distribution of their content. By personalising their newsletters and delivering content much more directly to interested readers, newsrooms can increase the loyalty but also the engagement of their audiences. Social Media still remains a very important channel to reach people, especially to grow audiences. It isn't mentioned as an engagement channel itself though.

When it comes to content, most newsrooms maintain a balance between investigative reporting and the coverage of local interest stories, such as portraying local businesses, their city's history or the cultural heritage. To make people's voices heard, especially of those normally not portrayed in traditional media, is also an important component

and methodology of their local reporting. Due to lacking resources, but also because it isn't part of their mission, most of the newsrooms in this study do not engage in news reporting. While all others see their content more as an alternative or supplement to the content provided by traditional local media outlets, only the Dublin Inquirer and Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach also cover local news.

2.14.3 Community/ Engaged Journalism Framework

Although the degree of integration of the community into journalistic and organisational processes varies enormously in the newsrooms we examined (from very integrated, as at Bristol Cable, to little integration at Müsli or Iasul Nostru), all organisations have at least adopted a mindset of working community-centric. In its simplest form it can mean to develop

products alongside the community's needs, as seen at Iasul Nostru. Having at least good feedback loops and listening practices in place, seems to be a common ground.

What we've seen as well is that events, meetups or other forms of creating physical space play a very vital role in developing an engaged journalism model. While it's mostly a wish to do more in that area at the smaller organisations interviewed, bigger organisations, who are actually able to organise resource-heavy events, often see them as a main factor for building a vibrant community. At Mensagem de Lisboa Pop-up-Newsrooms played an important role in making marginalised voices heard, at Tsüri.ch events are even making up for around 30 % of their yearly revenue. For VilaWeb it's crucial to have a walk-in newsroom and a café, to be physically present in their community.

For many, working together closely with their community and adopting a public-interest focus is an enabler for projects and much of the output. At Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach for example, they are only able to cover a

wide range of topics with a team of three FTE, because community members contribute articles (e.g. about local sports or carnival) on a voluntary basis. At Dublin Inquirer big projects like a collision tracker (tracking collisions in the city with bikes involved) were only possible because volunteers helped setting it up and gathering the data.

There is also a tendency to see local businesses as part of the community rather than customers for advertising. Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach runs a partner program for local businesses and organisations, granting them a certain visibility on the website for a recurring contribution to their membership program. Tsüri.ch partners with local businesses and organisation for their events. Mensagem was able to win the Port of Lisbon as a sponsor for a project about a refugee from World War II. The story had been discovered by a mensagem reporter. Together with an international artist they created a mural, developed an exhibition and turned the story into a book. The partnership was a great match for the Port of Lisbon as it was a key location for the story.

2.14.4 The Beginning of a Community Media

Founding independent newsrooms mirrors the challenges inherent in launching any startup, especially requiring significant time and often personal financial investment from their founders. Many of the newsrooms interviewed adopt a "bootstrapped model", with founders investing their free time and sometimes their own money while also having other occupations.

Only a few of the founders interviewed had a significant amount of funding in the beginning. Mensagem had a donor who provided money directly from the start, Iasul Nostru started with a 40.000 Euro grant from Substack. For Mensagem it meant that they were able to build a strong team right from the beginning that then was able to not only develop a strong journalistic product addressing a broad

audience. They were also able to raise further funding, which is resourceful as well. One conclusion is, that early money unlocks audiences but especially further funding for projects or the core of the organisation.

Basically all other newsrooms had to be run as a side-project of the founders first, mostly in their free-time. What doesn't seem to happen at all are investments, neither local or impact investments or other forms. What founders tend to rather do is asking for the support of family and friends. For example Tsüri.ch got a small, symbolic grant for programming their website. After several months of working voluntarily they decided to ask family members and friends for money to being able to set up a proper company. VilaWeb is a special case as they decided to do web development for other organisations in order to make money in the starting phase.

2.14.5 Founding Community Media

The original idea of founding their own local media is often based on the fact that the founders themselves perceive a gap and do not see their own needs in the provision of information being met. The founders therefore generally see themselves as part of a community that isn't satisfied with what's there. The founding team of Tsüri.ch consisted of media students who did not see the reality of their own lives reflected in the traditional media. At the Bristol Cable the feeling that traditional local media wasn't really covering pressing issues anymore and faced a decline in trustworthiness, was a main driver for founding.

Being a solo-founder is common, as finding like-minded individuals with the requisite experience and passion, especially in smaller towns, presents a significant challenge. The absence of business backgrounds among the team is mentioned several times as a major blocker for developing a sustainable business model. While some have attempted to compensate by taking courses and leveraging existing

networks, newsletters, and case studies, primarily sourced from the U.S., there remains a notable deficiency in adopting a business mindset. At Vilaweb focusing on business and the journalistic product together is acknowledged as the most important thing for building a sustainable media organisation. Mensagem has described it as

short-coming not to have had someone on the team from the outset who is familiar with business issues. That is why they now get an advisor on board for this.

2.15 Financing Community Media

2.15.1 Revenue Streams

Because strengthening local democracy is generally anchored in the mission of the newsrooms, most of them want their content to be freely accessible to everyone. This is why most of the newsrooms interviewed operate with membership models in various forms, where paying is an option rather than a must. The Dublin Inquirer is the only one with a paywall, but also having workflows in place to grant access to the content for people in the community who can't afford to pay. Generally speaking the decision for membership models vs. subscription models is always a field of experimentation that is done in consultation with the community.

We also see some experimentation with revenue streams, especially with local advertising being treated more creatively. At Mensagem, the Port of Lisbon was persuaded to sponsor a cultural project. Magločistač regularly introduced local businesses in articles and now are looking to charge for those. At Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach and Iașul Nostru businesses and local organisations are making up a big part of the membership income. At the Bürgerportal businesses agreeing to a partnership get discounts on advertising. Tsüri.ch developed many different advertising formats in their newsletters, from simple banner

adverts and everyday tips to entire special newsletters that advertising partners can buy. The Bristol Cable has developed an ethical advertising carta together with their community to make sure only local businesses that do good for the community are able to advertise in the Cable's print edition.

When it comes to campaigns, e.g. crowdfunding or membership campaigns we see that most organisations don't have the capacity to successfully run them, as they tend to be very resource-heavy. Nevertheless e.g. Tsüri.ch is quite successful with running two to three crowdfunding campaigns a year to finance certain projects. Before they specialised in crowdfunding, they had tried to achieve the same financial results with membership campaigns, but this was generally far less successful. Magločistač did three successful crowdfunding campaigns in 2021 and 2022.

2.15.2 Path to sustainability

The newsrooms we interviewed are in very different phases of reaching sustainability. With the newsrooms that are longer on the market we can see, that it takes about five years from founding to get to a financially healthy place. Tsüri.ch being in its tenth year now did not make a loss for the first time four years ago. Since then, there has been a slight profit every year, even though there are still debts from the first few years that need to be paid off. Even after ten or more years, it does not seem unusual for organisations to have to fight for financial survival. Particularly when grants are relied upon and these are discontinued, as we see with Bristol Cable, for example, organisations are repeatedly faced with the major challenge of fundraising. This is why most organisations try to diversify their revenue streams as much as possible and, above all, to put the membership part on a stable footing to become less independent on outside factores.

When organisations receive grants to support their core activities, they usually also use this as an opportunity to develop new products, initiate further projects and reach new audiences. A major challenge is then to maintain the activities even after the funding timeline.

We also don't want to ignore the fact that the team is often paid less than in traditional media companies. At Bristol Cable and Tsüri.ch, for example, all team members earn the same, regardless of their position, but at a comparatively low salary level. What we also frequently observe is that founders in particular often work unpaid for several years while paying their team members or freelancers for idealistic reasons. We also see this in newsrooms that are not included in this report, such as RUMS or Viernull, where the founders and management work without pay or for very low salaries, while the team and freelancers are paid comparatively well.

2.16 Operations and governance

While challenges regarding legislation of setting up a media business are very different in different countries, everyone mentioned certain barriers. May it regarding taxation, the status as a non-profit or the acceptance of as a social enterprise in the media sector. In Germany a big challenge for community media is reaching the status as a non-profit organisation. In Germany for example, because journalism as such is not a charitable purpose within the meaning of the German tax code, newsrooms can only achieve non-profit status in a roundabout way, for example if they also offer educational programmes or other side-projects. That makes it hard for them to establish a donation-based membership model which would suit their mission best. Figuring out how to overcome these barriers takes a lot of resources from the founders, especially in the beginning, not only in Germany.

For most of the newsrooms technology is a big factor. The challenge is to build a secure and reliable tech stack that

can be maintained with a small team. As with business issues, the challenge here is that there are rarely any team members with a tech background, especially at the beginning. This is why most organisations often fall back on tools that make it as easy as possible for them to launch their project. Tools mentioned that fulfil this requirement are Newspack, Substack and Ghost, all of which are tailored to media and content creators. While this usually works well in the beginning, some newsrooms seem to reach the limits of these solutions after a while, which motivates them to develop their own.

The Bristol Cable has developed its own membership platform to fulfil its specific needs as a cooperation, which is now being scaled to other newsrooms under the name beabee. Tsüri.ch is involved in a project called We.Publish, a CMS that is tailored to community newsrooms and is being further developed by several Swiss newsrooms in co-creation.

2.17 Conclusion: Lessons Learned from the European and Ukrainian Community-Centered Journalism

Supporting community-centered journalism in the midst of multiple crises, such as:

- Spreading of news deserts or otherwise informationally unhealthy local areas globally;

- Full-scale invasion of Ukraine and the war crisis of a terrorist nature on a scale not seen since World War II;

- Need for support and financial assistance for multiple causes across Ukraine and reshaping multiple security and democracy systems on the European continent

Has become one of the most pressing and relevant issues of utmost importance for sustaining the democratic transition in countries longing for EU membership, such as Ukraine, and also for supporting the established democracy in EU member states.

While war-related factors account for most of the differences in community-centered journalism between EU-countries and Ukraine, the democratic transition processes in Ukraine also contribute to the disparities in exercising community-centered journalism on the local level.

At the same time, we see that the basic principles of community media building are shared between the analysed experiences of community media development in European countries and Ukraine, such as:

- The need to respond to the arising issues of informational health of local areas and communities and global phenomenon of news deserts;

- The creativity in every aspect of the community media functioning and funding;

- The revenue mix that rely heavily on reader support in multiple ways (be it subscriptions, one-time donations, or regular contributions);

- The significant role of grants and international assistance in various forms in the community media financing;

- Countless efforts to attract the community-based reader by creating new platforms, clubs, and products;

- Using the instruments of engaged journalism, such as events organising, community dialogue, etc.;

- Common hardships on the path to sustainable development and financial self-sufficiency;

- New dimensions of understanding the notion of community and audience in digitalised online media.

We include the above-mentioned aspects in the Strategy Paper and Policy Paper to provide guidance on supporting community media in Ukraine during such difficult times for the country.
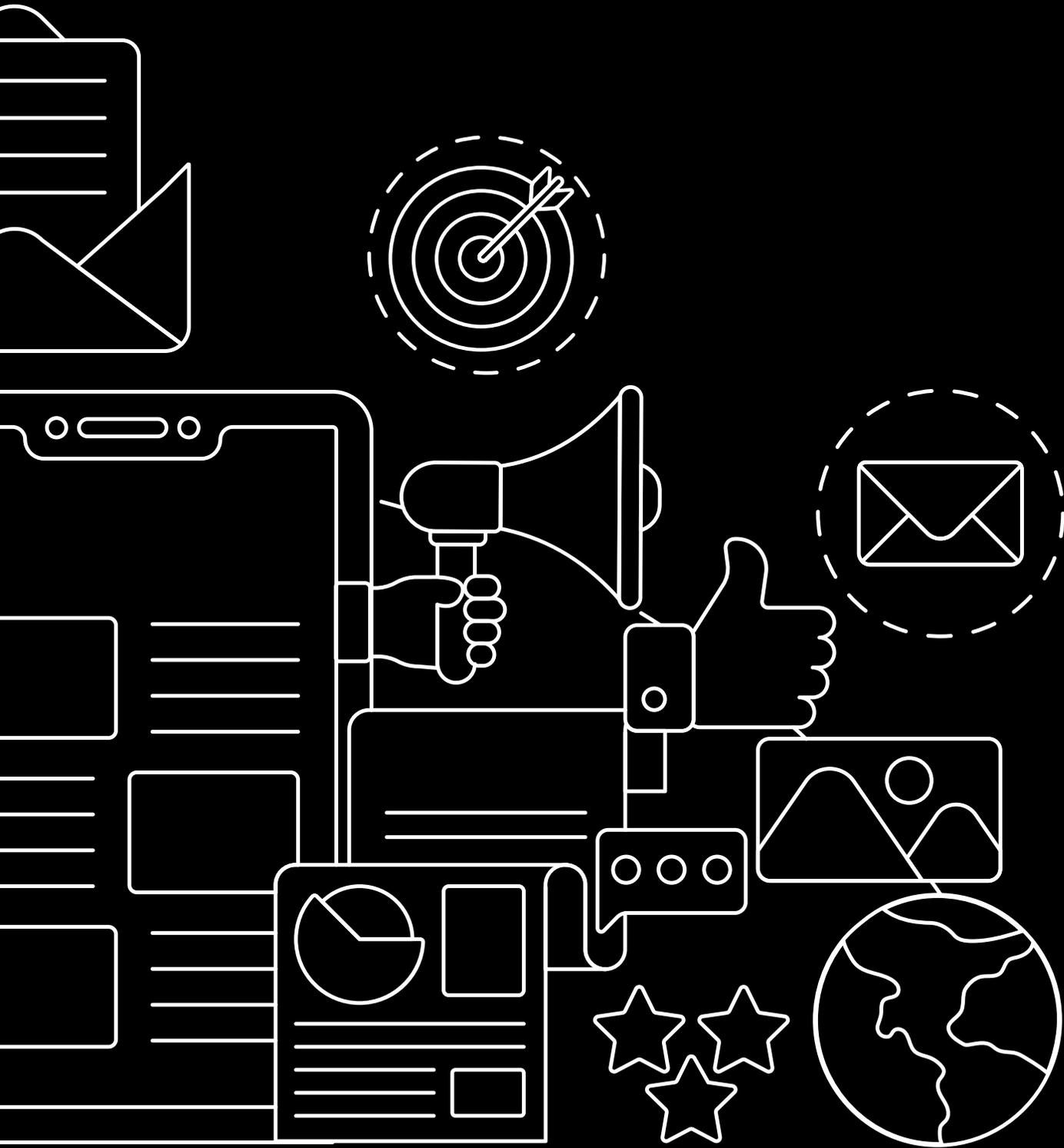
Appendix A. Case Study of the European Community Media Detailed

This report contains nine case studies of independent local newsrooms with a community-focus that exemplify how small local media organisations are founded, and how they operate.

Link to the Case Study of the European Community Media Detailed

The following newsrooms were selected for this report:

• The Bristol Cable (United Kingdom)

• Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach (Germany)

• Dublin Inquirer (Ireland)

• Iașul Nostru (Romania)

• Magločistač (Serbia) (in progress)

• Mecseki Müzli (Hungary)

• Mensagem (Portugal)

• Tsüri.ch (Switzerland)

• Vilaweb (Spain) (in progress...)

The Bristol Cable (United Kingdom)

Abstract / Brief Summary

The Bristol Cable is a pioneering community media organisation based in Bristol, UK. It operates as a cooperative owned by nearly 3,000 members. Since 2014, the Cable has been producing in-depth local journalism both online and in a quarterly print edition. The Bristol Cable's mission has always been to democratise the media industry. In the UK, five large conglomerates dominate the entire media landscape, including the local level. The cooperative structure, where members not only make financial contributions but also actively shape the organisation as shareholders, is seen as a model of community journalism and has attracted worldwide attention in the media industry. Additionally, The Bristol Cable has developed its own open-source membership platform, setting an example for independence from large online platforms.

The newsroom's mission statement

"The Bristol Cable is shaking up local journalism, reporting on the stories behind the headlines and putting Bristolians in charge of their media. Accurate and impactful journalism that engages our communities and holds power to accounts is expensive, takes time and can be risky. Thanks to the support of our members, media in the public interest, our journalism is free for all to access."

How It Started

The Bristol Cable was founded in 2014 by Alec Saelens, Adam Cantwell-Corn, and Alon Aviram, leading a group of volunteers. At its launch, they raised £3,300 through a crowdfunding campaign, £1,500 from Co-ops UK, and £1,600 from Lush. In the six months prior to the first print edition, the Cable organised a series of journalistic workshops in different parts of the city. These workshops were free of charge and open to everyone, focusing on topics such as investigative journalism, filming with smartphones, and police reporting. The workshops aimed to find volunteers, publicise the Cable's mission, and ensure the participatory nature of the project by amplifying many different voices.

The Bristol Cable was organised as a cooperative from the outset to create a new model for financing local journalism. After a year and a half, the cooperative had about 500 members, each paying an average of £2.50.

The first major grant securing the Cable's core funding for two years was $120,000 in 2015 from the Reva & David Logan Foundation based in Chicago, USA. This was followed by another $180,000 in core funding plus $75,000 in match funding over three years in 2017. In 2018, Luminate (formerly Omidyar Network) decided to fund the Cable with $275,000 until 2020. This funding was extended for three years in 2020, amounting to $450,000, securing a large part of the Bristol Cable's budget until 2023.

Products

The Bristol Cable's main product is its website, where stories are published several times a week. All content on the website is free to access. They also produce a quarterly print newspaper, which is sent to members' homes and distributed free of charge throughout the city. Another important product is a weekly newsletter, which summarises the week's significant events in Bristol, including the Cable's original reporting and other important local news. A slimmed-down version of the newsletter is freely accessible to everyone, regardless of membership status. The full version is available only to members who pay at least five pounds a month.

Revenue Streams / Finance

The Bristol Cable's yearly budget is £375,000, sourced from three different streams: membership contributions (35%), grants (60%), and non-corporate advertising (5%).

The Bristol Cable's membership programme is integral to its cooperative structure. Every supporting member becomes a shareholder with voting rights. Membership is open to anyone from £1 upwards to ensure inclusivity. As of 2024, the Cable has around 2,500 paying members.

Grants account for about 60% of the budget. The largest donor in the past has been the Luminate Foundation (previously Omidyar Network), which supported the Cable with around £725,000 in core funding between 2018 and 2023. Other significant funders include the Reva & David Logan Foundation and the European Journalism Centre. Fundraising decisions at the Bristol Cable are guided by an Ethical Fundraising Policy developed in collaboration with members.

Non-corporate advertising constitutes a small portion of the yearly budget. Most advertising is placed in the quarterly print edition, distributed for free around the city. The Ethical Advertising Policy, created with member input, defines who can and cannot advertise. This policy states that only advertisements that meet the following criteria will be published:

- Promote social and cultural events and activities that may interest the general readership;
- Products and services that directly benefit local citizens and the city's economy and environment;
- Other adverts in line with the Cable's ethical stance, particularly those from independent local businesses and third sector organisations.

Community / Engaged Journalism

The Bristol Cable's entire organisational structure is based on the concept of Engaged Journalism. As a co-operative and Registered Community Benefit Society, the company guarantees its members a say in decisions affecting the operational and strategic aspects of the business. Members can vote on important decisions, such as funder or advertiser acceptance, use of Facebook, and allocation of core funding, at the Annual General Meeting and throughout the year.The primary aim of this model is to involve people in journalism. The Bristol Cable editorial team regularly uses callouts, or community surveys, to gather opinions, experiences, and data. These surveys are a key component of the Cable's community strategy, helping the editorial team to generate topic ideas, find story protagonists, gain insights, and assess community opinions. Articles are created based on survey responses, providing research approaches and access to sources.

The Cable also offers workshops to members and hosts regular public events addressing pressing issues in Bristol. Community members are invited to contribute articles through a series called "Voices," where they can share their personal views on social issues or news in the city.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

The biggest challenge is fundraising. Since the core funding from Luminate expired in 2023, fundraising has consumed enormous resources within the team. A membership campaign has been running since the end of 2023 to compensate for the loss of funding. The long-term goal is for the Bristol Cable to finance itself entirely through members' contributions.

Biggest Success Factors

The biggest success factor is the Bristol Cable community. Around 2,500 people are members, supporting the Cable financially and contributing content through their survey responses, articles, and decision-making on the Cable's content direction. Community members also voluntarily participate in a Directors Board, which serves as a supervisory or advisory body. At the Annual General Meeting, all members are invited to make important organisational decisions. Thus, the community is a central component of the entire organisation, both in terms of content and governance. The declared aim is to increase the number of members, as this is the greatest lever for the Bristol Cable to establish a sustainable financial position and become independent of grants. The success of the Membership Programme is fundamental to the continued existence of the newsroom. In short: without the community, the Cable would not exist.

Another important success factor, closely linked to the community, is the in-house membership system that the Bristol Cable developed. This system is used not only to manage members and their payments but also to facilitate a large part of community engagement, particularly the surveys. The organisation also uses this tool to handle important elections or votes within the cooperative. By integrating a newsletter provider, the most important communication channel with members is also linked to the system. Thus, it functions as a CRM software with connected payment tools and a survey feature, perfectly tailored to the Bristol Cable's model. By developing its own solution, the Cable remains independent of proprietary software in the long term. Under the name "beabee," the Bristol Cable's membership system is being scaled for use by other newsrooms.

Overview

Name	The Bristol Cable
Website	https://thebristolcable.org/
Location / Location of coverage	Bristol, United Kingdom
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	472.000 population
Year they started publishing	2014
Language	English
Newsrooms' mission statement	Our four main principles are: creating Ethical Journalism and remaining Community Focused and, through that work, Holding Power to Account and Creating Change.

Management and team

Name	The Bristol Cable
Founders	Alec Saelens, Adam Cantwell-Corn, Alon Aviram
Current management team	Board of directors which is staffed with 10 Cable members who were elected at the Annual General Meeting; Secretary of the Board: Elizabeth Mizon;
Team	Full-time employees: 7 Part-time employees: 3

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	Cooperative / Registered Community Benefit Society, owned and supported by member-owners in Bristol
Tax status	non-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Website and quarterly print edition
Additional products	Podcast
Audience and community reach	Members: 2,500 - 3,000
	Newsletter subscribers: ???
	Social Media reach:
	Facebook: 13,000 followers
	Instagram: 4,000 followers
	Twitter: 15,000 followers
Most important community engagement format	Callouts
Revenue streams	membership contributions (35%)
	grants (60%)
	non-corporate advertising (5%)

Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach (Germany)

Abstract / Brief Summary

The Bürgerportal in GL is a local community media outlet in the city of Bergisch Gladbach in western Germany. It was established as a digital local newspaper and citizen's platform in 2009 by Georg Watzlawek and Werner Schmitz-Dietzsch. Today, the Bürgerportal's primary product is a daily newsletter, which is read by approximately 16,000 people in the city every day. Offering all content freely accessible to everyone, alongside a membership program called "Freundeskreis" with 900 voluntary paying members, the Bürgerportal stands as one of the pioneering community media outlets in Germany.

Newsroom's Mission Statement

The mission of Bürgerportal is "Know what's going on!" In line with this, they strive to provide thorough local reporting for their audience. They perceive themselves as a conventional local daily newspaper, albeit one that is digitally published both as a newsletter and as an impact-oriented digital platform for citizens and local initiatives. Additionally, through their BürgerAkademie, they offer political education and media literacy programs for members of their community.

How It Started

The Bürgerportal in GL was founded in 2009 as a limited liability entrepreneurial company (UG) by Werner Schmitz-Dietzsch and Georg Watzlawek. Their vision was to develop a digital newspaper in the form of a daily newsletter, while also establishing a digital platform for businesses, associations, and local initiatives. From 2009 to 2013, both managed the Bürgerportal on a part-time basis. However, since 2014, Georg Watzlawek has been the sole full-time operator of the Bürgerportal.

Products

The primary product of Bürgerportal is a daily newsletter distributed every morning at 7 a.m. It encompasses the most significant news topics of the day, including major stories published on Bürgerportal's website. This daily newsletter has an approximate readership of 16,000 people each morning.

Additionally, the newsletter can be accessed through the website, where it is accompanied by other news stories, features, and reports.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Bürgerportal's revenue mix is highly diversified, encompassing various streams. Advertising holds the largest share, accounting for approximately 40% of the total revenue, followed by reader revenue at 30%, a partner program for local companies at 15%, and the operation of a co-working space also at 15%. The advertising segment includes sponsorships for events and content marketing initiatives such as book recommendations sponsored by local booksellers or a lawyer's column focusing on different legal topics. These advertisements are featured on both the website and in the newsletter. Reader revenue is generated through a membership program called "Freundeskreis." Since all content on Bürgerportal is freely accessible, readers voluntarily contribute to become members of the "Freundeskreis." In return, they receive benefits such as preferential treatment for event invitations, discounts on concert or theatre tickets, invitations to exclusive events like summer parties, and a yearly photo calendar.

Similarly, the partner program functions as a corporate version of the "Freundeskreis" membership. Companies contribute voluntarily and receive benefits such as visibility on the Bürgerportal website, advertising discounts, and complimentary use of the co-working space facilities. The co-working space serves as the editorial office for Bürgerportal but is also available for public rental.

Community / Engaged Journalism

Community journalism plays a pivotal role in Bürgerportal's strategy. They actively engage their broader audience by soliciting feedback and questions through their newsletter. Additionally, individuals have the opportunity to contribute content voluntarily, such as reports on local sports or carnival events. This approach allows Bürgerportal, despite its small team, to cover a wide range of topics within the city.

The membership program, known as the "Freundeskreis," serves as the core community of Bürgerportal. Members receive regular invitations to small discussion events like the Bürgerclub, jazz concerts, and other social gatherings. Through initiatives like the Bürgerakademie, Bürgerportal organizes events focused on topics such as local politics and media literacy. This platform enables the community to learn about shaping local politics in Bergisch Gladbach or gaining insights into the workings of journalism.

Furthermore, Bürgerportal has previously facilitated citizens' initiatives, such as developing positive visions for districts in Bergisch Gladbach, which were then presented to local authorities.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

Bürgerportal faces its most significant challenge in sustaining its extensive operations with a relatively small team. Georg Watzlawek, one of only two full-time employees, shoulders multiple responsibilities, including managing the daily newsletter, the cornerstone of their offerings, overseeing all revenue streams, and organizing the "Freundeskreis" community. Given that revenue growth occurs organically and the expenses associated with hiring additional staff are substantial, the pace of expansion remains relatively slow.

Biggest Success Factors

By prioritizing the newsletter as its primary journalistic product, Bürgerportal has successfully cultivated a considerable organic reach and established itself as a dependable digital daily newspaper, reliably delivered to readers' inboxes at 7 a.m. This autonomy over reach, independent of external factors, constitutes one of the two critical success factors for the platform. The other

pivotal factor is the "Freundeskreis" community, which not only contributes significantly to the revenue mix but also serves as the heart of Bürgerportal. The entire community journalism approach revolves around this community. Through deep and regular engagement with its members, Bürgerportal has become deeply integrated into the city's social fabric, a feat unmatched by competitors like the Kölner Stadtanzeiger. Moreover, it is through this community that Bürgerportal fulfills its mission of being a comprehensive local journalism provider for Bergisch Gladbach, as community members contribute stories on topics that would otherwise be overlooked due to the constraints of the small team.

Overview

Name	Bürgerportal in GL
Website	https://in-gl.de/
Location / Location of coverage	Bergisch Gladbach, Germany
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	110.000 population
Year they started publishing	2009
Language	German
Newsrooms mission statement	"Know what's going on." We endeavour to ensure comprehensive local reporting for our audience. We are a traditional local daily newspaper, but one that is published digitally as a newsletter, but also an impact-driven digital platform for citizens and local initiatives. With our Freundeskreis and BürgerAkademie, we provide a sense of community and political education and media literacy for our members.

Management and team

Founders	Georg Watzlawek, Werner Schmitz-Dietsch
Current management team	Georg Watzlawek
Team	Full-time employees: 2

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	"sole proprietor"
Tax status	for-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Daily Newsletter (free)
Additional products	Website (free)
Audience and community reach	Newsletter: 8.000 subscribers, but around 16.000 readers in total
Website: 60.000 to 80.000 visits / month	110.000 population
Freundeskreis: around 900 paying members	2009
Most important community engagement format	Bürgerclubs, regular small in-person discussion format
Revenue streams	Revenue: 18.000 € / month
Advertising (40 %)	
Freundeskreis (30 %)	
Partnerships (15 %)	
Co-working space (15 %)	

Dublin Inquirer (Ireland)

Abstract / Brief Summary

The Dublin Inquirer, established in 2015 by Lois Kapila and Sam Tranum, stands as an independent, public-interest newsroom based in Dublin, Ireland. It specializes in publishing in-depth stories both online and in a monthly print edition, delving into local issues such as housing, transport, and politics. Through civic tech projects, events, and surveys, the newsroom actively involves its community.

Despite facing financial hurdles and operating with a limited staff, the Dublin Inquirer sustains its operations primarily through subscriptions, with additional support from grants allocated for specific projects.

Innovatively, the Dublin Inquirer goes beyond traditional storytelling by incorporating civic tech initiatives such as a bike collision tracker. By providing digital tools and data, the publication aims to enhance the lives of individuals within its community, showcasing a commitment to journalistic innovation and community engagement.

The newsroom's mission statement

"Dublin Inquirer is an independent, subscriber-funded newspaper serving Ireland's capital since 2015, publishing weekly online and in print monthly."

How It Started

Lois Kapila and her husband, Sam Tranum, both seasoned journalists, relocated to Dublin in 2013. Encountering challenges breaking into the established Irish media landscape as foreigners, Lois took matters into her own hands and developed the idea of a locally funded online medium for Dubliners. Drawing inspiration from innovative newsrooms like the Texas Tribune, with which she had

become familiar during her work in the U.S., she recognized the potential of introducing a community-focused model to the local news market.

Following a year of meticulous planning, learning from other media entrepreneurs, and completing a local enterprise course, Lois launched the Dublin Inquirer.

For the initial five years, Lois did not draw a salary, while her husband, Sam, maintained full-time employment elsewhere but also contributed voluntary work to the Inquirer. Sam's employment served as the couple's financial backbone, enabling Lois to concentrate on establishing the organisation. To kickstart the journalistic endeavours, Lois secured funding by borrowing money from family members and taking out a loan, which facilitated the hiring of two junior reporters.

Despite attending the enterprise course and engaging in networking activities, the Dublin Inquirer did not receive any structural support.

Products

Dublin Inquirer delivers high-quality, independent local journalism online on a weekly basis. Approximately 10 new stories are published each week, covering core beats such as housing, public transport, immigrant life, and local politics. Founder Lois Kapila characterizes their approach as in-depth, deliberate, and committed to producing quality journalism that serves the public interest.

Their stories are disseminated online through their website, three different weekly newsletters, and a monthly print edition. To reach a wide audience, Dublin Inquirer utilizes various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, X, Mastodon, Bluesky, and TikTok. However, they acknowledge experiencing a decline in reach on these platforms, prompting a focus on increasing newsletter subscriptions.

In addition to storytelling, Dublin Inquirer engages in projects that extend beyond traditional journalism, such as the development of civic tech tools to support reporting and provide ongoing information for citizens. For instance, their council tracker makes information accessible on how local counselors have voted on different issues, which was previously buried in PDF files. They also crowdsource small and large bike accidents in the city with citizens through their collision tracker. In anticipation of local elections, they created a voter guide showcasing candidates' stances on eight major community-chosen issues.

These projects involve strong reader and community member engagement, with individuals contributing expertise, providing feedback, participating in hack days for development, facilitating partnerships, and more. (For more details, refer to the Community/Engaged Journalism chapter).

Revenue Streams / Finance

In 2022, Dublin Inquirer operated with a total budget of €180,000. Founder Lois Kapila notes that this budget suffices to cover expenses primarily because the entire team, including themselves as founders, receive comparatively modest salaries of €30,000 per year.

While experimenting with various revenue streams in the past, such as membership, partnerships with local shops, and advertising, the majority of revenue, nearly 80%, now comes from subscriptions. By 2024, they had amassed 1,900 subscribers, generating a monthly revenue of €12,400.

The subscription model offers three tiers:

- Digital Subscription (€6/month): Grants access to all online articles.

- Digital Patron Subscription (€8/month): Offers the same access as the Digital Subscription, with an additional €2 contribution to support Dublin Inquirer.

- Digital and Print Subscription (€9/month): Includes access to all online articles plus a monthly print edition.

Although the subscription model places core content behind a paywall, Lois Kapila describes it as a "leaky paywall" because individuals who cannot afford a subscription can access articles for free.

The remaining revenue primarily stems from smaller grants for specific projects. Dublin Inquirer received its first grant from the European Journalism Centre just before the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic, followed by several smaller grants from the Google News Initiative.

In 2023, Dublin Inquirer secured €31,000 from the Dutch foundation Journalismfund Europe for a project focused on covering a rural county north of Dublin, which was at risk of becoming a news desert. Subsequently, in 2024, they received a grant from the EU to initiate a youth journalism training program in collaboration with several other organizations.

In the past, Dublin Inquirer has also received modest philanthropic support from its readers, for instance, to finance the development of a new website.

Sponsorships at events occasionally contribute to Dublin Inquirer's finances, albeit making up a small fraction of the total budget. However, Lois Kapila emphasizes that events and personal interactions are not primarily viewed as revenue streams but rather as crucial means for converting participants into subscribers.

Community / Engaged Journalism

The Dublin Inquirer has established a strong bond with its community through collaborative projects, a hallmark of its approach in recent years:

Council Tracker: Developed with community web developers, this tool provides insights into local councillors' votes, making information accessible that was previously buried in PDF documents.

Active Travel Collision Tracker: Created in partnership with the community, this tracker gathers data on road collisions involving bicycles. Experts in transport and road safety, along with major bike activists and climate groups, collaborated to develop the tool. Readers were invited to review early versions and provide feedback. Now, data for the tracker is crowdsourced from the community, with individuals reporting collisions they were involved in or witnessed.

Local Election Guide: Developed using the Citizen's Agenda approach by Jay Rosen, the Inquirer involved the community in submitting questions for candidates via a survey. The editorial team then selected the most pressing issues and asked candidates about them on behalf of the community. The resulting answers were published as a local election guide.

Events also hold significance for the Inquirer, serving to retain and attract subscribers. Ranging from pub quizzes to live journalism events, these gatherings feature reporters discussing investigations onstage, alongside music, comedy, or performance art. The Inquirer also organises meetups for specific sub-communities, such as a migrant meetup following anti-migrant riots in Dublin in November 2023.

Surveys occasionally engage the audience, allowing them to decide on new beats for the editorial team to cover. However, Kapila notes that community engagement efforts lack a refined strategy, primarily due to the absence of a team member dedicated to community engagement or subscriber support.

Regarding community engagement, Kapila emphasises that the Inquirer doesn't draw a strict line between audience and community. While there's a wider audience primarily engaged in reading articles, there's also a more involved core group attending events regularly, participating in surveys, or engaging on social media.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

Growing the number of subscribers stands as one of the primary challenges facing Dublin Inquirer. Lois Kapila notes that subscription figures have remained stagnant since 2023, hindering sustainable growth for the publication. To address this, they are considering expanding beyond Dublin to broaden their potential audience. However, without an increase in subscribers, sustainable growth is difficult to achieve. Despite regularly securing smaller grants, these are typically allocated for new projects rather than core funding, which Kapila emphasises would be crucial for the organisation's stability.

On the other hand, attempting to grow presents its own set of challenges. Kapila highlights the immense workload already faced by the small team, compounded by comparatively low salaries of €30,000 per year for the entire team, including the founders. Juggling various projects with a limited team is a significant challenge, with Kapila and her husband heavily involved in administrative tasks, fundraising, and community engagement. This diverse array of responsibilities adds to the workload, making it challenging to maintain the necessary focus on journalistic endeavours.

Kapila also identifies another barrier: the perception of Dublin Inquirer as a social enterprise, which complicates competition with strictly for-profit entities. This distinction presents challenges in attracting subscribers and securing funding, as the organisation operates with different priorities and objectives compared to traditional for-profit ventures.

Biggest Success Factors

Involving the community has been instrumental in enabling Dublin Inquirer to initiate innovative and sustainable projects, contributing to its uniqueness. Civic tech initiatives such as the Collision Tracker and the Council Tracker would not have been possible without community assistance. Embracing partnerships and maintaining flexibility are identified as major success factors by Lois Kapila. Rather than seeking full ownership of projects, the Inquirer prioritizes equitable collaboration, ensuring that partnerships are mutually beneficial.

While community support with building a tech stack and web development has been crucial in the past, Dublin Inquirer now relies on Newspack, a CMS specialized for independent publishers. Despite its costliness, Kapila describes Newspack as essential for their success, offering adaptability and excellent emergency support. With no technical background in the core team, Newspack has been pivotal in enabling their operations.

Agility and spontaneity also play key roles in the Inquirer's success. Maintaining an informal and accessible approach, as described by Kapila, allows for the swift execution of projects. This approach facilitated the development of initiatives like the Collision Tracker, which emerged from informal collaborations such as a WhatsApp group with traffic experts. While the absence of a comprehensive strategy presents challenges, it has also fostered creative solutions that define Dublin Inquirer and distinguish it from other organizations.

Overview

Name	Dublin Inquirer
Website	https://dublininquirer.com
Location / Location of coverage	Dublin City / Fingal
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	592,000 people living in Dublin; 1,2 million in the wider agglomeration
Year they started publishing	2015
Language	English
Newsrooms mission statement	Dublin Inquirer is an independent, subscriber-funded newspaper serving Ireland's capital since 2015, publishing weekly online and in print monthly.

Management and team

Founders	Lois Kapila, Sam Tranum
Current management team	Lois Kapila, Sam Tranum
Team	Full-time employees: 4 journalists
	Part-time employees: 1 (for backoffice and admin)
	Freelancers or consultants: 1 regular freelancer (covering immigration), 2-3 more irregular freelancers
	Volunteers: people contributing as part of single projects

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	Private Company Limited by Shares (LTD)
Tax status	for-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Website, Print Edition, Newsletter; in fact, stories are seen as the product
Audience and community reach	Facebook: 14.000. Instagram: 7.087 Mastodon: 2.800. TikTok: 511 Bluesky: 1.200. X: 20.175
Most important community engagement format	Direct collaboration for projects Events
Revenue streams	180,000 yearly revenue, mainly from subscriptions (80%) and grants (15-20%), individual donations or sponsoring make up only a fraction of the revenue. 1,900 paying subscribers = 12,400 € / month

Iașul Nostru (Romania)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Iașul Nostru, established and managed by Alex Enășescu, is a weekly newsletter for residents of the town of Iași, Romania. Founded in 2021, the newsletter originated from a funding opportunity offered by the Substack platform. Enășescu successfully expanded the newsletter's subscriber base from 0 to 6,000 within three years, reaching a community of over 10,000 individuals across various channels with his content.

The newsroom's mission statement

Iașul Nostru's mission is to provide journalism for the town of Iași that is more constructive and uplifting, but also mindful of the audience's limited time and attention.

How It Started

Iașul Nostru was initiated in 2021 by Alex Enășescu, who previously worked as a journalist for PressOne. Enășescu had a particular interest in reporting on local issues during his tenure at PressOne. However, he also noticed a gap in the provision of local news that existing media outlets were unable to fill adequately. Inspired by the emerging trend of local newsletters in the United States, he had been contemplating the idea of establishing a new local medium in his hometown for some time.

When the opportunity arose to apply for funding through the newsletter platform Substack, it didn't take Enășescu long to put his plan into action. He submitted an application and was awarded $40,000 to launch a local newsletter on Substack. This initial funding served as the catalyst for the inception of Iașul Nostru.

Products

Iașul Nostru's primary product is a weekly newsletter distributed every Friday morning. The newsletter caters to 6,000 free subscribers, with an aim for an opening rate of 50%. It features news from the town, original reporting pieces such as interviews or opinion pieces, and an overview of upcoming events. Enășescu strives to amplify the voices of "underdogs", including small businesses, NGOs, and civic activists, who are often overlooked by existing local media outlets. His outlet maintains a solutions-focused approach, advocating for causes that benefit the community, such as improving cycling infrastructure or addressing environmental issues.

Recently, Iașul Nostru has developed a series of local guides, which has contributed to doubling the subscriber base within a year.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Iașul Nostru has developed two revenue streams tied to the newsletter, generating a total of around 9,000 Euros per year:

Newsletter Subscriptions: Approximately 3% of the newsletter subscribers voluntarily support Iașul Nostru with a paid subscription, contributing around 5 Euros per month. Surveys with subscribers indicate that paying subscribers often include local businesses, artists, and NGOs in the town who directly benefit from the additional coverage provided by Iașul Nostru and wish to give back.

Sponsorships: Iașul Nostru allows sponsored messages in the weekly newsletter, which are sold for 100-400 Euros depending on the length and format.

Additionally, Enășescu has secured grants crucial for developing the product and expanding the subscription base. The initial 40,000 Euros grant from Substack provided the seed funding to launch the newsletter, covering expenses such as editor payment and fees for 10 freelance reporters contributing stories over the years. Another grant of 15,000 Euros from IPI facilitated the development of a new format and doubled the subscriber base.

As the Substack grant funds are depleted, Enășescu is taking on most of the editing and reporting responsibilities himself, with assistance from a copy editor and a local journalism student who aggregates local news and events. Complementing his income with freelance journalism work is also essential to sustain the project.

To ensure the sustainability of Iașul Nostru, Enășescu estimates a core annual revenue of 25,000 Euros is needed, which he considers challenging to achieve with the current output and revenue streams. However, he sees potential in offering an editor a two-year runway to maintain the product while he focuses on developing the business model, particularly by cultivating relationships with local businesses and growing paid subscriptions.

Community / Engaged Journalism

While Iașul Nostru does not identify itself as a strictly community-focused medium, its emphasis on the newsletter as its core product nurtures a close relationship between the medium and its audience.

Iașul Nostru adopts a user-centric approach, where close feedback loops with the audience inform the focus of reporting and the development of new formats. This is achieved through annual surveys and user interviews, allowing for a deep understanding of people's information needs and their information consumption habits. By actively engaging with their audience in this manner, Iașul Nostru ensures that its content remains relevant and resonates with its readership.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

Enășescu identifies the primary challenge in creating and growing his local newsletter with high journalistic standards as the difficulty in finding experienced reporters in the local area. Many individuals opt for more financially viable professions like advertising, making it challenging to recruit skilled journalists locally. Plans to collaborate with journalism students have not yielded satisfactory results due to insufficient skill levels, coupled with Enășescu's inability to provide the necessary hands-on support to train them while also maintaining the regular production of his newsletter.

This challenge is compounded by the need for financial runway to grow the business, which Enășescu estimates takes more than three years. However, funding opportunities for local media in Europe are limited, with the EU, for example, primarily focusing on cross-border collaborations rather than addressing the needs of early-stage local media initiatives. As a result, securing sufficient funding to support the growth and sustainability of Iașul Nostru remains a significant hurdle for Enășescu.

Biggest Success Factors

The key success factor for Iașul Nostru is Enășescu himself, who brings a strong journalistic background and a keen interest in understanding the business aspects of his venture. Enășescu's commitment to learning about new business models and staying informed through platforms like Niemanlab or The Fix, as well as engaging in personal exchanges with other founders, has been instrumental in his journey. He further honed his skills by enrolling in the Entrepreneurial Journalism Creators Program[u] at the City University of New York and an online Product Management course at CUNY.

Enășescu's personal situation also sets him apart, as he chose to remain in his city, establish a family, and actively contribute to improving the quality of life in his community.

Additionally, the initial seed funding provided by Substack was crucial in setting up the business. Substack's low-bureaucracy and accessible application process, without any restrictions on who could apply, made it an attractive option. Moreover, once granted, the platform alleviated initial tech-related challenges by providing tools tailored to the needs of a solo creator focused on newsletter-based content.

Overview

Name	Iașul Nostru
Website	https://www.iasulnostru.ro/
Location / Location of coverage	Iași, Romania
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	271,692 people - (including areas around around 500.000 people)
Year they started publishing	2021
Language	Romanian

Management and team

Founders	Alex Enășescu, 37 years
Current management team	Alex Enășescu
Team	Full-time employees: Alex Enășescu

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	/
Tax status	for-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Newsletter (free and paid)
Additional products	Podcast
Audience and community reach	Overall: Newsletter: 6000 Facebook followers: 5,500 Instagram followers: 3,700
Most important community engagement format	/
Revenue streams	$6,000/year gross from paid newsletter subscriptions $3000/year gross from sponsored messages in the newsletter

Magločistač (Serbia)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Magločistač is a civil society media outlet, founded in 2015 by the Citizens' Association "Center of Civic Values" from Subotica. Its mission is to provide public-interest local journalism that is freely accessible to all.

Primarily, Magločistač focuses on reporting social issues and the preservation of the cultural heritage of the city of Subotica. In its reporting, the outlet emphasizes solutions rather than solely highlighting problems, aiming to exert pressure on politicians to address issues effectively.

Over recent years, Magločistač's reporting has contributed to positive changes within the community. However, the organization faces significant financial challenges, common among independent media outlets perceived as oppositional by the government. These challenges stem from the complex legal landscape for NGOs in Serbia and stringent requirements for handling donations, which intentionally hinder contributions to media projects.

The newsroom's mission statement

Magločistač is a media outlet of civil society. Our mission is to inform citizens, guided exclusively by the public interest, because we believe that only well-informed citizens can make informed decisions and manage their lives.

The values that we stand for and are guided by in our daily work are free access to information of public importance, transparency of the work of institutions, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of assembly and association, media pluralism, dialogue, multiculturalism and interculturalism, the right to self-determination, respect for human and minority rights.

Our vision is to become a strong local media that contributes to the strengthening of the local community.

How It Started

Magločistač was established in 2015 by Natalija Jakovljević Ivanić, Ljiljana Elek, and Zlatko Romić as a project of the Centar građanskih vrednosti ("Centre for Civic Values"), a local civic society organisation.

The creation of Magločistač was prompted by the privatisation of state media in 2015, which led to the closure of numerous local media outlets. The founding members of Magločistač, all with backgrounds in journalism, had previously worked at a local radio station in Subotica. Mirana Dmitrović, the current editor-in-chief and project manager, joined the team six months after its inception.

For the initial five years, everyone involved volunteered their time without receiving salaries. In 2020, Magločistač conducted its first crowdfunding campaign, followed by a second campaign later that year. These efforts enabled the organisation to provide salaries for its staff for the first time.

Products

Magločistač's primary product is its website, where it predominantly publishes written articles. Through its reporting, the outlet concentrates on topics that are often overlooked in other local media, particularly social issues and the cultural heritage of Subotica. Their approach extends beyond simply describing problems, aiming to highlight potential solutions. According to Dmitrović, some of these solution-focused stories have even influenced legislation. For instance, years of reporting on a historically and culturally significant street in Subotica, slated for demolition by investors, ultimately resulted in the buildings being placed under a preservation order by Serbia's national government.

While the website remains the main focus, Magločistač has expanded its presence in recent years to include social media platforms. They now produce video content for platforms like YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, targeting younger audiences and diversifying their reach.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Magločistač currently faces a precarious financial situation, with grants from foreign organizations being its primary source of income. Previously, these grants have included funding from the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) and similar foundations from other countries. Currently, the British Council is funding a project by Magločistač aimed at creating paid content for local businesses. In 2023, the total revenue from project funding amounted to approximately 33,000 euros.

In addition to grants, Magločistač attempts to generate income from reader contributions through platforms like Patreon or Buy Me a Coffee. However, due to the unique legal challenges associated with processing donations in Serbia, the revenue from this source remains marginal, as detailed in the Blockers/Challenges section.

While three crowdfunding campaigns conducted in 2020 and 2021 generated significant revenue, Magločistač is currently unable to conduct additional week-long campaigns due to constraints on the team's resources.

Community / Engaged Journalism

While Magločistač considers itself deeply rooted in the local community, the outlet has not implemented specific formats for engaged journalism or community engagement.

Collaboration with the community primarily takes place through a lively exchange via email. This includes discussions about article critiques or suggestions for topics, which the editorial team regularly considers.

However, due to financial constraints, Magločistač is unable to hire someone dedicated to community engagement or building stronger ties with the local community.

Blockers / Biggest Challenges

The precarious financial situation represents the most significant challenge for Magločistač. Funding for local media in Serbia is often linked with attempts by the government to exert political influence on the funded publication, making Serbian grants unsuitable for Magločistač.

Furthermore, grants from abroad are typically project-specific and do not contribute to sustainable core funding. The high workload associated with project management and reporting adds considerable stress to the team. Additionally, the Serbian government impedes the progress of nonprofit newsrooms by imposing obstacles.

In Serbia, non-profit organisations must enter into a donation contract with each individual donor for each specific donation, making regular monthly donations, common in membership models, practically impossible. Moreover, the utilisation of platforms like Patreon or Buy Me a Coffee for donations is severely restricted in Serbia, rendering them ineffective for Magločistač.

As a result, reader revenue is not a viable financing option for Magločistač due to the rigid legislative framework.

Biggest Success Factors

The primary success factor for Magločistač is the personal motivation to persevere with the publication, despite facing numerous challenges. As Dmitrović articulated, "Our own values as individuals are the only reason we still exist."

While operating as an independent media outlet in Serbia presents financial difficulties, it also allows for the potential to publish impactful stories that can influence political decisions and legislation, ultimately benefiting the local community.

Although such opportunities are scarce, Magločistač receives support, particularly legal advice, from the Independent Journalists' Association of Vojvodina (NDN), a regional NGO that networks independent media organizations. This assistance helps navigate the complex media landscape and reinforces Magločistač's resilience.

Overview

Name	Magločistač
Website	https://www.maglocistac.rs/
Location / Location of coverage	Subotica, Bačka Topola, Mali Iđoš
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	160.000 population in total
Year they started publishing	2015
Language	Serbian
Newsrooms mission statement	Magločistač is a media outlet of civil society. Our mission is to inform citizens, guided exclusively by the public interest, because we believe that only well-informed citizens can make informed decisions and manage their lives. The values that we stand for and are guided by in our daily work are free access to information of public importance, transparency of the work of institutions, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of assembly and association, media pluralism, dialogue, multiculturalism and interculturalism, the right to self-determination, respect for human and minority rights. Our vision is to become a strong local media that contributes to the strengthening of the local community.

The values that we stand for and are guided by in our daily work are free access to information of public importance, transparency of the work of institutions, freedom of speech and expression, freedom of assembly and association, media pluralism, dialogue, multiculturalism and interculturalism, the right to self-determination, respect for human and minority rights.

Our vision is to become a strong local media that contributes to the strengthening of the local community.

Management and team

Founders	Natalija Jakovljević Ivanić, Ljiljana Elek, Zlatko Romić
Current management team	Mirana Dmitrović - editor-in-chief and project manager
	Natalija Jakovljević Ivanić - desk editor and journalist
	Maja Savić - journalist
Team	Part-time employees: 4

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	Citizen Association (NGO)
Tax status	non-profit

Additional products Youtube-Channel

Main products	Website
Additional products	Youtube-Channel
	Social Media
Audience and community reach	Website: 2.500 views / day
	Facebook: 7.031
	TikTok: 2.480
	Instagram: 1.122
	X / Twitter: 327
	Youtube: 67

Mecseki Müzli (Hungary)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Mecseki Müzli is a pioneering local independent media organisation in Pécs, Hungary, established in 2021 by experienced journalist Ervin Gűth. Initially launched as a solo venture, Mecseki Müzli relied on a weekly email newsletter as its primary product to disseminate local news to the community. Presently, Mecseki Müzli serves an audience of approximately 700 newsletter subscribers, offering them vital local news and information. The medium has primarily been funded through a reader-revenue model, supplemented by grants.

The newsroom's mission statement

Mecseki Müzli's mission is to offer concise, engaging, and substantial journalistic content about Pécs, harnessing existing local sources and eschewing artificial flavor enhancers, thus laying the foundation for a healthy news diet.

How It Started

The idea for Mecseki Müzli arose as a direct response to the acquisition and subsequent shift in editorial direction of local newspapers by government-affiliated entities. Ervin Gűth, observing the decline of independent journalism in his country and inspired by the emergence of newsletter-based media businesses, envisioned a platform to address the community's need for impartial information. To develop his concept, Gűth conducted interviews within the community to understand their information requirements and to validate his initial idea. Subsequently, he committed one day per week to launch a newsletter while sustaining his income through other journalistic and consultancy endeavours. The transition from concept to launch was expedited, taking shape over a few months. Crucial to this phase was Gűth's decision to utilise Ghost for creating his website and a paid newsletter.

Initially self-funded, Mecseki Müzli has since received grants from various organisations, including Internews and the International Press Institute. These grants have supported operational costs and facilitated the hiring of trainees, thereby expanding the project's offerings and broadening its audience.

Products

Mecseki Müzli's primary product is a weekly newsletter that amalgamates local news, analyses, interviews, and cultural insights, sent to subscribers every Thursday. The newsletter is dedicated to covering local issues only, collecting the most important news of the previous week and giving context,and, in some cases, fact-checking what has been published elsewhere. It includes a mix of topics around local history, hard news and news analyses, fact-checking, gastronomy and entertainment. The style is "opinionated" as Gűth states. The character limit for each newsletter is 12.000, the equivalent of a 7 minute read.

Success is measured through engagement metrics like subscriber growth and opening rates of the newsletter, as well as community feedback, reflecting the newsroom's commitment to serving its audience's interests and needs effectively.

As a local correspondent for the independent newsroom Telex, Ervin Gűth delves into investigative journalism on topics such as local elections and contentious procurements. Leveraging a content partnership, he disseminates these pieces via his newsletter.

With funding from the International Press Institute (IPI) and Internews in 2023, Mecseki Müzli expanded its repertoire to include long-form journalism. This encompasses feature articles and podcasts featuring expert interviews, each lasting approximately 30 minutes.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Mecseki Müzli relies on multiple revenue streams to sustain its operations. Despite three years of existence, the platform is still striving to achieve self-sustainability. At present, grant funding, along with subscriptions, supports a team of three people and covers operational costs until September 2024. The revenue mix includes:

- € 370/month from paid Newsletter subscriptions: Subscriptions are at the heart of its revenue structure, offering different tiers with varying levels of access and exclusivity. Presently, there are 685 newsletter subscribers, with 89 of them paying for the service. Furthermore, 33 individuals voluntarily contribute a little extra.

- € 100/month from Sponsorships: A local NGO is sponsoring a section on local history in the newsletter, contributing $25 per newsletter.

- € 30.000 in grants from IPI (20.000 for one year) and Internews (10.000 for 6 months)

- Donations: So far, three individuals have made small donations.

- Content partnership: A content-sharing arrangement with the media outlet Telex, where Ervin works. This partnership offers the opportunity to generate additional value through regular long-form pieces that can be incorporated into the Mecseki Müsli newsletter.

Güth sees the greatest potential for revenue growth by expanding the Telex partnership to a higher level and increasing the number of subscribers. He is contemplating discontinuing the free version of the newsletter and transitioning to a model where everyone is required to pay, especially since the current conversion rate from free to paid subscribers already stands at 50%. Güth believes he could potentially reach a total of 3000 people with his newsletter.

Community / Engaged Journalism

Mecseki Müzli distinguishes between its broader audience and its core community, with the latter actively participating in the newsroom's operations, particularly through two engagement initiatives:

The audience content loop: Subscribers are encouraged to submit topic ideas for feature or long-form articles. The team reviews these suggestions and selects those deemed feasible. Then, a vote is held among paid subscribers to choose from three selected topics. Once an article is published, subscribers are asked for feedback on the piece.

Open editorial meetings: Subscribers are invited to join editorial meetings, and despite the potential for low attendance, the first meeting saw 10 participants. For Güth, this represents an opportunity to foster greater loyalty and increase the relevance of the content produced.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

The main challenges confronting Mecseki Müzli include navigating Hungary's polarized media landscape and achieving a sufficiently large audience to attain enough paid subscribers to sustain a full-time position within three years.

Biggest Success Factors

Mecseki Müsli's successful establishment can be attributed to Güth's capacity to initiate the newsletter as a side project, leveraging his skills as a versatile journalist and entrepreneur. His user-centric approach and emphasis on the value proposition and product were crucial. Additionally, the platform Ghost played a significant role by providing an easy-to-set-up platform for publishing the newsletter and monetizing it, thereby facilitating the rapid launch of both the product and the business model.

Overview

Name	Mecseki Müsli
Website	https://www.mecsekimuzli.com
Location / Location of coverage	Pécs, Hungary
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	140.000 population. (The local daily sells 3000 copies per day.)
Year they started publishing	2021

Management and team

Founders	Ervin Güth
Current management team	Ervin Güth
Team	Full-time employees: 1
	Part-time employees: 2

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	"sole proprietor"
Tax status	for-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Newsletter (free and paid)
Additional products	Podcast
Audience and community reach	Newsletter: 780 total subscribers, 95 of those paid.
Most important community engagement format	The audience content loop: People suggesting and voting on topics to cover

Mensagem (Portugal)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Mensagem describes itself as a hyper-local,community-focused media organization serving all of Lisbon. It was "born from the desire of a group of Lisboners, who happen to be journalists, to improve their city." Founded in 2020 by Catarina Carvalho with financial backing from a local business owner, Mensagem is now an established entity with a 7-person team. Their website has 300,000 monthly views, and they reach 20,000 newsletter subscribers every week.

The newsroom's mission statement

By empowering the communities, sometimes just by showing how they live and what they do, we give way to dialogue and create a safe space for debate - also in the real world, not only digitally.

- Journalism - We tell the stories of the city no one was telling. No story is too small for us.

- Empathy - We believe in empathy-through-knowledge. We share the "your neighbors story" the "in your backyard" story. To help create that empathy.

- Community - Empowering the communities, sometimes just by showing how they live and what

How It Started

Catarina Carvalho and Ferreira Fernandes, two journalists, started Mensagem in 2020 in partnership with the owner of a cafe in Lisbon called A Brasileira do Chiado. The idea was for the newsroom to become part of a cultural hub developing around the café. Having worked as a journalist for many years, Catarina wanted to create a media outlet for Lisbon that was rooted in the community, covering topics and representing people who were missing in the existing local media landscape. Catarina trained one person to become

the editor, allowing her to focus more on partnerships and fundraising. Her business plan included not just the costs of content production with a team of seven journalists but also alternative revenue streams like a shop selling local products. The website was set up on the publishing platform Newspack, a WordPress product and service designed especially for media sites, which provides not just the technical setup for the website but also maintenance and support. It took about six months from idea to launch.

Products

Mensagem is blurring the lines between being a journalistic, civic, and cultural organization. At its heart are stories about the day-to-day lives of Lisbon residents, focusing on people who are not often talked about and taking a constructive perspective on issues by investigating how stated problems could be addressed. At the same time, the Mensagem team is working with partners in the city to create spaces for dialogue and cultural activities.

The medium showcases Lisbon residents in many ways. Whether it's letting people in Lisbon share their favorite streets or areas and their intimate relationship with the city in an article, or talking to local artists about the sounds of the city in their podcast and asking them to create Spotify playlists, Mensagem highlights the community.

Social media has been a strong channel for Mensagem from the very start. They create unique content for Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, including lots of video content. Besides the website and social media channels, the newsletter is an important way to reach people with Mensagem's stories and open conversations. Carvalho describes the newsletter as the "neighbour's letter," providing context to the stories with a personal angle, turning the newsletter into a stand-alone product.

Some stories are turned into books, offering an alternative

way to bring Mensagem to people, though it is not, as for some national media outlets like CORRECTIV in Germany, a potential revenue stream. Every 15 days, a new comic is published telling the history of Lisbon.

With this mix of channels, Mensagem is reaching a demographically diverse audience, primarily those between 25-30 and over 60 years old.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Mensagem wouldn't exist without the initial and ongoing major donation, which enabled them to establish high-quality journalistic products with a small team of senior journalists from the very start. However, Carvalho and her team have also identified and capitalized on additional opportunities to generate revenue and run various projects.

164.000 Euros in grants: Over the years, a number of projects have been financed through grants including from organisations like the European Journalism Fund (EU funding), ICFJ, IPI, Gulbenkian Foundation, EEA, Active Ctizens Fund as well as Google and Facebook. (Full list here)

About 30.000 Euros in individual donations/year (reader-revenue): People can support Mensagem with recurring or one-off donations, which are promoted through the website, though not aggressively pushed.

Sponsorships: Some projects have attracted support from local businesses. For example, the Port of Lisbon became a funding partner to develop additional ways to tell the story of a World War II refugee, a story discovered by a Mensagem reporter. Together with an international artist, they created a mural, developed an exhibition, and turned the story into a book. This partnership was a great match for the Port of Lisbon, as it was a key location in the story.

Community / Engaged Journalism

Mensagem is deeply ingrained in the community of Lisbon, collaborating with and producing a wide range of projects and stories for the people in its neighborhoods. This involvement extends beyond individuals to include local businesses. The newsletter serves as the main channel for dialogue, with people directly responding via email and sharing ideas with the journalists.

The café serves as a meeting and event space, where Mensagem hosted numerous neighborhood meetings in the beginning to learn about people's lives, ideas, and concerns. They've also established a book club focusing on books about Lisbon and hosting readings and conversations with authors.

Readers also volunteer to write for Mensagem, sending in stories based on their personal experiences and opinions, which don't require fact-checking but contribute to the sense of community in Lisbon.

One of their current grant-funded projects, called "Undesert the News," involves establishing pop-up newsrooms in three of the least-covered areas within the metropolitan region: Chelas, Mem Martins in Sintra, and Amadora. Journalists work with young people in these communities, assisting them in telling their own stories while enhancing media literacy. With this project, Mensagem directly contributes to one of their main impact goals: cultivating understanding and empathy by amplifying voices that would usually be overlooked. These stories have been collaboratively produced with cultural groups in the communities.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

As a media organization that doesn't neatly fit into conventional categories, Mensagem has encountered challenges in fostering understanding of its positioning as a non-profit community organization, which affects its ability to attract funding from foundations supporting the non-profit sector. Journalism is often perceived as political and as a for-profit business, complicating Mensagem's efforts to secure support.

Moreover, in the current polarized climate of Portugal, there are additional editorial challenges to navigate as a small media organization. Being deeply embedded in the community, Mensagem faces the daily challenge of maintaining a clear distinction between journalism and activism.

Carvalho still sees significant potential in having their own café for building a community. However, the current café where they are based is rather tourist-oriented and doesn't allow them to create their own physical space in a way that fosters the sense of community she envisions.

Biggest Success Factors

Carvalho emphasizes that the most critical factor for success is having a very clear idea of what you want to do and where you are headed. In the case of Mensagem, she also asserts that success lies in the nature of the idea itself—being in a space where "nobody is, nobody is interested, telling stories nobody is telling, talking to people nobody is talking to." This unique positioning made it easy for Mensagem to garner attention and build the network necessary to reach more people and create partnerships like the sponsorship from the Port of Lisbon.

Additionally, having someone on the team from the beginning who is skilled in working on the business side of things was crucial for Mensagem. Ideally, journalists themselves should have a business mindset and be open to devising creative ways to finance their work, as journalism alone won't cover all expenses.

Mensagem started from a comfortable position with a significant amount of initial funding. This enabled them to expand their reach rapidly and raise further funding based on those activities. The team meticulously tracked their impact from day one, documenting every indicator of success, whether it was stories being picked up by other media outlets, changes to local politics, or feedback from readers.

Overview

Name	Mensagem de Lisboa, A Mensagem da Brasileira
Website	https://amensagem.pt/
Location / Location of coverage	Lisbon, Portugal
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	548,703 people in Lisbon
Year they started publishing	2020
Language	Portuguese and English
Newsrooms mission statement	Empowering the communities, sometimes just by showing how they live and what
	they do we give way to dialogue and create a safe space for debate - also in the real
	world, not only digitally.
	Journalism - We tell the stories of the city no one was telling. No story is too small for us.
	Empathy - We believe in empathy-through-knowledge. We share the "your neighbors story" the "in your backyard" story. To help creating that empathy.

	Community - Empowering the communities, sometimes just by showing how they live and what

Management and team

Founders	**Catarina Carvalho, Ferreira Fernandes, Valor do Tempo, João Marecos**
Current management team	Catarina Carvalho
Team	Full-time employees: 7
	Part-time employees: 6

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	LDA
Tax status	for-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Stories shared through different channels	
Additional products	Website	Newletter
	Podcasts	Social Media
	Books.	Events
	Other cultural projects	
Audience and community reach	Website: About 300.000 readers per month	
	Newsletter reaches 20.000 subscribers (44% opening rate)	
	Instagram: 37.8000 Followers	
	Facbook: 17.000 Followers	
	X / Twitter: 7.840	
Most important community engagement format	Newsletter which works as a dialogue channel with the readers	
	Events at their café	
	Pop up newsrooms and meetings/focus groups	

	Yearly survey
	Readers volunteer in writing for mensagem
Revenue streams	One major donor
	Grants
	Donations
	Sponsored projects

Tsüri.ch (Switzerland)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Tsüri.ch is an independent digital and community-centred local newsroom from Zurich, Switzerland, which is designed to produce in-depth journalism for a young audience and to be financially supported by it.

All content on tsüri.ch is freely accessible, there is no paywall. Funded in 2015, today around 1,700 members support tsüri.ch's mission financially as members.

The primary distribution method for tsüri.ch's content is through newsletters. Under the name Civic Media, Tsüri-ch endeavours to engage with the community and brings the community together at up to 30 events a year.

Tsüri.ch's revenue model is diversified, relying primarily on reader contributions, civic media events, and advertising.

As a founding member of the Swiss association "Medien mit Zukunft" (Media with a Future), tsüri.ch actively participates in media advocacy and campaigns. This includes efforts to advocate for fair treatment of independent media in comparison to traditional publishing houses regarding journalism funding.

Newsroom's Mission Statement

"Tsüri.ch is committed to a sustainable, open, modern and environmentally conscious society. This can only be achieved with mutual trust: between the users and the editorial team. We therefore focus on transparency, authenticity and independence. We actively promote the political awareness of our target group." [x].

How It Started

Tsüri was founded in 2015 by a collective of young journalists and media students led by founder Simon Jacoby. Initially conceived as a two-year pilot project, the founders aimed to test the viability of local journalism tailored to a youthful demographic in Zurich. Two key motivations drove this initiative:

- Traditional local newspapers primarily targeted older demographics.

- Traditional local newspapers predominantly focused on print media.

Jacoby also mentions that they deliberately avoided creating a large-scale venture, considering their youth and relative inexperience in the industry. They appreciated the notion of it being a test, as it allowed them to explore experimental and independent approaches without the long-term commitment. Knowing they would conclude the project after two years provided them with the freedom to take more risks and innovate.

After approximately six months of planning, they commenced publishing content without even having a business model in place, as the project was never intended to be a money-making venture. To establish their website, they secured a modest grant of 6,000 Swiss francs from the Stiftung für Medienvielfalt, a foundation dedicated to fostering media diversity in Switzerland.

Jacoby recalls that the planning phase and initial months were somewhat chaotic and anarchic, compounded by a high turnover within the team. Many members were

juggling internships, academic pursuits, their first paid roles in editorial offices, and their involvement with Tsüri. Despite this unpredictability, Jacoby naturally became the focal point where organisational threads converged, gradually forming a semblance of structure.

As Tsüri gained traction over several months, the founders recognized its potential and decided to formalise the project into a sustainable business entity. They sought financial support from family and friends to establish Tsüri as a company and develop a comprehensive business plan. Around one and a half years into the project, they achieved a milestone by being able to offer salaries. Prior to this, everyone had been contributing on a voluntary basis. Subsequently, they could fund two full-time equivalent positions and compensate freelancers with modest fees.

Products

Tsüri's flagship product is its daily newsletter, named "Züri Briefing," which is dispatched every weekday morning at 6 am. This newsletter serves as a digest of the day's most significant news, interspersed with personal reflections from the editor and highlights of Tsüri's own notable articles or campaigns.

To craft the newsletter, the editor begins monitoring local news from 2 am onwards, compiling a press review that includes links to the original sources of the news. Beyond mere selection, the editor also provides textual categorization of the news items. While the primary aim of the newsletter is to offer a valuable service by curating the most pertinent news, it also endeavours to engage and entertain readers, offering daily tips. Tsüri characterizes the newsletter as: "Every morning at 6 a.m. you will find curated news, stories, and tips for the day in the Züri Briefing. Personalised. Informative. Entertaining."

The Züri Briefing is provided free of charge and currently boasts approximately 15,000 subscribers.

While the "Züri Briefing" stands as the cornerstone of Tsüri. ch's offerings, the platform also boasts a variety of other newsletters:

A weekly newsletter showcasing the Tsüri editorial team's top story recommendations.

The "Gemeinderats-Briefing" (Local council briefing), a specialized weekly newsletter focusing on local politics within Zurich.

A weekly event newsletter highlighting upcoming events in the area.

In addition to newsletters, Tsüri.ch publishes a range of articles and investigative pieces on its website. According to Jacoby, the content spans investigative research, reports, and articles, along with SEO-optimized content tailored to the youthful target demographic. This includes easily digestible content such as lists of restaurant or bar recommendations in Zurich, often created with input from the audience. Such articles serve to attract the target demographic to tsüri.ch through SEO optimization.

Revenue Streams / Finance

In 2023, Tsüri.ch's revenue amounted to approximately 850,000 CHF. According to Jacoby, for the past four years, all operations have been self-sustaining, with only a small remaining debt from previous years that still requires repayment.

The revenue mix is primarily divided into three main streams, each contributing roughly a third to the total sales:

1) Membership/Reader Revenue

2) Civic Media

3) Advertising

All content on Tsüri.ch is freely accessible to users, with approximately 1,700 individuals voluntarily contributing to membership fees, ranging between CHF 8 and CHF 15, with CHF 8 being the minimum fee. In return for their support, members gain access to the community, receive event invitations, and enjoy discounts on merchandise. Tsüri.ch also includes revenue from its own shop under the category of membership/reader revenue. While the shop's income constitutes a small portion of the overall revenue, Jacoby notes that it is financially viable and serves as a form of advertising when individuals wear Tsüri-branded clothing around the city.

Reader revenue encompasses smaller crowdfunding initiatives, typically ranging from 1 to 3 per year, aimed at financing specific projects or sensitive investigations. For instance, in 2024, a crowdfunding campaign with a target of CHF 20,000 was launched to ensure the financial stability of the municipal council newsletter. Although crowdfunding campaigns typically yield modest sums in the context of overall turnover, they are effective in engaging individuals who may not wish to commit as regular members but are willing to make one-time contributions. Additionally, existing paying members can also be encouraged to contribute one-off payments, supplementing their regular contributions—a practice that many members engage in, as per Jacoby's observations.

The Civic Media revenue stream at Tsüri.ch encompasses all aspects related to events and focus months (refer to Community/Engaged Journalism). This revenue primarily stems from partnerships for focus months and event sponsorships. Additionally, income is generated from ticket sales for chargeable events. With approximately 30 events annually, this segment has become one of the top three revenue sources for the organization.

Tsüri.ch offers both advertising and content marketing services. Advertising primarily occurs within the newsletter, featuring a "tip of the day" for CHF 100 CPM, equivalent to approximately CHF 1,500 currently. Customers also have the option to book prize draws or competitions within the newsletter, as well as entire advertising newsletters.

Banner advertising on the Tsüri.ch website is also available, limited to one banner per article. Customers can further place sponsored articles or reports on the website.

The newsroom itself operates as a for-profit stock corporation (AG). To access funding from charitable foundations, particularly for more complex research or financially non-self-sustaining projects, Tsüri.ch established a charitable organisation. This entity selectively applies for funding and supports the initiatives of the for-profit company accordingly.

Community / Engaged Journalism

Tsüri.ch encapsulates its collaboration with the community under the term "Civic Media."

The cornerstone of community engagement is events, with Tsüri.ch hosting approximately 30 annually. These events typically revolve around focus months, during which the editorial team delves deeply into a specific topic, such as the housing market's tense situation or the climate crisis. Event formats range from larger panel discussions to smaller, interactive gatherings. For instance, the Tsüri.ch pitch night features experts presenting their insights on the focus month's theme to an audience, while smaller interactive formats like the "Seedling exchange market" facilitate community participation, allowing individuals to exchange seedlings during the Climate focus Month. As detailed in the Revenue Streams/Finance section, events are monetized primarily through sponsorship and partnerships. However, Jacoby emphasizes that maintaining a non-commercial

atmosphere is paramount to ensure continued community engagement. "If that were to happen, no one would come anymore. The content is always the focus, and we can then commercialize the whole thing."

The Tsüri.ch community actively contributes to journalistic endeavors, participating in crowd-investigations such as "Who owns Seefeld?" where residents shared information about landlords to increase transparency in the housing market. Smaller formats like the "Wednesday question" invite community input, such as recommendations for the best Thai restaurant in the city, which the editorial team then transforms into listicles for the broader audience.

According to Jacoby, the core Tsüri.ch community comprises the 1,700 paying members, along with other individuals who attend events without financial contributions. Additionally, there's a growing number of attendees who frequent events regardless of the topic. Overall, Jacoby estimates the total engagement with Tsüri.ch, encompassing paying members, social media interactions, and event participation, to be around 5,000 individuals. To maintain connections with its members, Tsüri.ch periodically sends out a member newsletter containing event invitations. Nearly one-third of Tsüri.ch's staff is dedicated to community engagement, with three employees overseeing all aspects of Civic Media.

Biggest Challenges / Barriers

Tsüri.ch's most pressing challenge lies in expanding its membership program. Jacoby notes a significant surge in membership during the coronavirus pandemic, but growth has since plateaued or progressed sluggishly. "I firmly believe that in a city with over 400,000 inhabitants, we possess greater potential than just 1,700 paying members. Therefore, the primary challenge is to tap into this potential more effectively," Jacoby asserts. For Tsüri.ch, expanding its membership base represents a long-term endeavour with

substantial financial prospects. Jacoby highlights that the marginal costs associated with acquiring new members are minimal, and each new member reduces the overall risk, thereby enhancing the organisation's financial stability.

Biggest Success Factors

According to Jacoby, the primary success factor for Tsüri.ch is its community-driven approach, epitomised by its "Civic Media" philosophy. This approach not only underpins two of the main revenue streams but also shapes the trajectory of the third, advertising. It is deeply ingrained in Tsüri.ch's overarching strategy and mission.

Another crucial element of success is the organisation's steadfast focus on newsletters as key journalistic products. Jacoby emphasised the pivotal shift when Tsüri.ch decided to prioritise the dissemination of a daily newsletter to engage its audience. He explained that relying solely on the website for content distribution was insufficient, as individuals typically don't proactively visit the site daily. The synchronised delivery of content via newsletters ensures simultaneous access for subscribers, unlike platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Facebook, where content dissemination may be delayed. Additionally, transitioning to newsletters helped Tsüri.ch achieve independence from social media platforms, mitigating the risk associated with reliance on third-party platforms like Facebook, whose abrupt changes can significantly impact traffic.

A third contributing factor to Tsüri.ch's success is its collaborative engagement with other independent media outlets in Switzerland. Tsüri.ch is a founding member of the Swiss association "Medien mit Zukunft" (Media with a Future), which comprises approximately 30 independent online media entities. This association plays a dual role: advocating for media policy reform and funding mechanisms in Switzerland while also serving as a

collaborative platform for member media organisations. This supportive network has proven instrumental in Tsüri.ch's development and expansion.

Overview

Name	Tsüri.ch
Website	https://tsüri.ch
Location / Location of coverage	Zürich, Switzerland
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	440.000 population
Year they started publishing	2015
Language	German
Newsrooms mission	Tsüri.ch is committed to a sustainable, open, modern and environmentally conscious society. This can only be achieved with mutual trust: between the users and the editorial team. We therefore focus on transparency, authenticity and independence. We actively promote the political awareness of our target group.

Management and team

Founders	Simon Jacoby
Current management team	Simon Jacoby, Elio Donauer, Lara Blatter
Team	Full-time-equivalent employees: 10
	Part-time employees: 3

Governance Structures

Legal form of company	AG plus e.V.
Tax status	For-profit

Product & Revenue Streams

Main products	Daily Newsletter
Additional products	Website, Weekly newsletter, Local council newsletter, event newsletter
Audience and community reach	Daily Newsletter: 15,000 subscribers
	Membership: 1,700 paying members
Most important community engagement format	Events
Revenue streams	Revenue: 850.000 CHF / year
	Memberships/reader revenue (1/3) (including merchandise)
	Civic Media (1/3) (mostly from sponsorships for their events)
	Advertising (1/3) (mostly in their newsletter

Vilaweb (Spain)

Abstract / Brief Summary

Vilaweb is a national community newsroom based in Spain. Deeply rooted in the Catalan independence movement, they were one of the first newsrooms in Spain to fully adopt a digital-only strategy in 1995. Vilaweb was also an early adopter of a membership model to finance journalism, where the community pays a voluntary subscription to support the mission. This membership model was

introduced in 2004. In 2014, Vilaweb had around 2,000 subscribers. Today, more than 25,000 subscribers support Vilaweb financially.

Subscribers not only provide financial support to the newsroom but also play a crucial role in informing Vilaweb's reporting and governance.

The newsroom's mission statement

"VilaWeb exists to give a voice to the people of the Catalan Countries, serving as an instrument to control power, defend progressive values, fight for the common good, for the Catalan language, for freedom and culture."

How It Started

Vilaweb was founded in 1995 by journalists Vicent Partal and Assumpció Maresma. At the time, Partal and Maresma were working as editors at La Vanguardia and El Temps, becoming increasingly frustrated with the state of journalism. This frustration led them to establish their own newsroom.

Due to Partal's background in technology and the early internet, they decided to launch Vilaweb as an online newsroom from the outset. The initial team consisted of Partal, Maresma, and a journalist friend. In the first year, Partal continued to work at La Vanguardia to help finance Vilaweb.

Partal recalls that in the beginning, they were unsure of Vilaweb's future direction and viewed it primarily as an experiment, especially since very few people were using the Internet in 1995. In the early years, Vilaweb mainly earned revenue by programming websites for others and creating online content for phone companies. It wasn't until 2001 that Partal and the team realized the significant role the Internet could play in the future of journalism. Around that time, they also began selling advertising on Vilaweb.

Three years later, in 2004, the team decided to ask readers for financial support, becoming one of the first to do so while most legacy media continued to offer online content for free. It took Vilaweb 11 years to reach its first 2,000 subscribers. After that, growth increased significantly (to 25,000 subscribers today), which Partal attributes to a general increase in willingness to pay for online content, such as music and video-on-demand.

Looking back, Partal emphasizes the importance of not only having a journalistic vision but also adopting a business mindset.

Products

Vilaweb's main product is its website. In terms of content, Vilaweb distinguishes itself from other newsrooms through several fundamental strategic decisions:

• Focused Reporting: They exclusively cover politics, business, culture, and science, consistently omitting other topics.

• National Coverage in Catalan: They report on national topics in Catalan and see themselves as a newsroom for the entire nation, not as a local or regional newspaper, unlike most competitors in Catalonia.

• Voluntary Membership Model: The subscription or membership model is voluntary. People pay primarily to support the community.

• Independent Analyses and Interviews: In addition to news coverage, they prioritize analyses and interviews that are independent of current affairs. At least four such articles are published nightly for the next day, and subscribers receive these articles in advance via an extra newsletter.

Vilaweb offers additional products, some of which are exclusive to subscribers. Besides the subscribers-only newsletter, there are thematic newsletters covering

various beats or written as personal newsletters by specific journalists. To cover foreign affairs, Vilaweb licences and translates reports from the Washington Post. Vilaweb also produces podcasts, with the most important being a weekly video podcast featuring two journalists discussing politics, which reaches around 60,000 people weekly. Subscribers have access to audio versions of Vilaweb's articles and exclusive games. Vilaweb hosts its own Catalan version of The New York Times' Spelling Bee, as well as crossword puzzles and Worldle.

Five years ago, Vilaweb shifted its focus to attract more young people by producing more video content and developing products specifically designed for younger audiences, such as a podcast about motherhood by a 25-year-old female journalist.

Revenue Streams / Finance

Vilaweb's annual revenue is €2.5 million. Seventy percent of this revenue comes from reader contributions, with around 25,000 subscribers paying voluntarily. Most of the remaining income is generated from advertising. A very small portion comes from the sales of a bookshop located at the front of Vilaweb's newsroom in Barcelona.

Community / Engaged Journalism

Vilaweb sees itself as deeply rooted in the Catalan independence movement. Building relationships with their community members is therefore extremely important to them. This commitment is evident not only in their special formats but also in the community mindset that Vilaweb has established. For instance, Vilaweb operates from a freely accessible editorial office, the front part of which is a bookshop. This setup makes it very easy for people to interact with the journalists. Partal also says that he personally answers every email from the community.

The most important community format is the annual Vilaweb Assembly, a series of 10 to 20 events held throughout the year in different cities across Spain. All Vilaweb subscribers are invited to these events, where they can discuss the future of Vilaweb with the editorial team.

WhatsApp is another crucial channel for community contact. This idea emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic when Vilaweb created a WhatsApp group with doctors from hospitals across Spain to help assess the situation, carry out fact-checking, and critically review government guidelines. Vilaweb currently maintains several dozen such expert WhatsApp groups that discuss various topics, providing knowledge the editorial team can tap into as needed.

Paying subscribers can also comment on articles and discuss them with other subscribers and journalists on the Vilaweb website. To maintain civilised discussions, the use of clear names is mandatory.

Despite their openness towards the community, Vilaweb also sets clear boundaries. While the community can participate in various ways, Vilaweb makes it clear that professional journalists and the management team ultimately make the decisions.

Biggest Success Factors

Vilaweb's biggest success factor has been its early adoption of the membership model as a new way to finance journalism, even though this strategy took over ten years to fully develop. Significant increases in membership were observed during key events such as the Catalan referendum in 2017, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the war in Ukraine.

Flexibility and innovation have also been crucial. Vilaweb has explored various financing methods beyond selling journalism, such as programming websites and producing

online content for others. Partal emphasises that every decision at Vilaweb balances journalistic integrity with business considerations. For example, they decided not to cover football, despite its importance in Catalonia, and opted to make a deal with The Washington Post for foreign affairs coverage instead of building their own correspondent network.

Partal also notes that Vilaweb benefits from not being a large company, maintaining a functional team size of about 30 people, which he considers perfect for a national newspaper not focused on day-to-day news.

Consistency has been crucial for Vilaweb, ensuring their mission and focus are always clear to the public and avoiding any confusion about their identity. At the same time, Partal mentions that they have reinvented Vilaweb three or four times over its 29 years of existence.

Overview

Name	Vilaweb
Website	https://www.vilaweb.cat/
Location / Location of coverage	Catalonia
Size of potential audience/ town region covered	7,7 million living in Catalonia
Year they started publishing	1995
Language	Catalan
Newsrooms mission statement	VilaWeb exists to give a voice to the people of the Catalan Countries, serving as an instrument to control power, defend progressive values, fight for the common good, for the Catalan language, for freedom and culture.

Management and team

Founders	Vicent Partal, Assumpció Maresma
Current management team	Vicent Partal (Director), Assumpció Maresma (Editor-in-chief)
Team	Full-time employees: 30 FTE

Product & Revenue Streams

Legal form of company	Sociedad de responsabilidad limitada (S.L.)
Tax status	For-profit

Additional products Games

Main products	Website
	Podcasts
	Youtube-Channel
	Newsletters
Additional products	Games
Audience and community reach	Website: 2,5 to 3 million unique users / month
	Subscriber newsletter: 25,000 subscribers
	Morning newsletter: 40,000 subscribers
	Plus several topic specific newsletters, with the most successful having 15,000 subscribers
	Instagram: 109.000 follower
	Facebook: 180.000 follower
	Twitter: 363.000 follower
	Youtube: 16.400 subscribers
Most important community engagement format	Vilaweb annual assemblies
Revenue streams	Subscriptions/Membership
	Advertising
	Shop sells

Summary of European Community Media Cases

Name	Country	Points in Press Freedom Index by Freedom House	Who we interviewed	Founding year
The Bristol Cable	United Kingdom	91/100		2014
Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach	Germany	93/100	Georg Watzlawek (Founder)	2009
Dublin Inquirer	Ireland	97/100	Lois Kapila (Founder)	2015
Iașul Nostru	Romania	83/100	Alex Enășescu (Founder)	2021
Magločistač	Serbia	57/100	Mirana Dmitrović (Founder)	2015
Mecseki Müzli	Hungary	65/100	Ervin Güth (Founder)	2021
Mensagem de Lisboa	Portugal	96/100	Catarina Carvalho (Founder)	2020
Tsüri.ch	Switzerland	96/100	Simon Jacoby (Founder)	2015
Vilaweb	Spain	90/100	Vicent Partal (Founder	1995

Team Size	Revenue streams (in order of importance)	Core Product (s)	Core Community engagement formats
10	Grants, Membership, Advertising	Website	Callouts, Events
3 FTE	Membership, Advertising, Sponsorships	Daily newsletter	Events
5 FTE + freelancers	Subscriptions, Grants	Website, Newsletter, Print edition	Collaborative investigations, Development of Civic Tech, Events, Whatsapp groups
3 freelancers / consultants	Grants, membership, advertising	Weekly Newsletter	
3 FTE	Grants, Crowdfunding campaigns (2021, 2022)	Website	
No team	Grants, membership, sponsorships	Weekly newsletter	Audience Content Loop
13 FTE	One major donor, Grants, Donations, Sponsored projects	Website, Social Media Channel, Newsletter	Reader dialogue via newsletter, Events, Pop-up newsrooms, Community Meetups, Focus groups, Yearly feedback survey, Readers contributing articles
10 FTE	Membership, Events and Sponsoring, Advertising	Daily newsletter	Events
30 FTE	Membership, Advertising	Website	Annual assembly, Thematic WhatsApp groups with experts

What can we learn across those case studies

With the newsrooms that we have included in this report, we have tried to cover as wide a range of models and approaches as possible. Nevertheless, we are aware that there are many more that are not included in this report. Because the analysed landscape is still very volatile and innovative, there can hardly be any two newsrooms that are the same.

Our small selection also shows that the direction taken by the newsrooms often depends on the experience, expertise and preferences of the founders but also on external influences. Because those newsrooms are normally deeply rooted in their community, they tend to make use of the resources and support available there. They are also very agile, constantly taking on opportunities that are opening up, instead of following an exact strategy. While this of course varies greatly, there is a common ground that lies in focussing on the needs of their community (read more about that in Community / Engaged Journalism Model). Because the whole ecosystem of independent journalism is still a space of innovation and experimentation, there are just a few examples of local newsrooms across Europe that can be called sustainable, stable or even growing yet. Prominent examples not included in this report are Manchester Mill in the United Kingdom or RUMS in Germany, while from the ones included Vilaweb, Mensagem or Tsüri.ch can be mentioned.

The big question that has become apparent in our investigation of newsrooms is how other newsrooms can adopt methods and innovations that work well for those sustainable newsrooms. Transformative research could play a major role in empowering more newsrooms to observe and replicate lessons made. Research and practice working hand in hand could help to build an innovation engine which ensures that innovations and models that work are adopted by the entire industry and can in turn be further developed.

Self-definition/ Mission

All newsrooms included in this report have shown that they are strongly mission- and impact driven. It stands out that, although they all have different approaches to it, their reason to be is to somehow improve the lives of members in their communities. Therefore, all of them have adopted some kind of solutions-focused approach to reporting, trying to be constructive about or even solving problems with and for their communities. By enabling participation in many forms, amplifying the voices of people in their communities and fighting disinformation they try to strengthen their respective local democracies.

Taking this into account you could argue to look at those newsrooms more as social enterprises or impact startups that redefine the role of local media, than classic media organisations. By addressing areas where people lack access to local news and opportunities to engage with what's happening in their communities, these organisations not only inform but also empower communities, fostering a sense of civic engagement and solidarity that strengthens the social fabric. Because of these efforts that sometimes go far beyond traditional reporting, those newsrooms often find themselves on the fence between being a civic society organisation and a media organisation. Although this is rarely a problem for their own self-image, it does present them with challenges to the outside world because the approach is not only met with a great deal of scepticism it can also be a problem in terms of legal status, e.g. in Germany, where journalism is not yet recognised as a charitable purpose in the tax code.

Nevertheless being impact-oriented or filling a gap was always the main driver for the newsrooms included in this report. E.g. Magločistač is deeply committed to inspiring change through their reporting, motivating citizens and officials to take action beyond mere awareness. Similarly, Mensagem de Lisboa is meticulously tracking the impact of their stories, whether they lead to policy changes or community action. Tsüri.ch's mission from the beginning was to build a newsroom that addresses a younger audience with in-depth local journalism, simply because they felt it was badly needed in Zurich. The Bristol Cable started with the mission, to radically reimagine how local journalism is produced and funded.

Products

All newsrooms portrayed in this report adopt a digital-first approach. However, some, like The Bristol Cable and Dublin Inquirer, recognize the value of print as a means to reach diverse audiences.

For most of the newsrooms, newsletters have become a very central product. The reason for that which stands out and was mentioned by several participants is that newsletters allow newsrooms to have a much more direct relationship with their audiences, making them less independent on algorithms of Social Media platforms and their goodwill for local news. With newsletters, newsrooms can build their own reach and retain the most power over the distribution of their content. By personalising their newsletters and delivering content much more directly to interested readers, newsrooms can increase the loyalty but also the engagement of their audiences.

Social Media still remains a very important channel to reach people, especially to grow audiences. It isn't mentioned as an engagement channel itself though.

When it comes to content, most newsrooms maintain a balance between investigative reporting and the coverage of local interest stories, such as portraying local businesses, their city's history or the cultural heritage. Most newsrooms interviewed also tend to do long-form and in-depth reporting. To make people's voices heard, especially of those normally not portrayed in traditional media, is also an important component and methodology of their local reporting.

Due to lacking resources, but also because it isn't part of their mission, most of the newsrooms in this study do not engage in news reporting. While all others see their content more as an alternative or supplement to the content provided by traditional local media outlets, only Vilaweb and Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach also cover news.

It is noticeable that most newsrooms identify existing gaps in the local information offering and then try to fill these gaps with their reporting. In Bergisch Gladbach, there was actually a lack of news reporting in the city, that the Bürgerportal is filling now. Tsüri.ch found a gap in serving a younger audience with in-depth journalism. Mecseki Müsli enriches the news coverage of other media by providing additional context or fact-checking, because this is precisely the gap that traditional media have.

Community/ Engaged journalism model

Although the degree of integration of the community into journalistic and organisational processes varies enormously in the newsrooms we examined (from very integrated, as at Bristol Cable, to little integration at Müsli or Iasul Nostru), all organisations have at least adopted a mindset of working community-centric. In its simplest form it can mean to develop products alongside the community's needs, as seen at Iasul Nostru. Having at least good feedback loops and listening practices in place, seems to be a common ground.

What we've seen as well is that events, meetups or other forms of creating physical space play a very vital role in developing an engaged journalism model. While it's mostly a wish to do more in that area at the smaller organisations interviewed, bigger organisations, who are actually able to organise resource-heavy events, often see them as a main factor for building a vibrant community. At Mensagem de Lisboa Pop-up-Newsrooms played an important role in making marginalised voices heard, at Tsüri.ch events are even making up for around 30 % of their yearly revenue. For VilaWeb it's crucial to have a walk-in newsroom and a café, to be physically present in their community.

For many, working together closely with their community and adopting a public-interest focus is an enabler for projects and much of the output. At Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach for example, they are only able to cover a wide range of topics with a team of three FTE, because community members contribute articles (e.g. about local sports or carnival) on a voluntary basis. At Dublin Inquirer big projects like a collision tracker (tracking collisions in the city with bikes involved) were only possible because volunteers helped setting it up and gathering the data.

There is also a tendency to see local businesses as part of the community rather than customers for advertising. Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach runs a partner program for local businesses and organisations, granting them a certain visibility on the website for a recurring contribution to their membership program. Tsüri.ch partners with local businesses and organisation for their events. Mensagem was able to win the Port of Lisbon as a sponsor for a project about a refugee from World War II. The story had been discovered by a mensagem reporter. Together with an international artist they created a mural, developed an exhibition and turned the story into a book. The partnership was a great match for the Port of Lisbon as it was a key location for the story.

How they start

Founding independent newsrooms mirrors the challenges inherent in launching any startup, especially requiring significant time and often personal financial investment from their founders. Many of the newsrooms interviewed adopt a "bootstrapped model", with founders investing their free time and sometimes their own money while also having other occupations.

Only a few of the founders interviewed had a significant amount of funding in the beginning. Mensagem had a donor who provided money directly from the start, Iasul Nostru started with a 40.000 Euro grant from Substack. For Mensagem it meant that they were able to build a strong team right from the beginning that then was able to not only develop a strong journalistic product addressing a broad audience. They were also able to raise further funding, which is resourceful as well. One conclusion is, that early money unlocks audiences but especially further funding for projects or the core of the organisation.

Basically all other newsrooms had to be run as a side-project of the founders first, mostly in their free-time. What doesn't seem to happen at all are investments, neither local or impact investments or other forms. What founders tend to rather do is asking for the support of family and friends. For example Tsüri.ch got a small, symbolic grant for programming their website. After several months of working voluntarily they decided to ask family members and friends for money to be able to set up a proper company. VilaWeb is a special case as they decided to do web development for other organisations in order to make money in the starting phase.

Who is starting

The original idea of founding their own local media is often based on the fact that the founders themselves perceive a gap and do not see their own needs in the provision of information being met. The founders therefore generally see themselves as part of a community that isn't satisfied with what's there. The founding team of Tsüri.ch consisted of media students who did not see the reality of their own lives reflected in the traditional media. At the Bristol Cable the feeling that traditional local media wasn't really covering pressing issues anymore and faced a decline in trustworthiness, was a main driver for founding.

Being a solo-founder is common, as finding like-minded individuals with the requisite experience and passion, especially in smaller towns, presents a significant challenge. The absence of business backgrounds among the team is mentioned several times as a major blocker for developing a sustainable business model. While some have attempted to compensate by taking courses and leveraging existing networks, newsletters, and case studies, primarily sourced from the U.S., there remains a notable deficiency in adopting a business mindset. At Vilaweb focusing on business and the journalistic product together is acknowledged as the most important thing for building a sustainable media organisation. Mensagem has described it as short-coming not to have had someone on the team from the outset who is familiar with business issues. That is why they now get an advisor on board for this.

Finance: Revenue Streams

Because strengthening local democracy is generally anchored in the mission of the newsrooms, most of them want their content to be freely accessible to everyone. This is why most of the newsrooms interviewed operate with membership models in various forms, where paying is an option rather than a must. The Dublin Inquirer is the only one with a paywall, but also having workflows in place to grant access to the content for people in the community who can't afford to pay. Generally speaking the decision for membership models vs. subscription models is always a field of experimentation that is done in consultation with the community.

We also see some experimentation with revenue streams, especially with local advertising being treated more creatively. At Mensagem, the Port of Lisbon was persuaded to sponsor a cultural project. Magločistač regularly introduced local businesses in articles and now are looking to charge for those. At Bürgerportal Bergisch Gladbach and Iașul Nostru businesses and local organisations are making up a big part of the membership income. At the Bürgerportal businesses agreeing to a partnership get discounts on advertising. At Mecseki Müsli a local NGO is sponsoring a local history section in the newsletter. Tsüri.ch developed many different advertising formats in their newsletters, from simple banner adverts and everyday tips to entire special newsletters that advertising partners can buy. The Bristol Cable has developed an ethical advertising carta together with their community to make sure only local businesses that do good for the community are able to advertise in the Cable's print edition.

When it comes to campaigns, e.g. crowdfunding or membership campaigns we see that most organisations don't have the capacity to successfully run them, as they tend to be very resource-heavy. Nevertheless e.g. Tsüri.ch is quite successful with running two to three crowdfunding campaigns a year to finance certain projects. Before they specialised in crowdfunding, they had tried to achieve the same financial results with membership campaigns, but this was generally far less successful. Magločistač did three successful crowdfunding campaigns in 2020 and 2021, but currently rule it out due to the extensive efforts needed.

Path to sustainability

The newsrooms we interviewed are in very different phases of reaching sustainability. With the newsrooms that are longer on the market we can see, that it takes about five to ten years from founding to get to a financially healthy place. At Tsüri.ch for example they made the first small profit after six years. Since then, there has been a slight profit every year, even though there are still debts from the first few years that need to be paid off. Even after ten or more years, it does not seem unusual for organisations to have to fight for financial survival. Particularly when grants are relied upon and these are discontinued, as we see with Bristol Cable, for example, organisations are repeatedly faced with the major challenge of fundraising. This is why most organisations try to diversify their revenue streams as much as possible and, above all, to put the membership part on a stable footing to become less independent on outside factors.

When organisations receive grants to support their core activities, they usually also use this as an opportunity to develop new products, initiate further projects and reach new audiences. A major challenge is then to maintain the activities even after the funding timeline.

We also don't want to ignore the fact that the team is often paid less than in traditional media companies. At Bristol Cable and Tsüri.ch, for example, all team members earn the same, regardless of their position, but at a comparatively low salary level. What we also frequently observe is that founders in particular often work unpaid for several years while paying their team members or freelancers for idealistic reasons. We also see this in newsrooms that are not included in this report, such as RUMS or Viernull, where the founders and management work without pay or for very low salaries, while the team and freelancers are paid comparatively well.

Operations and governance

While challenges regarding legislation of setting up a media business are very different in different countries, everyone mentioned certain barriers. May it regard taxation, the status as a non-profit or the acceptance of as a social enterprise in the media sector. In Germany a big challenge for community media is reaching the status as a non-profit organisation. In Germany for example, because journalism as such is not a charitable purpose within the meaning of the German tax code, newsrooms can only achieve non-profit status on detours, for example if they also offer educational programmes or other side-projects. That makes it hard for them to establish a donation-based membership model which would suit their mission best. Figuring out how to overcome these barriers takes a lot of resources from the founders, especially in the beginning, not only in Germany.

For most of the newsrooms technology is a big factor. The challenge is to build a secure and reliable tech stack that can be maintained with a small team. As with business issues, the challenge here is that there are rarely any team members with a tech background, especially at the beginning. This is why most organisations often fall back on tools that make it as easy as possible for them to launch their project. Tools mentioned that fulfil this requirement are Newspack, Substack and Ghost, all of which are tailored to media and content creators. While this usually works well in the beginning, some newsrooms seem to reach the limits of these solutions after a while, which motivates them to develop their own.

The Bristol Cable has developed its own membership platform to fulfil its specific needs as a cooperation, which is now being scaled to other newsrooms under the name beabee. Tsüri.ch is involved in a project called We.Publish, a CMS that is tailored to community newsrooms and is being further developed by several Swiss newsrooms in co-creation.

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Policy Paper

Media Recovery in Ukraine
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Executive Summary

Two years into the full-scale war in Ukraine have acutely impacted the country's media landscape at national, regional, and local levels. At the country level, the intensity and terrorist nature of the war and the economic crisis caused by it have aggravated multiple hurdles for all media operations and increased risks for freedom of the press. At the regional and local levels, the safety and operations of local newsrooms were acutely impacted, leading to shutdowns, a lack of funds, shortages of employees, psychological stress and trauma, and a lack of or insufficient access to information. In turn, multiple communities faced significant challenges in navigating the critical information needs necessary for making informed decisions. As Ukraine begins its recovery and reconstruction, strong and independent media are essential to facilitating dialogue and reconciliation, overcoming the consequences of war, and its continuous efforts toward full democratic transition by enhancing transparency, accountability, and civic engagement. This paper details the necessity for support of nationwide and local media in Ukraine, highlights successful support projects, and provides specific policy recommendations for policymakers, donors, and international monetary institutions.

3.1 The Need for Media Support in Times of War: Current State of Media in Ukraine

The conflict in Ukraine has caused significant damage to the media landscape and posed multiple risks for independent journalism in Ukraine, including increased risks to the safety of journalists and to press freedom. Financial strains due to reduced advertising revenues and heightened operational costs further challenge media outlets. The critical role of media in providing accurate information to the public, countering misinformation and propaganda, facilitating

dialogue and reconciliation, and monitoring and reporting on reconstruction efforts has been weakened over the course of full-scale war due to the existence and further rise of news deserts.

One of the most recent research reports by the Media Development Foundation in Ukraine, published in February 2024, outlines the urgency of the rise of news deserts in Ukraine and the growth of the entire local districts (or the whole regions) into informationally unhealthy or partially healthy areas [1]. The tendency signifies that multiple local communities have limited access to sufficient information about public safety, healthcare, politics and governance, education, transportation, economic development, environment, and civic initiatives.

While the news deserts phenomenon in Ukraine is also part of the global tendency (the new studies in the European Union[2] and United States[3] outlined the key implications of the spreading news deserts), the full-scale war aggravates the tendency, since inadequate informational health in terms of ensuring critical information needs of communities 1) weakens public safety and national resilience, 2) adversely affects Ukraine's democratic transition, nourished by broad public awareness and informed decision-making at the local level; 3) increase the risks for strengthening the Russian propaganda and misinformation, in particular in the areas most affected by war (Eastern and Southern Ukraine). Thus, the issue of communities' access to critical information is the basis for understanding the media landscape impacted by multiple crises and the war in Ukraine.

Direct war consequences for media include:

1) journalists' victims of the war (Reporters Without Borders documented more than 100 journalists who have been killed, injured, kidnapped, taken hostage, tortured, or caught up in bombings[4];

2) media shutdowns (233 Ukrainian media outlets have had to close since 24 February 2022, according to Reporters Without Borders and National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NUJU));

3) displacement of journalists, lack of journalists, and damage to media infrastructure;

4) increased risks to press freedom and safety;

5) strengthening the propaganda component of the news structure as part of countermeasures in response to Russian disinformation.

The full-scale invasion and the terrorist nature of the war waged against Ukraine have brought multiple economic consequences that impact the media market and landscape at all levels. The economic crisis in Ukraine (GDP fell by 30% in 2022 – World Bank) has shrunk the Ukrainian market in general and the advertisement market in particular, which used to be a significant source of funding for independent media in the pre-war period. The heightened operational costs combined with the limited advertising market challenged all independent media.

The economic crisis was followed by a rapid increase in foreign development aid sent to Ukraine since February 24, 2022. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) stated that the amount of foreign development assistance directed to support Ukraine in 2022 was US$28.7 billion, almost 22 times higher than in 2015. This made Ukraine one of the world's largest recipients of donor assistance; development aid in the form of grants has become one of the most significant sources of funding for

nationwide and local media. According to MDF's research on the state of independent local media, 76% of surveyed online media outlets have between 70% and 100% donor funding in their funding models sample of 36 independent newsrooms) [5]. The case study of eight major nationwide publishers has shown that all surveyed media outlets worked with donors with a share of donor support in their funding models between 30% and 95% in 2023 [link to the research that will be published shortly].

According to the survey by the MDF, the most pressing war-related risks brought by war for media in 2023 include:

- lack of funding;
- difficulties with finding employees;
- exposure to the ongoing war events and blackouts;
- severe psychological distress and trauma;
- mobilization;
- insufficient or lack of access to information, etc. [5]

Overall, the lack of funding was reported as the most pressing issue for independent local newsrooms in Ukraine. At the same time, while the financial crisis impacted all of the media, there are regional differences in the funding models of local publishers. The research by the MDF has shown that foreign aid in grants constituted 45% of the revenues of Western Ukrainian local newsrooms and 50% of those in Central Ukraine as of the end of 2023. In contrast, other parts of Ukraine had significantly higher shares of donor funding in the reported revenues: 73% for Northern Ukrainian local publishers, 87% for South Ukrainian local publishers, and 93% for those in Eastern Ukraine. Based on this data, the recent policy brief by the MDF advocates targeting Western and Central regions of Ukraine equally to Eastern, Southern, and Northern Ukraine when it comes to providing funding to enhance the country's resilience and decrease the number of news deserts.

While donor funding has become the most important source of survival for local publishers, the market formed by grant possibilities posed some challenges for many newsrooms in Ukraine, according to research by the MDF.

The current major characteristics and problems of donor funding in Ukraine:

1. Different goals of grant-supported media outlets. For most surveyed media outlets, in particular at the local level, the purpose of receiving donor support was to survive and meet basic needs, mainly ensuring salaries for staff. These teams often refused to make any other expenditures, such as office rent or equipment purchases, and experienced delays in paying salaries. The search for grant opportunities was constant, and the administrative burden of reporting and constant new commitments was high. A small part of the surveyed media had more stability in their work with donors.

2. Accelerated and chaotic growth of some media organizations through project grants. The constant need to find new grants has become a regular agenda for most editorial teams. For some of them, project grants aimed at implementing a specific project have become an opportunity to maintain their existence. Nonetheless, such grants impose additional administrative obligations on the teams and change existing priorities of work or even suspend them altogether. Project grants were often combined with training and hiring new staff. It was also common for editorial teams to combine several projects at the same time. Completion of some projects meant the search for new ones and new editorial transformations. An issue reported by all media outlets with a high share of donor funding was the short-term nature of grants and the lack of institutional funding that could allow the media to develop integrally.

3. Exhaustion of editorial teams persistently functioning in survival mode. The full-scale war has left media outlets vulnerable in every Ukraine's region. Two of the media outlets that MDF reached out to as part of the research were in the process of partially closing its production and laying off part of its staff because of a lack of funding. Military service draft and staffing issues, saving funds on office rent, the introduction of remote work mode, and the constant need for donor support have put some media outlets in what some have called a "war for funding." Some outlets noted that the workload on their teams was much greater than they could handle, primarily because of a lack of staff and the inability to plan long-term personnel policies and invest in the training and development of specialists involved in short-term projects. Some editorial teams also noted issues in assessing the real cost of projects.

4. Need for long-term institutional support. All media outlets with a high level of donor support in their financial support models have noted the absolute need to attract donor support in the future and are looking for opportunities to receive institutional support. Thus, donor assistance for media organizations has become both an opportunity and a challenge in the context of war. The multiple increase in supply has enabled more organizations to continue to exist. At the same time, the donor support market has changed compared to the period of 2014-2021. The dynamics and experience of media organizations during the full-scale war of 2022-2023 also changed. As of the end of 2023, there were clusters of media organizations that had the stable experience of working with donors and those whose experience was chaotic.

5. Tenders of local authorities as a risk for editorial independence. As an alternative to donor funding, some local publishers began to look for opportunities for financing through participation in tenders of local authorities, which increased the latter's influence on the local media landscape and undermined the independence of newsrooms when the share of such non-donor funding in newsroom revenues was growing rapidly (or was the only source of the revenues).

Thus, given the variety of factors impacting the media operations in Ukraine in times of war and the different levels of urgency and intensity for different parts (regions) of Ukraine, the key issues and needs identified in recent research can be summarised into clusters.

Clusters of key issues:

1. Critical Information Needs: Ensuring the informational health of communities (local areas, regions, the country's level) by supporting media in order to provide access to critical information necessary for democratic transformations and preventing the reverse of democracy building;

2. Media Survival and Financial Strain: Preventing shutdowns of independent media outlets due to the lack of possibilities of funding in times of reduced advertising revenues and increased costs of operation, including security expenses;

3. Safety for Journalists: Overcoming the direct consequences of war resulted in media infrastructure damage, journalists' displacement, and overall level of security in the profession;

4. Threats to Press Freedom: There has been an increase in threats, harassment, and violence against journalists, limiting their ability to report freely and safely.

5. Democracy Transition and Watchdog Role of Media: war accelerated some of the Ukrainian transition processes, such as gaining the status of a candidate for accession to the EU; at the same time, the need for a watchdog role has increased, in particular at the local level

6. Help with the exhaustion of editorial teams persistently functioning in survival mode and accelerated and chaotic growth.

3.2 Existing Media Recovery Plans and Their Recommendations

Several initiatives and plans have been put in place to support the Ukrainian media landscape:

1. The European Union's Support for Ukrainian Media: The EU has provided financial support, training, and equipment to Ukrainian journalists and media outlets through various programs, including the European Endowment for Democracy (EED).

2. UNESCO's Response to the Crisis: UNESCO has been actively involved in providing emergency support, training on safety and digital security, and promoting freedom of expression.

3. Internews and USAID Initiatives: Internews, with support from USAID, has implemented projects to provide emergency funding, equipment, and safety training for journalists.

4. Ukrainian Media Fund: provides extensive grant support to Ukrainian organizations to enable them to carry out various activities, including content production, media monitoring, investigative journalism, and media literacy initiatives (€1 200 000,00 raised for Ukrainian media till April 2024)

5. The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF): launched the "Voices of Ukraine" program which includes journalist stipends, fellowships for media workers (furnished apartments, healthcare, psychosocial support, and professional training), and a conference on war reporting.

6. The International Media Support (IMS): focuses on ensuring the safety of journalists, sustaining national and regional media partners, and aligning global tech companies with local needs to counter disinformation and enhance resilience.

7. The Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF): focuses on enhancing the sustainability and resilience of regional newsrooms, particularly those near the frontline or in liberated territories.

8. Other: IREX, National Endowment for Democracy, Deutsche Welle Akademie, Prague Civil Society Centre, Civil Society Organization «Initiative Center to Support Social Action "Ednannia," The Fix Foundation, International Renaissance Foundation, Media in Cooperation and Transition (MICT), Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Thomson Reuters Foundation, Solidarity Fund PL, n-ost, International Press Institute, The Ukrainian Cultural Foundation, Goethe-Institut, Pact ENGAGE, Reporters Without Borders, ERIM Equal Rights & Independent Media, NDI, Chemonics, SIDA, People in Need, Heinrich Böll Stiftung, UNDP, Free Press for Eastern Europe, WAN-IFRA, European Journalism Centre, Open Media Hub, JX Fund – European Fund for Journalism in Exile, DT Global, Council of Europe. The British, U.S., Czech and Australian Embassies in Ukraine and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Netherlands also fund Ukrainian media. These initiatives have recommended several actions, including:

- Providing emergency financial support and equipment;

- Offering safety and digital security training for journalists;

- Promoting legal protections for journalists;

- Supporting capacity-building programs and long-term financial sustainability of media outlets etc.

3.3 Expanded Policy Recommendations

Based on the recent research, existing recovery plans, and identified needs, the following expanded recommendations are proposed:

3.3.1   For Policymakers in Ukraine

1. Create a National Media Support Fund:

- Establish a fund dedicated to rebuilding and supporting media infrastructure. This fund should prioritize long-term institutional support for independent media organizations, focused on prioritizing sustainability of media operations and the professional growth of journalists (as opposed to the short-term project-centered grants), the grants for rebuilding damaged facilities, purchasing equipment, and providing operational support to media outlets.

- Despite limited trust in such a fund, given a history of short-lived initiatives, this is the most helpful a Ukrainian state could be — therefore, an institution should be put in place with a system of checks and balances. International Board of Directors, civic society organizations' participation, and the inclusion of independent lead editors into the decision-making process could be beneficial for media organizations without extensive fundraising history.

Examples from Other Countries:

- Norway: The Norwegian Media Authority administers a Media Support Scheme that provides financial support to media organizations, ensuring diversity and quality in media content.

- Canada: The Canada Periodical Fund offers financial assistance to print magazines, non-daily newspapers, and digital periodicals to support their operations and ensure the availability of diverse Canadian content.

- France: The French government provides subsidies through the Fonds de soutien à l'émergence et à l'innovation dans la presse to support innovative projects and digital transformation in the media sector.

- The Netherlands: Dutch Journalism Fund (formerly Dutch Press Fund) supported by the government of the Netherlands to strengthen struggling media and provide financial support to investigative journalism and the professionalisation of local media. Public Broadcasting Media Fund supports public broadcasting corporations, including local and regional public broadcasters.

- Sweden: During the COVID-19 pandemic, which has led to a 50 percent drop in advertising revenue for some of the country's local and national newspapers, the Swedish government has announced a wave of financial support to help the culture and media sectors.

- Denmark: Danish Journalism Fund supports independent media outlets, focusing on investigative journalism and the professionalisation of local media. Also, Public Service Fund will be expanded to support Danish-language content for regional and national radio and podcasts. Independent Research Fund Denmark supports specific research activities including those in the media and journalism.

2. Strengthen Legal Protections for Journalists and Enforce Equal Access to Information Across Regions:

- Strengthen legal frameworks to protect journalists from harassment, violence, and censorship. Give more credibility to reports from organizations in the sphere — National Union of Journalists of Ukraine (NSJU), Independent Media Union of Ukraine, Institute of Mass Information, Commission on Journalistic Ethics, etc. They possess in-depth knowledge of abuse against journalists and have experience in handling those cases. Acknowledge local media actors and their accounts of local cases.

- Provide additional support for Ukrainian civil society actors, ensuring fast and easily accessible legal aid for journalists who expose corruption at the community level as well as the national level.

- Amend the Criminal Code of Ukraine to increase penalties for crimes against journalists, ensuring that attacks on journalists are treated as severe offenses. Introduce specific provisions to protect journalists from Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) aimed at silencing critical reporting during the post-war period of recovery and rebuilding.

- SLAPP Cases: Ukrainian journalists have faced several SLAPPs, such as those targeting investigative journalists who expose corruption. By introducing anti-SLAPP legislation, Ukraine can deter frivolous lawsuits intended to intimidate journalists. If possible, waive any legal fees for small-scale media organizations, especially local ones.

- Establish a clear set of rules for access to information local authorities possess. As of now, there is a problem with different oblasts' military administrations interpreting access to information based on the personality of a person who has filed a request. It should be done by regulation.

3. Maintain Media Diversity and Pluralism:

- Promote Diverse Ownership: Provide incentives, such as tax breaks and grants, to encourage the establishment of media outlets by diverse owners, including women, ethnic minorities, and regional entrepreneurs.

- Independent local media should be the priority for National Media Fund programs or other recovery funds that include media operations. Following the end of the war, there is a risk of local and national political actors buying media outlets wholesale to gain influence. Those media won't need money from the funds as they would be maintained by owners. To level the playing field and establish a steady flow of vetted and independent information, small-scale

operations should be supported. Journalists' staying with local media organizations should be prioritized.

- Promote fair competition in media and limit monopolies. Transparent instruments for oversight of media ownership and control should be developed, especially at the local level, where large owners can create multiple newsrooms in one local area to control media policy and media products.

4. Support Media Literacy by endorsing model local media:

- Recognize leading media organizations in terms of adhering to journalistic standards, vetting information, and combating disinformation. Present them as model media organizations at a state level (already done by Filter project, it needs to be promoted more).
- Funding New Programs: New media literacy programs can be funded through public-private partnerships involving technology companies, educational institutions, and international donors. This can ensure a broad-based approach to fostering critical thinking skills among the population.

5. Modernise Public Broadcasting Services:

- Ukraine's public broadcaster, UA:PBC, faces challenges such as underfunding, political pressure, and limited reach. Increased and stable funding, legal guarantees of editorial independence, and enhanced digital capabilities can improve its performance.
- Improving Public Broadcasting: Enforce an established legal framework that ensures consistent funding for UA:PBC through a dedicated percentage of the national budget. Enhance its digital infrastructure to increase reach and engagement, especially among younger audiences.
- Facilitate fundraising efforts by Suspilne to employ and keep employed better professionals, maintain archives, seek funds for pinpoint enhancements etc.

- Develop rules for the media to withdraw from the wartime propaganda campaign and return to a balanced and diverse news report. This also includes ending the Wartime Single Marathon by Suspilne.

3.3.2 For Policymakers from Foreign Countries

1. Develop Long-Term Dedicated Media Support Programs:

Governments such as those of the United States, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Canada, Germany, Japan, and the UK should develop further specific programs within their foreign aid frameworks dedicated to supporting Ukrainian media. These programs should focus on building media institutions or supporting existing ones. Not having institutional support is a major concern among local media as they do not have other major revenue streams, as of now. Sustainable long-term institutional support will allow the media to develop their organizations and provide better social support and benefits for their employees.

Existing Examples:

- USA: The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has established media support programs that provide financial assistance and training to media organizations in various conflict zones, including Ukraine.
- Canada: The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) has incorporated media support into its international development programs, providing funding and capacity-building for media in emerging democracies.
- Germany: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) runs programs supporting media development in regions affected by conflict, providing both financial and technical assistance.
- Treat media support not as a one-off emergency response but as a long-term commitment. Develop multi-year programs that ensure sustained support and capacity building.

2. Offer Diplomatic Support for Press Freedom and Press Cooperation:

- Use diplomatic channels, including embassies, consulates, and international forums such as the United Nations, the European Union, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), to advocate for press freedom and media resilience and recovery in Ukraine. Diplomats should engage in dialogue with Ukrainian authorities to support legislative reforms and protection mechanisms for journalists.

- Engage in bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts to highlight the importance of press freedom. This can include:

o Raising media viability and press freedom issues in bilateral meetings between Ukrainian officials and representatives from the EU, U.S., and other democratic nations.

o Leveraging platforms like the United Nations Human Rights Council to bring attention to violations of press freedom and advocate for international support for Ukrainian journalists.

- Advocate for the presence of media subjects in Ukraine recovery debates and annual conferences.

- Invite media representatives, especially local ones, to give speeches on the recovery situation in Ukrainian regions. Recognize them as informed members of public interested in transparent process and anti-corruption initiatives.

- Facilitate international cooperation between regional and local media: provide funding for fellowships, friendly visits, and joint projects by Ukrainian local media organizations and local media outlets from your country.

- Specific Partnerships: Encourage partnerships between Ukrainian media outlets and international media organizations such as the BBC, Deutsche Welle, and the New York Times to foster knowledge sharing and collaboration.

3. Encourage Multilateral Cooperation:

Work with international organizations to coordinate media support efforts. Organizations like UNESCO, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) have the expertise and resources to enhance the effectiveness of aid programs.

Additional Examples:

- The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA): Provides support for media development and press freedom initiatives globally.

- International Media Support (IMS): Engages in supporting local media in countries affected by conflict or political transition, offering safety training, financial support, and advocacy.

- The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ): Advocates for the rights of journalists and provides emergency financial assistance and safety resources.

4. Be Wary of Training Initiatives:

- Ukrainian media are voicing their 'training fatigue', as every organization is providing some sort of training programme. It is mostly conceived without cooperation with other organizations, so a lot of trainings are duplicates of other learning activities.

- One should be aware of training conducted by all the stakeholders to create or facilitate a learning opportunity that would be helpful for the local media outlets.

- Trainings do not possess an inherent value in themselves. Familiarize yourself with Ukrainian context to tailor your programme to local needs and issues. There is a market for foreign actors who understand Ukrainian local media struggle without adding another training on top.

5. Monitor and Evaluate Media Support Initiatives:

- Establish mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the impact of media support initiatives. Use this data to inform future aid programs and ensure that they effectively meet the needs of Ukrainian media.
- Implementation: Develop a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation framework that includes regular reporting, feedback mechanisms from media beneficiaries, and independent assessments to measure the effectiveness and impact of media support programs.

6. Put Media Expenses Into Recovery Plans

- Media organizations could be an independent auditor of recovery spendings and procurements for a fraction of total recovery costs. They are interested in their local community and can provide a service for the local people.
- Put media development budgets into recovery budgets. This would ensure a steady flow of revenue for media organizations which will inevitably ensure a more efficient usage of recovery costs. This should be done especially for local investigative journalists as their output relies on media's funding.
- There could be a separate Media Development Fund of some sorts, but it should be tightly connected to total recovery efforts done by foreign actors.

7. Coordinate with Media and NGOs:

Work closely with local media organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to understand their needs and priorities. Tailor aid programs to address these specific needs effectively.

3.3.3 For Donors

1. Adopt a Multi-Faceted Support Approach:

- Financial Support: Provide core grants and low-interest loans to help media outlets keep employees, rebuild infrastructure, purchase equipment, and cover operational costs. For example, the Media Development Investment Fund (MDIF) offers tailored financial support to media organizations to promote sustainability and growth.
- Prioritize long-term institutional grants over short-term projects in order to allow the sustainable growth of independent media organisations. Consider the informational health status of the regions in Ukraine.

The assistance and support that could be provided for informationally healthy areas and news deserts varies significantly. Depending on the region's status, some areas, such as unhealthy regions or news deserts with limited access to critical information, might need media launch and relaunch programs. Conversely, support for existing organisations and initiatives might be necessary for informationally healthy areas to prevent them from transitioning into informationally unhealthy ones. For partially healthy regions, a combination of both approaches might be beneficial. Therefore, considering the informational health of local districts and communities in Ukraine (healthy, partially healthy, and not healthy regions) and targeting foreign development aid programs according to the region's health status might maximize the assistance's positive impacts on media development in Ukraine.

- Technical Assistance: Offer expertise and resources for digital transformation, cybersecurity, and technical upgrades. Internews has been successful in providing such support to media outlets in conflict zones.

- Training Programs: Fund training programs focused on journalistic skills, digital media, and investigative reporting. Organizations like the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) conduct workshops and provide fellowships to enhance the skills of journalists.

- Safety Equipment and Training: Donate safety equipment, such as protective gear and secure communication tools, to journalists operating in high-risk areas. The Rory Peck Trust provides safety training and equipment to freelance journalists working in dangerous environments.

- National Conferences: Representatives of national, regional, and local media should have multiple opportunities to unite, discuss the most pressing problems, and develop strategies to overcome them. Given the costs of holding such conferences, donor support is needed initially.

2. Prioritize Local and Regional Media:

Justification: Local and regional media are often the first to uncover corruption and hold local officials accountable. They play a crucial role in anti-corruption efforts and follow-the-money reporting. For example, regional journalists have exposed corruption in local government procurement processes, which would have remained hidden without their investigative work. Supporting these media outlets ensures that local issues receive attention and that there is accountability at all levels of government.

One of the most frequently voiced needs of local media is keeping the employees and ability to pay salaries to them, the lack of employees also contributes to issue of the administrative burden of reporting and constant new commitments. As low salaries, especially at the local level, are the key issue for most media organisations, the provided funding (with priority to long-term institutional support for local newsrooms or decreasing the administrative burden of reporting for small grants) should allow them to focus on providing adequate remuneration for work in journalism.

3. Encourage Collaborative Projects:

Fund collaborative projects that bring together media outlets, civil society organizations, and academic institutions to strengthen the media ecosystem and promote innovation. For example, the "Ukraine World" initiative by Internews and local partners combines media expertise with academic research to produce in-depth reports and analyses.

4. Flexible Funding:

Definition: Flexible funding means providing financial support that allows media outlets to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities. This includes multi-year grants with minimal restrictions on how the funds can be used, allowing organizations to allocate resources where they are most needed at any given time.

Desirable Indirect Cost Rate (ICR) Level: A desirable ICR level should be over 15%. This rate allows media outlets to cover overhead costs, such as administrative expenses, utilities, and rent, ensuring that they can operate sustainably and focus on their core mission of journalism.

5. Capacity Building:

Invest in training programs focused on the watchdog role of media, investigative journalism, digital skills, and financial management. For instance, the "Media Innovation Program" by IREX supports media outlets in developing new business models and digital strategies to enhance their sustainability and reach. Be careful to priotize wise, strategic financial support over capacity building.

6. Safety Programs:

Fund initiatives that provide safety training and equipment for journalists working in high-risk areas. Programs like the Committee to Protect Journalists' (CPJ) "Emergency Response Team" of 4201 Foundation programs offer crucial support to journalists facing threats and violence. Do not underestimate PTSD and trauma healing.

3.3.4 For International Monetary Institutions

1. Incorporate Media Support into Reconstruction Plans:

Recognize media as a critical sector in recovery plans. Include specific provisions for media support in funding agreements and reconstruction programs. Involve journalists and media organizations in developing such programs at an early stage.

2. Facilitate Low-Interest Loans for Media Outlets:

Provide low-interest loans and grants to help media outlets keep employees, rebuild infrastructure, invest in new technology, and ensure operational sustainability. Create special financial instruments tailored to the media sector's unique needs.

Conclusion

A resilient and independent media landscape is essential for Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction. By implementing these targeted policies and programs, stakeholders can ensure that the media continues to play a crucial role in fostering transparency, accountability, and civic engagement during this critical period. These specific recommendations will contribute to a robust media environment, supporting Ukraine's long-term stability and growth.

Author Biographies

Julia Hildebrand has 15 years of experience in building communities as well as engagement products for media. Since 2021 Julia has been project lead at CORRECTIV for the open-source software beabee and the CORRECTIV.Starthub, a community and resource hub for local media founders in Germany. As part of the founding-team at the Irish social startup ChangeX.org, Julia developed community software that allows people to start their own local projects and led on multimedia campaigns to grow the ChangeX community. At Deutsche Welle she worked with more than 30 newsrooms on developing social media strategies, guidelines and workflows for more user participation.

David Schraven, publisher of CORRECTIV, Germany's first investigative newsroom. He has worked at taz, Süddeutsche Zeitung, and the Welt-group, and was in New York for Time Magazine during 9/11. David founded the political blog "Ruhrbarone" and led the research department at Funke-Mediengruppe from 2010 to 2014. He served on the board of Netzwerk Recherche and managed its finances since 2011. David has received numerous awards, including the "Wächterpreis der Tagespresse" and the Research Prize of the Swiss Wolfgang-Fichtner-Foundation. His graphic report "Kriegszeiten" was nominated for the German Youth Literature Award.

Viera Zuborova, Director of CORRECTIV.Exile since June 2024, is a political scientist specializing in populism, extremism, social movements, civil society, political communication, marketing, intolerance, and hate speech. She has over ten years of academic experience and served as a Senior Research Fellow at the Center for European and North Atlantic Affairs (CENAA). Viera was a Scholar-in-Residence at ISGAP, Oxford University, and a Visiting Ph.D. Scholar at Université Libre de Bruxelles. A regular columnist for Aktuality.SK, she co-founded three NGOs focusing on human rights, education, youth, and social issues. She has also worked with the IOTA Foundation and ORAM.

Joanna Krawczyk is a senior executive with over 15 years of experience in media development and philanthropy. She is the Deputy Managing Director of the German Marshall Fund of the United States East, focusing on political and security transformation in CEE and Ukraine's reconstruction. Joanna manages the Ukrainian Media Fund, supporting local media during the war and reconstruction. She is an Obama Leader, board member of the European Media and Information Fund, and advisory board member of Journalismfund.eu and Allianz Foundation's Risktakers project. Previously, she led News Partnerships at Gazeta Wyborcza and the Gazeta Wyborcza Foundation.

Maksym Sribnyi, Head of Research at MDF, MA in Journalism at NaUKMA. Previously worked with DW Akademie, Baltic Centre for Media Excellence, Ukrainian Institute of Media and Communications in different research projects. Interested in media as organizations and as a public institution.

Marta Puhach, Researcher at Media Development Foundation. Received REES MA degree from the University of Kansas, US, MA in East-European Studies from the University of Warsaw, Poland, and MA in political science from the University of Ostroh Academy, Ukraine. Interested in international aid studies, financial operations of media organizations, media consumption studies.

Valeriia Shemshuchenko, Researcher at the Media Development Foundation. MA in Public Policy and Governance, Kyiv School of Economics. An all-around researcher interested in role of media organizations in public sphere, its connection to authorities, and public good it produces.

The report **"Revitalizing Ukrainian Local Media: Research and Recommendations"** presents a vital exploration of the current challenges and opportunities facing local journalism in Ukraine.

This publication, a collaborative effort spearheaded by Correctiv and the Ukrainian Media Fund under the German Marshall Fund of the United States, emphasizes the critical role of community-focused development in sustaining independent local media.

Supported by the North Rhine-Westphalia state government, this comprehensive study, enriched by the expertise of the Media Development Foundation, offers a strategic roadmap for stakeholders dedicated to rebuilding Ukraine's media sector. The findings and recommendations outlined within underscore the necessity of a coordinated approach, involving policymakers, civil society, and international donors, to foster a resilient, transparent, and democratic media landscape in Ukraine.