Transnational investigative journalism: towards a methodological practice

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

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Abbreviations

TIJ
transnational investigative journalism

TIJM
transnational investigative journalism methodology

Definitions

Collaboration/collaborative journalism
Collaboration in a broad sense, as there are degrees of collaboration that can go from sharing a contact or a story idea to a full model of co-production that involves very intense planning and coordination.

Methodology
TIJM refers to a methodology. The term was chosen as an easy way of describing the objective of this research project as to identify the ways journalists work in an attempt to find best practices. However, I’m aware that the name for this process may be rejected by journalists who might have the perception that calling it a methodology is overthinking the process. During the interviews and consultations for this research, some journalists proposed other names like ‘protocol’ or ‘decalogue’. At the same time, when I started using the word ‘protocol’ instead of ‘methodology’ in the interviews, some of them didn’t like what the word ‘protocol’ meant to them and how it resonated. Probably the most accurate wording is ‘methodological practice’.
Multicultural
The term ‘multicultural’ is used to convey different meanings in different contexts (Inglis, 1997):
- the demographic-descriptive usage
- the programmatic-political usage ‘multiculturalism’
- the ideological-normative usage
In this exegesis, multiculturalism is used in its ideological-normative meaning.

Transnational investigative journalism
The practice of journalists in two or more countries working in a collaborative investigation to bring to light wrongdoings that are happening – or have happened – in the countries involved.

Transnational journalism
The practice of journalists producing reports in collaboration between two or more countries.

Research approach
Where commonly an exegesis would use the wording ‘methodological approach’ to explain the method used to arrive at the findings, I have changed it to ‘research approach’ because this exegesis discusses the creation of a methodology. Talking about the methodology to create a methodology could be confusing. Hence, the wording ‘research approach’ has been chosen deliberately to explain the process through which the TIJ methodology was created.
The methodology for transnational investigative journalism methodology (TIJM) proposed as the artefact of his research has been made available to the community through the website www.tijmethodology.com. A website with public open access (see Figure 0.1) is the most practical way of building a bridge between academia and the broader community, including media organisations and students. The website – accessible as an open source – also aims to reach experts of all disciplines, who are increasingly part of transnational teams of investigative journalists. In the last five years, the job ads in media organisations in Latin America, America and Europa have shown a trend of diversification of roles within newsrooms: web developers, engineers, experts in statistics and metadata are some of the new faces joining teams of journalists, although they were rarely seen last decade. These professionals with new skills are also changing – as well as enriching – the traditional match-making process when building investigative teams.

The website includes the interviews that reveal the process through which I arrived at the TIJ Methodology. The TIJM practical representation is a production tracker with free access that students and professionals can use the way that suits them best. The artefact (the methodology materialised in a production tracker) also includes standard databases to consolidate the fields of data gathering to be exchanged with other colleagues.

![Figure 0.1 Website screenshot: transnational investigative journalism methodology](image)
This research is an attempt to start a professional conversation between investigative journalists from different backgrounds so as to learn from each other’s experiences and methods and keep the conversation open in order to deliver high-quality journalism. As the project developed, I focused on deepening the dialogue with the community. In order to open the conversation, the entire interviews done for this PhD are transcribed, translated and published as videos on the website. For academic purposes and to train new generations of journalists, the publication of the interviews is a substantial contribution together with the finalised methodology because it starts a public conversation about how we do investigative journalism and why.

Ben-Hur Demeneck, Doctor of Communication Sciences from the University of São Paulo, thinks a methodology is interesting because there are many ‘professional cultures’:

A method can help people to agree on the same objectives, the same code and the same language. I think this is good and opens a dialogue opportunity between different professional cultures … It’s like the anticipation of a more effective global civil society. To be cosmopolitan, the dialogue should go beyond the global aspects of the own region. A terminology I use in my investigation is ‘the double cosmopolitan loyalty of transnational journalism’. (Demeneck, 2016)

The dialectic nature of these dialogues is the key to starting a conversation about collaboration within and across national borders; they are conversation starters, enablers of the necessary dialogue we need in order to face one of the biggest challenges for collaborative journalism: the lack of awareness that we need to coordinate the production process to guarantee a content outcome that will have the maximum impact possible in today’s overcrowded media landscape.
Keywords

Cross-border, diverse, ethics, global, investigations, investigative journalism, journalism, multicultural, research
Abstract

This exegesis is a scholarly discussion about the transnational investigative journalism methodology/method (TIJM), the artefact of this project. This methodology proposed for the best practice of investigative journalism across borders is the main contribution of this research. The exegesis discusses how this TIJM can facilitate a transition between traditional individualistic journalistic practices to an inclusive, collaborative, cross-cultural model that fits the complexity and needs of contemporary transnational journalism.

The empirical corpus of this PhD by project includes interviews with more than 40 investigative journalists and researchers from three continents. The challenge of proposing a methodology required the inclusion of views, voices and experiences of professionals from around the globe in order to build the TIJM as a collective construct that could work as a framework to find a common ground when investigating together. The diversity of professional voices interviewed reflects the diverse narratives in the story-building process: how the story is framed, what voices are included and the tone. Their diverse views reflect on their professional practices, bringing to the research a multicultural dimension – in the ideological-normative sense.

The research process behind the design of the proposed methodology¹ involved identification of the main elements that are integral parts of the production process in journalistic investigations involving more than one country.

Driven by the increasing number and impact of global investigations like Al Jazeera’s three-year investigation ‘How to sell a massacre’ (2019) into the US gun lobby, which has just uncovered how officials from far-right Australian political party One Nation sought 20 million dollars in political funding in exchange for softening of Australia’s 1996 anti-gun

¹ TIJM was chosen as an easy way of describing the objective of this research project as to identify the ways journalists work in an attempt to find best practices. However, the researcher is aware that the name for this process may be rejected by journalists who might have the perception that calling it a methodology is overthinking the process. During the interviews and consultations for this research, some journalists proposed other names like ‘protocol’ or ‘decadologue’. At the same time, when the researcher started using the word ‘protocol’ instead of ‘methodology’ during the interviews, some did not like what the word ‘protocol’ meant to them and how it resonated. Probably the most accurate wording is ‘methodological practice’.
laws, as well as the 2016 *Panama Papers* and the 2015 Swiss Leaks. This research identifies transnational investigative journalism (TIJ) as one of the most significant new paradigms in contemporary journalism, and uses the built capacity and experience to understand how coverage of critical transnational wrongdoings can contribute to a more accurate and in-depth approach to storytelling that reflects the interconnectivity and diversity of the societies we live in. It will also play a significant role in building good global governance and increasing the levels of transparency with audiences.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
1.1 Research question

What professional practices could build a method for transnational investigative journalism in a culturally diverse and transborder scenario?

1.2 Background and context

Transnational investigative journalism (TIJ) has been growing as a de facto practice worldwide in the last 15 years, reaching its peak with the *Panama Papers* investigation in 2016. However, there is no agreed methodology (as used in academic research) to enable the systematic exchange of information across countries, or an international standard that allows the validation of information by journalists and media who are not part of the production process. This research will attempt to fill this gap by proposing what I call the transnational investigative journalism methodology (TIJM). Through more than 40 interviews and 50 survey responses with diverse professionals in investigative journalism from around the globe, I identify the key common areas that repeatedly cause tension when working collaboratively: ethics, trust, workload, copyright, editorial leadership and framing of investigative reporting.

There are many examples of TIJ. The 2015 HSBC bank international financial scandal (also known as Swiss Leaks) is one example. It involved journalists from 45 countries (Boland-Rudder, 2015) and its impact proves that cross-border investigative journalism has the potential to uncover and expose transnational wrongdoings as never before in history.

In the same direction, Chilean investigative journalist Carola Fuentes believes collaboration increases the efficiency of work compared with working alone, because ‘collaboration, whether it is through formal agreements or it’s informal, just through the knowledge we have amongst us in different countries, it always has results’ (Fuentes, 2015). Uruguayan multi-awarded investigative journalist Fabian Werner said to me during an interview that the HSBC investigation is one of the most successful examples of data exchange of ‘a group of journalists who have developed effective communication channels’.
Gabriel Monteagudo, investigative journalist and director of the Uruguayan newspaper *El Eco* in Colonia, shared the challenges of being a small, low-budget media organisation in a South American town. Collaborative journalism is one of the few options they have to continue investigating and digging into stories they cannot do by themselves. This is an example:

In 2002 we were working from a garage as an office when the investments of magnate Gaith Pharaon arrived in Carmelo city. We published many stories about it in our weekly paper that’s distributed in the cities of Carmelo, Nueva Palmira and Colonia, but not [the capital city] Montevideo, so nobody knew what we were doing. We didn’t even have a fax. Once we even had to pick up a fax from [the telephone company] Antel’s office because the BCCI bank in Paris was asking for any information we could have of Ghaith Pharaon. BCCI was the international bank Ghaith Pharaon had plundered. The bank sent us a fax asking to call them to Paris if we had any information. We couldn’t make a call to Buenos Aires because of the cost, how were we going to call Paris? We were taken to court for this story as well; these are the risks you take in this profession, and you need to know how far you can go. (Monteagudo, 2015)

From a report on Australia’s mining companies linked to hundreds of deaths in Africa to investigation of the worldwide human tissue trade, the work and accumulated experience of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) is more relevant than ever. Other leading organisations are the Global Investigative Journalism Network (GIJN), the Centre for Investigative Journalism (CIJ) and the Center for Public Integrity, created by Australian journalist Gerard Ryle. Directed by American journalist Drew Sullivan, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) has been working in collaborative projects across borders for ten years now, focusing on the region from Eastern Europe to Central Asia, but also working with partners in Latin America, Africa and the Middle East. The OCCRP seeks to provide in-depth investigative stories related to organised crime and corruption activities. Its reporting aims to help people from the region better understand how organised crime and corruption affect their lives. As documented in the 2015 OCCRP Annual Report (www.occrp.org/documents/OCCRP_Annual_Report_2015.pdf) their investigations have brought change: 10 government officials resigned or were sacked;
government changed 20 laws or regulations, and tax authorities found 600 million in hidden assets, among other impacts.

The *Panama Papers* – in April 2016 – showed the world that the efforts of transnational investigations involving hundreds of journalists around the globe have a real impact when working together. The biggest coordinated investigative report in history was able to analyse and make sense of 11.5 million leaked documents that detailed financial and attorney–client information for more than 214,488 offshore entities. This illustrated how wealthy individuals and public officials are able to keep personal financial information private through shell corporations that are legal but are used for illegal purposes, including fraud, kleptocracy, tax evasion and evasion of international sanctions.

2015 was a significant year for cross-border investigations in terms of public awareness of the reach of transnational crime and the potential of investigative journalists working together to increase levels of accountability at a global scale. In July 2015 the former Director of the ICIJ, William Buzenberg, published ‘Anatomy of Global Investigation’ – a study that follows the course of the ICIJ’s three most important investigations before the *Panama Papers*: Offshore Leaks, Luxembourg Leaks and Swiss Leaks. In September–October 2015, 100 reporters launched in Washington DC the first Investigative Film Festival and Symposium ([http://doubleexposurefestival.com/](http://doubleexposurefestival.com/)) featuring ‘films and cutting-edge forms of visual storytelling inspired by the investigative instinct’.

In October 2015, the Global Investigative Journalism Conference brought together investigative journalists from more than 100 countries. In 2015, the Peru-based Institute for Press and Society (Instituto Prensa y Sociedad, or IPYS) launched a database of more than 300 investigative journalistic reports from across Latin America. Latin America’s potential in cross-border investigative journalism based on a collaboration model has been identified by IPYS, the organisation responsible for the annual Conference of Latin American Investigative Journalists, an event created in 2009 that also recognises the best reporting in the region. The success of this annual event has led Transparency International, the Open Society Foundation and IPYS to launch in 2017 the first competitive funding to support Latin American transnational investigation projects. Earlier, in November 2015, coordinated by the CIJ,
Puerto Rico hosted the first Meeting of Caribbean Investigative Journalists, which brought together investigative journalists from 17 countries.

Things are happening and the world is moving quickly. Australia, however, does not have major representation in international forums of investigative journalists or collaborative reporting, with a few exceptions including a partnership between the Australian public broadcaster ABC and the ICIJ.

Surprisingly, Latin America is thriving in relation to online and data-based investigative reporting; this is one of the reasons that led me to interview dozens of Latin American investigative journalists to gather their journalistic experience in investigative reporting as well as collaborative investigation. Whereas most Latin American in-depth reports have not transcended the region – which is usually underreported or stereotyped by mainstream international media – a recent study shows the importance of investigative journalism in Latin America. In 10 years, seven presidents or former presidents in the region were prosecuted and/or imprisoned as a consequence of journalists’ investigations (Uceda, 2013).

In Global muckraking: 100 years of investigative journalism from around the world, Columbia University’s Anya Schifrin (2012) brings together relevant investigations of journalists from all over the world and includes work from Peru, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Nicaragua. A new conglomerate based in Colombia, called Connectas, has taken Latin American cross-border collaboration even further in the last four years. As a non-profit, Connectas (http://connectas.org) is a journalistic initiative that brings together more than 140 journalists from 15 Latin American countries. It promotes the production, exchange, training and dissemination of information in the Americas, privileging a transnational perspective. In February 2016, Connectas launched the Connectas Hub, a new platform through which journalists in the region can share knowledge about research techniques and key information for the Americas. The project seeks to promote the production and distribution of TIJ work (Bueno, 2016).

In an interview for this research, the director of Connectas, Carlos Eduardo Huertas (2015), explained that the organisation has several strategies for journalistic production in place to support colleagues in various areas and this is the sustainable model they’ve found, what
Huertas says any Latin American revolutionary group would call ‘the combination of all the fighting strategies’. The Investigative Reporting Initiative in the Americas (IRIA) enables Connectas to work with colleagues in eight countries with whom they have been establishing the basic variables needed in collaborative work.

One significant and very original investigation was led by Mexican journalist Juan Raul Olmos, who investigated the routes used for trafficking of art pieces stolen by the Nazis in Europe and then brought to America. It was a document-based investigation and involved many Latin American countries: Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile and the USA:

[Initially] I worked by myself but … the impact of the story led us to work in a transnational story, together with Connectas. We’ve decided to go back to the 2012 story and do it with testimonies of people who are descendants of the people who were looking for the art pieces, and the idea was to assign a journalist in each country to investigate what happened in each place. To do this, we put together a very broad data base with the thousands of declassified documents. We processed them to identify which of them were about Latin America. In this way we could identify specific documents per country so it could be assigned to the journalists who would do their own search. (Olmos, 2015)

Other organisations, like the Argentinian Journalism Forum (FOPEA), have identified the need to build networks, working relationships and trust-based relationships between journalists of different regions or countries. Based on his experience as executive director of FOPEA, Argentinean investigative journalist Andrés D’Alessandro thinks that, even though there are many codes of ethics written by many organisations, there is a need to consolidate them as a first step at national, regional and global levels:

We are promoting investigative journalism and digital journalism … sharing the practices and the logic behind an investigation with other colleagues so we can learn. And then perhaps it’s beneficial to systematise those practices. For example, who were the winners of the Latin American investigative journalism award last year? Well, are there common patterns in the topics, in the methodologies, in ethics …? (D’Alessandro, 2015)

Organisations working in transnational investigations have been exploring ways of working together. Connectas is one of the bodies that seem to have a more systematic and thought-
through process. This is based on three pillars: trust, clarity and communication. Huertas explained the three points:

If you don’t trust your counterpart, it will be very difficult to start any of these adventures, in all senses. The topics are usually sensitive, and you need to feel confident that the information you are told they have found is within the classic standards of journalism, that it’s been checked, and they’ve done their best to have precise information. The other variable is clarity in the coordination … even though journalists have this kind of apostolate around democratic values, when developing stories it is necessary to make it very clear each one’s role so that things can evolve in an appropriate way. The third element is clear communications. (Huertas, 2015)

For the Connectas team, both methodology and planning are necessary in any process, and they created a ‘matrix’ to follow the investigations that they call ‘the brain’: this involves documenting the step-by-step mental process journalists normally follow when they approach an issue and mapping it in a way that helps in planning the investigation. Huertas said that the steps of the brain are similar to the steps suggested for the first version of this methodology.

Ginna Morelo, editor for Colombian newspaper El Tiempo’s data unit, created another matrix that she calls ‘data rakers’ to work on data-based investigations. ‘The matrix was born with a main question and lateral questions connected with it. Then we intersect data and think about all the databases we’ll use or we’ll build to visualise it. It sounds quite easy but it takes quite a lot of time to fill in the entire matrix’, explained Morello (2015).

But collaboration is still difficult and behind the many stories of success we hear, there are many more frustrated stories that never happened. Among the many reasons why journalists find it difficult to work in transnational investigations are the funding models available and the restrictions of established media organisations. Uruguayan investigative journalist Guillermo Garat thinks freelance journalists have an advantage when it comes to coordinating across borders because most media companies are going through an economic crisis that makes it difficult for them to absorb investigative teams:

I think transnational investigative journalism relies on the will of the journalists involved and I think freelance journalists have advantages over fulltime journalists because of the dynamic. (Garat, 2015)
The successful outcomes of collaborative investigations should not hide the challenges of the production process behind them. I discussed with Danish journalist and Roskilde University academic Brigitte Alfter, European expert in transnational investigations, how many fail because the team is not prepared to use cultural and professional diversity as an opportunity to enrich the content. Differences in editorial views, ways of working, relationships with power, legal systems and valuations of advocacy journalism, as well as time management, relations with sources, ethics and conceptual frameworks, are only some of the expressions of diversity in the practice of investigative journalism across borders. Whereas this diversity normally enriches the outcome, if not managed properly it can be the cause of insurmountable tensions that put an end to the project or, more commonly, stop it from even starting. Alfter is mindful of not damaging the collaboration because the cultural background of each team member – as well as the kind of networking person each of them are - has an influence in the team work. That’s why Alfter thinks intercultural communication and networking are two areas – that have been studied by business for decades- that need to be considered as part of any transnational collaboration model. Alter explains that business researchers have sociologists and psychologists to work with intercultural communication. Someone from a very formal tradition meeting someone from a very informal tradition – the informality as such could be considered impolite or badly educated. And at the moment you understand this, and you understand the fact that your tie or lack of tie and or choice of tie even could offend someone or could be part of the communication, and then you get a whole different way of acting in a team. And once you start reading about it – it’s like when I started reading about it, it was such an eye-opener and all of a sudden I started to read signals from other people completely different. (Alfter, 2016)

Luis Burón, a Panamanian investigative journalist, spent six months in Spain on a scholarship together with 15 other Latin American journalists. Even though all of them came from the same region, they could still identify different working methodologies in Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Argentina and Chile because the idiosyncrasy of each country is transferred to the profession, and journalism is not the exception:

If in Latin America – which is a fairly homogenous region – comparing the methodology with Australia or Afghanistan or Uruguay and Morocco there will be discrepancies, and I think it’s a great idea to have something that works as a starting point. Maybe you don’t follow all of it, but it’s a
The game changer in collaborative investigative reporting is embracing cultural diversity at two main levels: during the production process and during editorial decision-making. Based on my experience in working with multilingual and multiethnic journalistic teams, I believe that only a culturally diverse news team (working either face to face or remotely) will be able to manage the challenge of producing in-depth cross-border/cross-cultural stories. The practice of transnational journalism – including the suggested methodologies and best practices – is an important part of the evolution of journalism and the increased need to frame local stories within a world context. Investigative journalist Oscar Castilla, co-director of the Peruvian data investigative platform Ojo Público (‘Public Eye’ in Spanish), has realised that the local approach to investigations is not that useful and we need a regional approach ‘and learn to play the game you play locally, but with the rest of the colleagues in South America’ (Castilla, 2015).

This is already happening. D’Alessandro of FOPEA said in an interview that the methodology has become so important that, in the evaluation of journalism awards, this methodology is as important as the result and impact of the publication:

We had the investigative journalism award in Argentina … and what’s the criterion … [There are many elements] You have the criterion of impact, or the methodology, or the use of sources or the ethics behind the investigation. In my view, the most important thing is the methodology, and the origin of the information [as it] is related to the trust and the credibility of the journalist. (D’Alessandro, 2015)

1.3 Purpose

The TIJM aims to facilitate and improve the quantity and quality of collaborations between investigative journalists of different countries, as well as making the production process transparent so the editorial decisions are made visible. This is not only related to the accountability of journalism with the public, but is also a tool to help journalists and editors who were not involved in the production to validate the outcomes of the investigation.
Gabriel Labrador, recognised investigative journalist from El Salvador, has done many transnational investigations in Central America but not a lot of work as part of a transnational team. Even though he has found alternative options to carry out his investigations – mainly travelling to the nearby countries – he understands there are some circumstances that require a methodology:

When there are long distances and the logistics are challenging because of the complexity of the story, the only option to finish a story is to work slowly with a method like the one you are suggesting. The other option is do nothing because there are too many barriers. I’ve been looking at the method and I think it’s a slow but safe way to advance. (Labrador, 2015)

This TIJM facilitates a space for discussion of global journalistic ethics and diversity of ethical frameworks. It also encourages the expression of narratives with regional and/or global perspectives that are increasingly crucial for understanding the core of transnational wrongdoings in a globalised world. The relevance of TIJ has led other journalists to try to theorise about the practice; I have identified three other PhD works that discuss the practice from diverse angles, by Stefan Candea in Romania/Germany, Ben-Hur Demeneck in Brazil and Amanda Gearing in Australia. These three professionals of journalism as well as academics have shared in this research their views and approaches to cross-border collaboration.

We are witnessing the beginning of a worldwide methodological discussion and this PhD aims to help lead this global dialogue, engaging professionals and academics from around the globe to share and discuss their thoughts and practices. In August 2016, Danish investigative journalist Brigitte Alfter, author of a handbook for journalists on cross-border journalism (2016) (www.crossborderjournalism.dk/da) and Editor-Europe at Journalismfund.eu, contacted four journalists to start a dialogue and information exchange: Stefan Candea, Ben-Hur Demeneck, Amanda Gearing and myself. The five of us are among the very few journalists and academics in the world who are working on TIJ research.

Candea is the director and co-founder of the Centre of Investigative Journalism in Romania and the European Investigative Collaborations (EIC) network (https://eic.network). In an interview (Candea, 2015) done for this investigation, he explained that part of his research focuses on finding alternative networking and financial models that can support the practice
of TIJ. In 2015 Candea founded the EIC network. In an interview in 2016, he explained the
close connection between organisations, funding and content outputs. He thinks the ‘ICIJ is
basically a group of people overcentralised in terms of decision and organisation, workflow,
resource sharing, and publication. So this is under no circumstances what you would call the
collective action or a collective group’. Candea goes even further to suggest we need more
inclusivity as he understands the networks we have today are too centralised, arguing that the
same people travel from one conference to another one endorsing each other, including social
media:

It’s kind of very few people if you think – these people shouldn’t be
representing the global phenomenon of investigative journalism. I mean,
we are talking about maybe fifty, eighty, maybe a hundred, but not really
this is really few. The names that you see most of the time coming back
and like the names that you see all the time being associated with
investigative journalism cross-border, these are like less than fifty.
(Candea, 2015)

In his alternative model at the EIC network, Candea highlighted the importance of respecting
the initiator of an investigation, who is supposed to have a special say in editorial and
publication decisions – together with the coordinator – even if the initiator is a small actor in
the network. Candea suggested that journalists working collaboratively need to stay as critical
as they normally are, because criticism and debate should not be a problem. On the contrary,
‘it should be a problem when you realise that there is no criticism and no debate and that
people are like in a church, when everybody agrees and chant. So I see this is sort of
happening, especially in the last years’ (Candea, 2015).

Since funding for investigative journalism – national or transnational – is limited and it is
difficult to guarantee the independence of journalists, the Journalismfund tries to build
models that maintain editorial independence. Aftter explained the team at the Fund has a
peer-reviewed jury that operates independently from the funding bodies, and keeping this
distance allows them to accept funding that a journalist could not take in a direct agreement.
For example, last year the Journalismfund received money from Oxfam, which is an
interesting development because as a journalist you normally would not be able to take
money from Oxfam because they are an interest group. Whereas in some countries journalists
can’t take money from the government because it’s seen as manipulative, dangerous or damaging of the journalist’s credibility, in other countries government funding is legitimate:

Like public service broadcasting in Europe is all funded by governments. We just make the necessary checks and balances, and you have a lot of money from wealthier countries going to poorer countries to support journalism … I think it’s really important when you give money to journalists to give the uttermost possible transparency including the contracts. (Alfter, 2016)

Candea has expressed concern about the independence of investigations carried out by NGOs funded by different bodies. Whereas the Journalismfund in Europe has a mechanism to guarantee transparency and independence, most organisations do not. The Journalismfund tries to avoid the problem of lack of separation between economic and editorial decisions that some NGOs face:

Now with this non-profit world you basically have in most of the organisations the same people who are applying for money and asking donors to give them money. I think the end result is that you have a much weaker configuration right now. (Candea, 2015)

Candea is also vigilant about how the collaborative machinery works without the organisations. He criticises the tendency of some cross-border journalism initiatives that over control processes from the top.2 His collaborative approach includes a coordinator that he sees as a ‘sort of coordinator, not the director, more like a buffer between various interests and egos and should balance the network’. Candea feels that there’s a need to rebalance the tendency of everybody to take over, so he insists the workflows ‘shouldn’t put too much power in anyone’s hands’. As Alfter points out, Candea’s work also talks about networks as ‘elements of power’ that can be ‘inclusive or exclusive’.

Awarded Mexican journalist Daniel Lizarraga explained that the coordinator needs to be someone who is across what everyone is doing and provide an overview of the story, but not a hierarchical figure like a boss. Monica Almeida, investigative journalist from Ecuador,

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2 In Candea’s view, some organisations have a tendency of take control of both the funding and the editorial decisions, over other minor partners that are part of the investigation but do not have the financial power or editorial say to challenge the umbrella organisation in charge. In this sense, both Candea and TIJM consider that a more horizontal approach will gain in inclusiveness and diverse views to enrich journalistic reporting.
Quito bureau chief of *El Universo* newspaper and reporter for the ICIJ, suggested the coordinator needs to understand they are not the boss but a coordinator, so the person in this role needs to have the capacity to arrive at agreement without imposition: they can coordinate, agree on things, ask how things are done and softly suggest when something is not the most adequate way of doing things. Candea said the coordinator should be a sort of facilitator, ‘more of a buffer between various interests and egos and should balance the network’ because there’s a tendency for groups to split over control.

The way this coordinator operates can almost determine the success or failure of the investigation. Sometimes team members do not feel they are part of a team because they are not across what other members are doing. Normally this is the task of the coordinator: to act in the best interests of the project and decide that the best way to protect the journalists involved from being overloaded with information is to limit the information they have access to. But as explained above, this might have an unwanted side effect that the parts involved are not aware of the big picture and lack a sense of collective purpose. Along these lines, Venezuelan journalist David Gonzalez said in an interview for this research that in a healthy collaboration project the coordinator of the investigation should keep all participants informed of the evolution of the investigation:

For example, if it’s an investigation about human trafficking that involves five countries, it’s relevant to have a notion of what’s happening and the progress in each country. Not that the global vision is only managed by the project leader, but that the project leader also shares the global vision of what’s happening; that’d be interesting. (Gonzalez, 2015)

Demeneck discussed the ethics of investigative journalism across borders and his thesis (Demeneck, 2016) explores how the emergence of a global public opinion can be related to the discussion of ‘global journalism ethics’. Demeneck sees the TIJ Methodology proposed in this PhD as a potential path to an agreement on the ethics of cross-border factual storytelling. He believes that a method that speaks to many cultures has its own value because it could make visible the asymmetries of globalisation. Demeneck suggested this epistemological discussion could become a media strategy to counter the hegemony of media corporations and minimise dependence on the same information sources and channels: ‘I also think that the impact of the publication is bigger [and] it leads to a new framing of invisible topics’ (Demeneck, 2016). He argued that, even though the internet has made available most...
investigations from around the globe, if they are not picked up and reproduced by other media outlets then the exposure is limited to the region. A way to address this challenge could be to give editors the tools to validate investigative reports produced by overseas third parties. Potentially, a methodology could provide the tools to validate investigative reports across borders.

1.4 Ontological and research approach

Ontology

In the last five years I have supervised multiple investigative reports at the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS), Australia’s public multicultural broadcaster. This experience has equipped me with a deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges of producing content with a team of 300 journalists who speak more than 70 different languages in what is the most culturally and linguistically diverse newsroom in the world. SBS is almost twice as diverse as the BBC World Service, which operates in 40 languages since 2017 – before then there were 28 languages. Close production supervision of investigative reports done by journalists born in different countries has taught me about the benefits of a culturally and linguistically diverse production team, but also about the challenges of conciliating diverse editorial views and journalistic practices. This experience has made visible to me the need for a methodology/manual that transforms diversity into an added value to the content, rather than a drawback.

While this professional experience is robust and meaningful, from a global perspective it cannot account for more than the experience of one particular editor in one country. The challenge of proposing a methodology required the views, voices and experiences of professionals from around the globe in order to build the TIJM as a collective construct. The need to include diverse views when building the TIJM has defined this research’s constructionist ontological approach, which proposes that the construction of meaningful knowledge happens in the interactions between humans in their social contexts (Berger and Luckmann, 1991).
The TIJM proposed is thus a co-constructed experience that includes the views and values of the many journalists who were interviewed for this research. Building this methodology as a construct from the experiences of more than 40 investigative journalists is also an effort to analyse the epistemological approaches behind the different practices of TIJ. During the research, most journalists interviewed for this PhD agreed that traditional investigative journalists are more likely to use intuition and empirical knowledge as the pillars of their investigative processes. But working in a team across borders requires an agreed method that makes visible the logic of the investigative process.

Gonzalez thought that even though all Latin American countries share a common agenda:

> Journalists don’t always share the same journalistic schools and traditions … when you start doing it, you realise there are procedures, ways of doing things that are different in each country, within the same journalism. (Gonzalez, 2015)

The TIJ methodology this research proposes is an ‘inter-subjective’ construction built on the diverse meanings that each journalist interviewed attributed to their professional experience. As there is not one single way of understanding journalism or a global ethical framework all journalists agree on, TIJM is a framework that allows – and encourages – dialogue between the participants in each case to agree on a number of aspects before working together. In this sense, the constructionist ontological approach of this research (Papert and Harel, 1991) also reaches the application of the TIJM. Every time in the future when a group of journalists decides to use the TIJM, they will be following a guideline to create their own workflow that will be a new construction in each case, as the result of the interaction between the parts. Allowing the free interaction of journalists’ subjective representations of reality is the only way the TIJM can truly respect diversity of realities and views, as I cannot anticipate and

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3 By ‘inter-subjective’ I mean the process of exchange of ideas with diverse journalists who share their experiences and knowledge in order to arrive at a common ground.

4 While the expression ‘subjective representations of reality’ might be seen as a collision with the concept of ‘objectivity’ – the golden rule in traditional journalism – in this exegesis I use this more progressive approach to the practice of journalism, which is the result of interacting subjectivities. Whereas ‘objectivity’ is a valid rule for journalism, it is impossible to measure or to agree on what objectivity will look like in each investigation. The framing of the story, the sources chosen to interview and quote, as well as the way to tell the story are always subjective decisions that can be validated when contrasted against the journalistic values of balance and accuracy.
include in the method the infinite potential scenarios of cross-border journalistic investigations.

The constructionist approach is therefore present at two levels. It is defined by the inclusion of the views and values of almost a hundred journalists – between the 40 interviews and the 50 survey responses – who participated in the construction of this methodology, as well as by the diverse ways they will put into practice the methodology in each particular investigation.

Research approach

To answer the research question, this PhD proposes the use of a common methodology to face the challenges of working collaboratively in journalistic investigations across borders. The TIJM has been published on a public website created as the artefact of this PhD by project. The website (www.tijmethodology.com) includes the video interviews with the journalists who contributed with their views to building the methodology. Its purpose is to be an open and dynamic accessible platform that works as a bridge between academic research, professionals (journalists) and the broader community. The website has three main parts: the methodology; an index to find investigative journalists; and the interview videos with the journalists that helped shape the methodology. The website – the ‘artefact’ of this PhD – aims to start a cross-border dialogue about how journalists can agree to work collaboratively.

I have called this methodology transnational investigative journalism methodology (TIJM) and its construction involved consultation with journalists from different countries and cultures to capture the knowledge built from the practice of the discipline, following Donald Schön’s theory (1983) of building knowledge through the lessons learned from the practice of the discipline. The action of proposing a methodology for the best practice of transnational investigations is in itself another way of implementing what Schön calls ‘reflective practice’, a dialogue between my experience as an investigative journalist and the methods I use, including the experiences of other colleagues, in order to enrich the dialogue.
Vivien Altman, a veteran of international current affairs in Australia, is outspoken about the quality of journalists she has come across most of her career, expressing great respect for them:

In my experience with other journalists and other countries, I feel really privileged I’ve worked with so many really competent, intelligent people who have different perspectives to mine but simply enrich and maybe change the course of the story depending on what we found out. (Altman, 2016)

Following Schön, my reflective practice in this case involved a number of factors beyond the visible journalistic editorial production process. It involved networking, interviewing and collaborating, both as a researcher and as a professional journalist. It was during these exchanges that came to light the differences and similarities of representations, arguments, problem framing, story shaping, conflicting values, impact assessment and consequence evaluation, in producing and publishing investigations that are able to construct meaning and coherence, and that can finally contribute something new and relevant to the public domain.

Investigative journalist Roger Rodriguez brings an illustrative example of the complex issue of story framing and how different views of the world will lead to approaching reality in different ways. In the Colombian rainforest, a number of construction companies are building motorways that involve more than 2000 workers, most of them men, who arrive in towns of no more than 500 people. While most traditional stories would focus on the capacity of these towns to host that number of workers or the environmental impact or the temporary jobs created and their sustainability, a ‘South’ framing of the story will focus on the human side of the development’s impact. In this case, explained Rodriguez, the story was how the arrival of these workers in extremely poor towns increased child sexual exploitation to the point that parents would go around exhibiting their children. As a consequence of some media reports, developers and construction companies were called on to implement social responsibility measures to minimise the human impact in these communities.

To capture these views and experiences, in filmed interviews more than 40 experienced investigative journalists from Latin America, Europe, Australia and the USA discussed both professional strategies and cultural practices of investigative journalism. In addition to the interviews, another 50 journalists from diverse cultural backgrounds answered a
questionnaire about methods and practices of investigative/transborder journalism, in order to broaden the diversity of views that is by definition part of the ideological-normative multicultural dimension of this research.

In *The Reflective Practitioner*, Schön discussed what he calls the ‘dominant epistemology of practice’, where he explored how competent practitioners build and put into practice their practical knowledge. Schön’s proposal that there is a kind of knowledge that emerges through the practice of the discipline and cannot be accessed through regular research methods is reflected in this PhD. The same way that Schön’s insights originated in his observations of studio-based architectural teaching, the practice-based knowledge behind the creation of the proposed method for the best practice of transnational multicultural investigations is based on my experience as a journalist and editor in the most multicultural newsroom in the world, SBS. Schön elaborates on the dialogue between practice and theory through two main concepts that are reflected in actual practices: ‘knowing-in-action’ (the integration of thought and action) and ‘reflective practice’ (the relationship between the researcher and their context), which are the two sides of the TIJM proposed in this PhD. Together, the knowing-in-action through the practice of collaborative investigative journalism and the reflective practice of the journalistic processes have resulted in the production of knowledge as a result of trial and error.

In his master’s degree, Demeneck identified three stages of truth in a journalistic process: the first moment is the starting point of the investigation, the impulse of a journalist towards the truth that involves their principles and their motivations when they choose the topic. The second stage, said Demeneck, is the course of the investigation, the methods chosen to find the truth, and the checking and validation of the information. The third moment is the validation after the investigation’s results: the validation of the journalistic statement as the best available cognitive finding. In an interview for this research, Demeneck highlighted that most current discussions about journalistic ethics are focused on the first stage, the impulses, but not so much on the methods; that is the purpose of this PhD by project.
Latin American investigative journalists

The numerically important presence of Latin American investigative journalists in this consultation is due to the fact that, since 2009, Latin American investigative journalists have been getting together in an annual event (Colpin – the Latin American Conference on Investigative Journalism) where they discuss and exchange the methods and strategies they used in their most relevant investigative reports. Every year Colpin also awards the best Latin American investigations. During the last eight years, IPYS, the Peruvian organisation that created Colpin, has been facilitating the creation of a community of Latin American investigative journalists. In 2017, IPYS launched a competitive funded body to support transnational investigative projects in Latin America (http://premio.ipsys.org/bases-proyectos.html), adding to the experience of Connectas, a Colombian conglomerate that since 2013 has brought together investigative journalists from more than a dozen Latin American countries. According to Ricardo Uceda, member of IPYS and multi-awarded Peruvian investigative journalist, 70% of the projects funded by this funding are published, because they start with a clear idea of what they are looking for and the steps of the investigation that need to be placed in a timeline.

I became aware of these initiatives when I was invited to present a transnational investigative report titled ‘The other 9/11’ at the 2014 Colpin in Mexico. Back in Australia, I decided to study in depth the accumulated Latin American experience in investigative journalism, which was unknown in Australia. The following year, I returned to Latin America to participate in the 2015 Colpin in Peru, where I interviewed a group of high-profile Latin American investigative journalists who shared their views and experiences for this research.

Interpretative theory, collective and contextual intelligence

Interpretive theory (Bevir and Rhodes, 2002) provides the epistemological framework for this research, which collects the different methods and workflows used by the investigative journalists consulted. The interpretive approach is in line with the constructivist ontology of

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this investigation as they both understand the world as the conjunction and interaction of individuals’ subjective experiences.

‘Collective intelligence’ and ‘contextual intelligence’ (Nye, 2008) are two important concepts in this research as TJM has the potential to be a method of collective intelligence (CI), defined by George Pór (Bohnen, 2007) and Altmann et al. (2011) as the achievement or emergence of a new knowledge that results from collaborative and collective work. CI means ‘the ability to create products that are valued in one or more cultural settings’ (Nye, 2008b). It is composed of cognitive analytic capabilities, as well as tactic knowledge built up from experience. Contextual intelligence is defined here as the correct application of knowledge to a particular context: ‘Contextual intelligence is the intuitive diagnostic skill that helps you align your tactics with your objectives so that you get smart strategies in different situations’ (Nye, 2008b).

By interviewing journalists from a wide variety of cultural backgrounds, this research explores how the combination of knowledge and cultural context makes transnational journalism a growing form of CI, challenging traditional individualistic journalistic behaviours and practices (Lee and Skewes, 2003). While the construction of the TJM is mainly a CI exercise, the implementation of the TJM implies the ability to apply contextual intelligence. Many think that investigating in isolation is not only an old-fashioned approach to the discipline but also a waste of resources. Fabian Werner, multi-awarded investigative reporter and one of the directors of the multi-awarded Uruguayan online journalism platform NGO Sudestada, said:

Investigative journalism is teamwork. To investigate alone is an invitation to fail. For more than twenty years I’ve worked in investigations with other teams and if they hadn’t been done by a team, the investigations wouldn’t have existed due to time constraints, resources, access to sources; working by yourself I think is wasting opportunities and it also means you think you can do more than you actually can. (Werner, 2015)

Werner highlighted that investigative journalism presents a higher risk of making mistakes than other kinds of journalism. The reason for the higher risk of potential mistakes is because the access to sources and information is normally restricted, so fact-checking and corroborating data are more complex processes, as well as time consuming. And so a way of
mitigating the risk is to work collaboratively: ‘Journalists don’t like making mistakes, but we all make mistakes. And when you investigate the risk is higher; that’s why it’s important to have investigative teams’ said Werner.

Marcelo Pereira, director of the Uruguayan newspaper *La Diaria*, elaborated on the opportunities offered by an investigation that nobody has done yet, but could be a perfect example of a transnational report because of the different audiences. Pereira explored the way the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) works and its interaction with countries that are labelled ‘tax havens’ to do transactions of soccer players. Uruguay is one of these tax havens and people know it. So the transaction of soccer players has become a normal practice and would not be news in Uruguay. However, while the UEFA knows about this, most Europeans are not aware of these pseudo-legal mechanisms. The example cited by Pereira was about a Brazilian international soccer player who was formally transferred from a Brazilian club to a second division club in Uruguay that sold him again to a powerful European club. But the player never went to Uruguay or used the club shirt. In fact, Pereira thought that the player might not even know he was temporarily part of this small Uruguayan team. The triangulation worked because tax regulations are more beneficial in Uruguay. However, even though everyone knows this happens in Uruguay, nobody has investigated it, probably because the people making profit in the soccer business are usually very close to the investors that support sports journalism.

Building the TIJM as part of this research has been an inductive process, as proposed by grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1999). The same way that grounded theory constructs theories through the analysis of data gathered systematically, this TIJM was built following the documented experiences (interviews) of one group of journalists, together with the survey results of another group of relevant journalists and my experience as a journalist. The conceptual categories that emerged from this inductive process are the basis of the TIJM design, a collective construction of a methodological proposal for the practice of TIJ. The TIJM Methodology was hence built in a process that involved three stages of interviews and a survey. After each stage of consultation, a version of the methodology was drafted. The first stage of interviews – with Uruguayan journalists – led to the first version of the methodology. The second stage – with a broader group of Latin American journalists – helped build the second version, and the third stage involved interviews with American, Australian and
European journalists. Together with the survey results that included journalists from more than 20 other nationalities, the third stage of interviews shaped the third and final TIJM.

1.5 Exegesis outline

This exegesis is divided into five chapters and includes seven appendices.

The first chapter has introduced the topic and defined the research and ontological approaches to the investigation, as well as the problem of knowledge that created the need for a methodology. The second chapter reviews relevant literature in the field. Organised in an introduction and four main topics, the literature review explores what other investigations have been done about the topic or are related to the field or the conceptualisation of the topic.

In Chapter 3 the TIJM is outlined, presented in eleven sections. The introductory section explains the rationale for how the method was built. Each following section describes one of the ten areas of the standard methodology: the story; the team; the agreement; the timeline; the coordination; the production; the publication; the legal aspects; ethical considerations; and diversity. The last section of Chapter 3 describes the website that contains links to organisations of investigative journalists around the world. Titled ‘Find an investigative journalist’, it is a preliminary discussion on the importance of professional ‘match-making’ when building a team to carry out an investigative story. The expertise in team building in journalism would be worthy of separate research.

The fourth chapter describes the three stages of face-to-face interviews with experienced journalists in order to build the methodology. The first stage consisted of seven exploratory interviews with Uruguayan investigative journalists. The outcome of that process helped shape the first version of the methodology. The second stage of consultation involved more than 30 Latin American journalists, who are featured on the website. The outcome was the second version of the methodology. The third stage included interviews with journalists from Australia, the USA and a few European countries.
Chapter 5 focuses on describing the fourth stage of consultation: a survey answered by more than 50 journalists from more than 20 different countries.
This literature review shows that the body of literature about TIJ is limited, both because it is a relatively recent phenomenon and also because it is uncommon for journalists to reflect on their professional practice to build academic knowledge. However, in the last five years there have been some attempts to discuss the challenges and advantages of the discipline, although rarely as peer-reviewed articles.

The aim of this research is to construct a methodology for TIJ that considers the new paradigm of transnational investigation beyond the national journalistic sphere. The body of academic work in this area is very limited because TIJ is a relatively new discipline. This literature review explores the academic and industry articles published – mainly since 2014, a year that marks the beginning of a series of papers that reflect on, systematise and analyse the role of transnational (investigative) journalism. Most of these articles focus on the importance of collaboration across borders and networking, as well as the application of new technologies in data analysis. In 2017 the *Journal of Applied Journalism and Media Studies* made a call for papers on cross-border journalism. It was edited by journalists and academics Brigitte Alfter and Stefan Cândea. They explained why it is important to discuss the growing practice of transnational journalism: ‘there is yet no agreement on an acceptable definition(s) to describe this journalistic genre and the processes it involves, as well the promises and perils it entails’ (Alfter and Candea, 2017). Academics from the USA and the Netherlands (Van Der Haak et al., 2012) have called this the era of ‘networked journalism’ (NJ) in which journalists’ analysis, context, explanation and storytelling skills become more relevant as large amounts of data become available, as evidenced by the Edward Snowden\(^6\) case.

This literature review also argues that the trans-nationalisation of investigative reporting can change the narrative of international news coverage and the public perception of wrongdoings. In addition, it addresses the ethical challenges presented by TIJ that are similar to the ones faced by journalism across borders in general (or global journalism). Finally, it is crucial to discuss the multicultural dimension – in the ideological-normative sense – of cross-

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\(^6\) Edward J. Snowden leaked highly classified information from the National Security Agency (NSA) in 2013 when he was a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) employee and contractor, revealing global surveillance programs and triggering a global discussion about national security vs individual privacy. The US Department of Justice unsealed charges against Snowden of two counts of violating the Espionage Act of 1917 and theft of government property. His passport was revoked and he is thought to be living in Russia.
border collaborative investigations as this dimension is intrinsic to the culturally diverse 
nature of global stories.

It is important to clarify the use of the term ‘multicultural’ as it is used to convey different 
meanings in different contexts. In ‘Multiculturalism: new policy responses to diversity’ 
Christine Inglis (1997), former director of the Multicultural Research Centre of the 
University of Sydney, breaks down the concept of multiculturalism by identifying three 
different uses of the term: the demographic-descriptive usage; the programmatic-political 
usage; and the ideological-normative usage. While the demographic-descriptive usage of the 
word ‘multiculturalism’ just describes the composition of a population in terms of race and 
etnicity, the programmatic-political usage is related to the particular policy initiatives 
intended to manage a group’s ethnic diversity.

In this exegesis, multiculturalism is used in its ideological-normative meaning:

Multiculturalism emphasises that acknowledging the existence of ethnic 
diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture 
should go hand in hand with enjoying full access to, participation in, and 
adherence to constitutional principles and commonly shared values 
prevailing in the society. By acknowledging the rights of individuals and 
groups and ensuring their equitable access to society, advocates of 
multiculturalism also maintain that such a policy benefits both individuals 
and the larger society by reducing pressures for social conflict based on 
disadvantage and inequality; they also argue that multiculturalism is 
enrichment for the society as a whole. (Inglis, 1997)

For Demeneck, the fact that this proposed TIJM considers multiple cultures ‘has an added 
value of building a more robust cognitive base’ (Demeneck, 2016). Candea of the EIC 
network pointed out, ‘different cultural and political backgrounds have different sort of 
influence on the story, on the research process’. The issue of diversity in terms of both 
language and culture is not an issue of journalism, said Guilherme Canela, UNESCO’S 
adviser in communication and information for MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay 
and Uruguay), because there are many stereotyped visions of the world’s regions (and in-
between regions: Latin America, Africa, Oceania and Asia) and language is only one reason 
of this regional profiling:
There are many other kinds of cultural misunderstandings and so multilingualism is one of the issues that have to be tackled, but there’s also a large agenda of cultural diversity that needs to be deepened to change the lack of transnational knowledge and journalism is included. (Canela, 2015)

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the body of literature that reflects on the practice of TJJ is recent and does not include a significant number of peer-reviewed pieces. However, in the last five years a niche group of journalists and academics have started to produce articles focused on the importance of collaborative journalism across borders. Paul Radu (2014), Alexandre Léchenet (2014) and Bill Buzenberg (2015) are among the first to reflect on this relatively new paradigm. Radu’s article ‘Investigative journalism: it’s all about cross-border cooperation’ focuses on the three main principles that can lead to high-quality journalism: ‘think outside your country’, ‘make use of existing investigative journalism networks’ and ‘make use of technology’, while Léchenet’s paper, written for the Reuters Institute, focuses on global database investigations and describes the increasingly relevant role of data journalists in large investigations, as they are able to analyse the data, make it accessible to other journalists and help manage projects across borders. Following Radu and Léchenet, in July 2015 Bill Buzenberg, the former director of the ICIJ, published an article titled ‘Anatomy of global investigation’ that follows the course of the ICIJ’s three most important investigations: Offshore Leaks, Luxembourg Leaks and Swiss Leaks. ‘Globalization requires a cross-border journalistic response. Journalism has fallen behind the way the world is organized … We need to create a scale of journalism to fit the crime’, explains Buzenberg, to bring awareness on the need of the discipline, almost as if we could not avoid going down this path.

When this research was proposed, the 2015 Swiss Leaks represented the biggest development of a cross-border collaborative model, having brought together a team of 86 journalists from

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7 Secrecy for sale: inside the global offshore money maze [www.icij.org/offshore](http://www.icij.org/offshore)

8 Luxembourg Leaks: global companies’ secrets exposed [www.icij.org/project/luxembourg-leaks](http://www.icij.org/project/luxembourg-leaks)

9 Swiss Leaks: murky cash sheltered by bank secrecy [www.icij.org/project/swiss-leaks](http://www.icij.org/project/swiss-leaks)

46 countries through a complex 15-month investigation. It was followed by the *Panama Papers* where the ICJ, together with the German newspaper *Suddeutsche Zeitung* and more than 100 other media partners exposed the identities of shareholders and directors of 214,000 shell companies set up by Mossack Fonseca, a Panamanian law firm and corporate service provider. This kind of collaborative model has spread in the last ten years at the same time that big media organisations’ investigative units have been reduced (Kendal, 2014) and in many cases dismantled. More and more independent journalists have been creating their own digital platforms. In an interview for this PhD research, Canela reflected on the lights and shadows of the changes that are happening in the media landscape:

Media´s decreasing investment in investigative units is a problem for investigative journalism at a national level, and of course, it’ll affect other collaborative ways as well. That´s why I think transnational works will be increasingly coordinated with these new experiences of investigative journalism, that are online, that are organised as small business structures that are new business models. In Latin America there are many in all the countries of the region, they are very successful in terms of quality, and have more legal freedom in their business model to cooperate amongst them. (Canela, 2015)

And for stories that were once impossible for independent journalists to investigate – without the support of an established media – digital connectivity has given them access to worldwide transnational collaborations. Producing investigative stories developed in collaboration through a robust network of reliable journalists is a common denominator of most alternative models of investigative journalism. Journalists have started to work across borders as a response to the global nature of wrongdoings concerning the environment, finance, security and human rights, money laundering, religious groups, state aid, military and secret services, migration, corporate corruption such as malpractice within the pharmaceutical industry, and organised crime.

This cross-broader framing of stories has redefined both the practice of the profession as well the framing of the narratives. For example, Radu’s (2015) and Charles Lewis’s (2013) papers on investigative reporting are valuable contributions to the understanding of the professional experiences and journalistic ontology of this relatively new paradigm, as the exercise of thinking journalism beyond borders implies a reconceptualisation of locality and extraterritoriality. Radu, the executive director of the Sarajevo-based OCCRP, argued the
'magic bullet’ is combining technology with street-level investigation: ‘It is the mix of local and global information, the combination of local shoe-leather reporting and leaps across borders through databases that will make the difference in the long run’ (Kaplan, 2013). While data allows a quantitative approach to the story, the human angle and stories bring the quality element.

Lewis’s (2007, 2013) papers on investigative reporting are referent works in the reflection of TIJ, as he is founder of both the CIJ and the Centre for Public Integrity. Lewis, a visionary and veteran in transnational investigation, thinks the potential of investigative journalism collaboration across borders is still in its infancy. Drew Sullivan and David Kaplan’s work (2013) has contributed to the understanding and discussion of global investigative journalism, while Buzenberg (2015) stresses the importance of data-driven collaborations across borders.

The Center for International Media Assistance (CIMA) published a series of works on how to support global investigative journalism. In a 2013 CIMA publications, Kaplan (2013) explained that journalists ‘are linking up as never before to collaborate on stories involving international crime, unaccountable businesses, environmental degradation, safety and health problems’ and identified more than 106 non-profit investigative reporting organisations worldwide that play important roles in the discipline.11

Professor Wendy Bacon (2012), former academic at the University of Technology of Sydney (UTS) and respected Australian investigative journalist, explored the potential of investigative journalism when the variable of space disappears. Bacon argued that journalism students and academics are professional human resources who are not used enough and suggested using this built capacity within universities in collaborative investigations across borders. Two years later, Gearing’s research (2014) looked into the practice of investigative journalism and how traditional journalistic skills and new technologies combine to redefine a new space where networks (Castells, 2011)12 are a key part of the journalistic production


12 ‘The most crucial forms of power follow the logic of network-making power. In a world of networks, the ability to exercise control over others depends on two basic mechanisms: (a) the ability to constitute network(s) and to program/reprogram the network(s) in terms of the goals assigned to the network; and (b) the ability to
process. Gearing argued that the application of new technologies in journalism together with an increasing global collaboration has resulted in an ‘emerging global Fourth Estate’. Gearing also explored the theory of global journalism proposed by Peter Berglez (2013). Berglez proposed that journalism will eventually leave the boundaries of the lenses through which the narratives are built and will have a more global outlook on society, meaning that the national boundaries will not remain so relevant in building news narratives.

The above is some of the limited literature available about or related to TIJ. In each case, the authors discuss a particular aspect related to TIJ at a descriptive level and based on their experiences and observations. In order to walk towards a methodological proposal for the best practice of TIJ, it is necessary to explore the phenomenon beyond the descriptive level. It is the aim of this PhD to propose a methodology that provides keys to addressing the common challenges faced by individuals and organisations when working collaboratively in terms of people skills and behaviour, diverse ethics, different – and sometimes unknown – workflows and schools of journalism. Different ways of working affect the way we build the narratives in journalism. Aside from the individual narratives, the way we approach the story in transnational investigations adds depth to the global public sphere, as suggested by Habermas (1991), and could potentially alter the perception of international issues from being a matter concerning ‘the other’ to a matter belonging to the global community. A story about slave mining work in an African country that could have been perceived in the past as a problem of ‘the other’ with a transnational dimension can be transformed into a global or bilateral issue. An example is ‘Fatal extraction: Australian mining in Africa’, an investigation published in 2015 by the ICIJ that revealed the controversial roles of more than 150 Australian mining companies in Africa.

connect and ensure the cooperation of different networks by sharing common goals and combining resources while fending off competition from other networks by setting up strategic cooperation.’ (Castells, 2011, p. 4)

13 http://pulitzercenter.org/project/fatal-extraction-australian-mining-in-africa ‘In a special six-part rich multimedia presentation, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) used thousands of corporate records to detail how Australian companies can under-report deaths, injuries, legal actions or strikes. Never-before-seen court documents, legal complaints, community petitions, contracts and confidential company emails reveal the extent of Australia’s controversial imprint across Africa.’ https://projects.icij.org/fatalextraction/
While global journalism is commonly associated with big media corporations (Keane, 2007), this research proposes a collaborative model that can also apply to individuals working as freelance journalists or in non-profit organisations, such as the US-based ProPublica and Chile’s CIPER. As Grieves (2012) concluded, the role of individual initiatives in trans-border journalism is vital as it is the human proactive role in wanting to collaborate that makes the difference in the production process, that is ‘shaped by individual understandings of this type of work’ (Grieves, 2012). Grieves’s analysis of European experiences of cross-border productions includes successful and unsuccessful cases. His aim is not to find a unique narrative as a way of eliminating the differences that make cross-border production a challenge for journalism. On the contrary, he argued in favour or respecting cultural diversity in journalism:

> The variety of distinct journalistic forms corresponding to different cultures is a vivid indicator of the fact that people from different places communicate about themselves and others in particular ways …

Transnational journalism does not supplant national cultures of journalism, but rather supplements them. (Grieves, 2012)

Grieves’s work in European cross-border journalism is in line with my experience, as I supervise investigative and long-form journalistic reports of journalists based in Australia who were born – and in most cases educated – overseas.

In an interview for this PhD, Pereira, director of La Diaria, used a professional experience to explain how the different cultures in journalism can lead to telling radically different stories. While he was in Spain in 2009, José Mujica was starting to profile as the following president of the country, before he became an international figure. During this trip, Pereira talked to many people, from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain to colleagues in newspapers like El País de Madrid or El Diario Público. All of them tried to explain Mujica in the context of a simplified vision of Latin America:

> for all of them the mould to frame Latin America was the same connection of three silly phrases that were a rough generalisation: [they said] ‘in Latin America you have the leftists like Chavez, Evo Morales and Correa who are the populists, and then you have the serious ones like Bachelet and Tabaré Vazquez. So Mujica, where does he sit?’

And that was all. So from here we had to explain that the image built in Spain of some of these ‘populists’ is built – amongst other elements – by a
Spanish powerful media group that lost the lucrative business of textbooks in those countries and they became enemies with those presidents. ‘Really?’ asked the Spanish colleagues. ‘That’s something you should know’ [I answered].

In Spain Evo Morales said once to a journalist from El Pais: ‘I want you to know that you were sent to ask me this question because this is what happened in Bolivia’ as Prisa [which owns El Pais de Madrid] was the company that used to do the textbooks. The journalist turned green.

When producing international news, most big media organisations tend to choose the news packages sent by known Western(ised) brands: BBC, CNN, Al Jazeera and a few more, or a story produced by a recognised journalist. The editorial decision is normally based on the brand the media organisation identifies with: they are seen like ‘us’ as opposed to an unknown journalist from a distant country who belongs to the group seen as ‘them’. ‘The other’ is not only the other country and the events happening there, but also the journalist from that country, who is normally perceived as ‘the other’.

When a story breaks in a foreign country, news services rely on the information provided by the wires and established correspondents, even when another local journalist might have better access to sources on the ground. Based on more than 15 years of experience as a reporter in Uruguay and in Australia, I believe the same principle applies to investigative reporting produced by a journalist from another country, who speaks another language and works in a media outlet that is not one of the few providers of international news.

Besides the language barrier, which has a big impact on international news coverage, there is also lack of trust in ‘the other’s’ editorial standards and professional ethics. Collaborative journalism across borders challenges these structures; when a story is produced by a team of journalists from different countries working in a horizontal structure (as proposed by the TIJM) the gap between ‘us’ and ‘them’ starts to get smaller. As Demeneck said when I interviewed him for this research: ‘I think it is also a change of mentality because otherwise we’ll always depend on the same communication channels – and sources’ (Demeneck, 2016).

Alfter, who runs the European Journalismfund, explained that the objective of the Fund is to stimulate cross-border collaborative journalism through research grants, network
opportunities and this kind of thing, in order to establish good examples and good contacts between journalists:

Through the practice of collaborating in a team of three, five, seven, eleven journalists … they get to know each other, and we can see that they do collaborate again at a later stage because they have built trust. (Alfter, 2016)

Candea from the EIC network said that

the big discussion when an investigation starts is who you know and who you trust and who you worked with before, and then this trusted group at the beginning establishes a circle of trust and then they recommend others, and each in the group would say ‘hey I know another person’ whenever we need another person and the others would accept it just because they accept the first one, the introducer. And so the trust is expanded to someone else. (Candea, 2015)

Even though the procedural element is key for cost-effective practice of TIJ, the best practices this PhD project is trying to establish and convey are not limited to a procedural series of actions. There are philosophical and ethical differences that affect the practice of journalism which are shaped by diverse geopolitical, historical and political scenarios.

The eight exploratory interviews carried out with Uruguayan investigative journalists in June 2015 broadened the initial procedural approach to the methodology to include a discussion of ethics. This is a fundamental aspect to discuss in collaborative investigations, and even to conceptualise what truth and objectivity are in journalism and thus agree on the rationale behind the framing of the investigations: what do we investigate and why.

In an interview for this PhD, Pereira of La Diaria proposed that Latin American investigative journalism should be understood in the conceptual Latin American framework, where investigative journalists normally have a position and a commitment towards the issues they investigate. Whereas not all investigative journalism in Latin America is advocacy journalism,14 Pereira argued that:

14 While in some parts of the world advocacy journalism is synonymous with bias and lack of professionalism, in other contexts advocacy journalism has worked as the engine that has kept award-winning journalists investigating despite not having any financial support.
the typical Latin American investigative journalist has another scale of motivations that relate to his will to investigate … Investigative journalism in Latin America – at least the kind of journalism I’m interested in – is linked to a vision of society that … involves taking a position. There’s a rebellious impulse that is political – but non-partisan – in its view of society. (Pereira, 2015)

According to Pereira, different approaches affect perceptions of reality, making the field of suspicion (what to investigate and why) very different from the way traditional Anglo-Saxon journalists frame investigations. Therefore, Pereira suggested that a TIJ Methodology should start with a conversation about the journalists’ motivations and an open discussion of their potential conflicts of interest.

Candea also focuses on ethics and how much the context influences the framing of the story. When I interviewed Candea, he said he understands that in some parts of the world the decision ‘on whether it’s a topic we investigate or not is different, if we should only report on illegal stuff, not on unethical stuff, because in my world, Eastern Europe, a lot of the stuff is actually the other way around: conflicts of interest, ethical and moral issues, etc. where the legislation doesn’t say it’s illegal, but it’s still corruption (for example, the links between officials and officials’ family’s businesses), even if it doesn’t involve a millionaire sum of money’.

Concern about the legal versus ethical framing of an investigation was also raised by Pereira, who pointed out that the capacity for suspicion of a story – and how it is framed – is always related to the theoretical thought about a society, including its structures. This ‘theoretical thought’ includes the unspoken values that ultimately determine – or at least influence – the editorial decision-making. Pereira thinks that the development of investigative journalism at an international level is conceptually framed in a way that might not match the kind of work investigative journalists do in Latin America:

The approach in the investigations I’ve read about focuses on the legality – or not – of an issue. I have the impression that the capacity for suspicion is linked to a theoretical thought about society. And this is something to consider when discussing a lingua franca between journalists. Or the investigations that are financially supported by organisations, it happens that the suspicion in structural terms seems to disappear. (Pereira, 2015)
Pereira is passionate about the core values behind the editorial decisions and how the differences in the ways journalists understand what needs to be evaluated are different between Latin America and the Anglo-Saxon world. To begin with, most Latin American investigative journalists are driven by a force that leads them to fight for the story so as to change the world. However, this drive could be seen as a hindrance by Anglo-Saxon journalists, who would tend to label these kind of journalists ‘advocates’ even when their journalistic standards are high.

Concern about potential conflicts of interests other colleagues might be facing in other countries – when working in a transnational team – was brought up by a number of journalists I interviewed. Monteagudo identified it as one of the key challenges of working collaboratively: conflicts of interests, professional vocation, how deep you want to go in the investigation and whether you really want to do investigative journalism, meaning how committed journalists are in the search for possible truth.

Discussion around the main values of the journalists involved in each project needs to be considered as part of the collaboration process, it is not optional. Whether the conversation takes place or not, these values are present across all the processes of editorial decision-making, and avoidance will only translate into postponing the conversation until conflicting values become evident in an editorial joint decision. In this sense, Canadian media ethics scholar Stephen Ward’s (2010, 2015) concept of a ‘global ethics’ approach for journalistic ethics in an increasingly globalised world fits into this investigation analysis. As media

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15 In the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Center for Journalism Ethics, Ward describes global media ethics and its components, https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/global-media-ethics

‘Global media ethics aims at developing a comprehensive set of principles and standards for the practice of journalism in an age of global news media … Most codes of ethics contain standards for news organizations or associations in specific countries. International associations of journalists exist, and some have constructed declarations of principle. But no global code has been adopted by most major journalism associations and news organizations. In addition to statements of principle, more work needs to be done on the equally important area of specific practice guidelines for covering international events. An adequate global journalism ethics has yet to be constructed.’

Ward identifies a list of components of ‘global media ethics’ that he classifies in three categories: conceptual tasks, research tasks and practical tasks. The conceptual tasks involve ‘new philosophical foundations for a global ethics, which include: global re-interpretation of the ethical role and aims of journalism; global re-interpretation of existing journalism principles and standards, such as objectivity, balance and independence; and construction of new norms and “best practices” as guides for the practice of global journalism.’

The research tasks mean increasing ‘research into the state of journalism, amid globalization: studies of news media in various regions of world; studies on the evolution and impact of globalization in news media, with a
reporting has gone beyond regions and nations, Ward brings into the conversation the need for and the emergence of a new code of ethics for a globalised world that rethinks the principles of journalism; this code is nothing else than finding a way to reconcile conflicting values across cultures (both human cultures and professional cultures). Agreeing on the ethics and discussing the framework of suspicion are two key elements to build the trust between journalists working together across borders.

Even though transnational and global are different concepts when applied to the business world across borders, for the purpose of this discussion of journalistic ethics this research considers global ethics in journalism as a synonym of transnational ethics.

In ‘Global journalism ethics’ Ward states:

> Journalism ethics is in the midst of a difficult transition that cannot be adequately addressed by traditional principles and concepts … We need to reinvent journalism ethics for a new age, from the ground up … To achieve this reinvention, philosophical thought is essential [and] philosophical thought will lead us to the conclusion that any adequate ethic of journalism should be cosmopolitan in content, procedure, and aim. (Ward, 2010)

Ward (2010) discussed that the need for global ethics in journalism is based on at least two reasons, a practical and an ethical one. The practical one is that a non-global ethic cannot address the problems that global journalism faces, and the ethical reason is that the global impact and reach of the stories come with global responsibilities. Ward argued: ‘One responsibility is to report issues and events in a way that reflects this global plurality of views; to practice a journalism that helps different groups understand each other better’ (2010). Among the tasks in walking towards an ethics code of this nature Ward includes studies on the ethical standards of new media in different countries, which is an implicit acknowledgement of multicultural diversity in journalism. On the Global Ethics website,
Ward also suggested ‘coalition-building among journalists and interested parties with the aim of writing a global code of ethics that has wide-spread acceptance’.

How will this global ethics code be built in such a way that the final outcome is the result of a thorough and inclusive comparative ethics exercise? The key points here will be who are the parts involved in this dialogue, who do they represent and who will make the call when there are disagreements, especially when some might expect their ethics to be a ‘standard’ for global journalism. The need for a collective construction of the (possible) truth emphasises the importance of trust between colleagues in worldwide journalism. The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) has proposed a Code of Principles for the Conduct of Journalism as ‘a global standard for ethics’ (White, 2008).

TIJ also plays a role in building good global governance and increasing the levels of transparency. The development of globalisation, particularly in the internet age, holds particular significance for global governance (Lawson, 2002) and influences the role of TIJ. This scenario situates TIJ as one of the actors in public opinion building, good governance, accountability, transparency and social mobilisation (Protess, 1992). Humanitarian international legislation (Donnelly, 2012) sets a common ground for TIJ to legitimate professional involvement in human rights cases of any state, individual or group. The way individuals and groups value information is increasingly based on the credibility of the sources, and governments – defined within national borders – are less relevant actors. Whereas in the past the competition for credibility was built on government sources, Nye (2011) argued that ‘news media, corporations, NGOs, intergovernmental organisations, and networks of scientific communities’ have become credible ‘journalistic sources’.

I believe that a multicultural approach to a shared methodology is the only way to start an authentic and credible journalistic dialogue across borders. This would be the opposite of a centralised method suggested by one culture that imposes its views and values on the others.

In The Global Investigative Journalism Casebook, Mark Lee Hunter (2012) exemplified investigations from Bulgaria, Jordan, Africa, the Philippines and Latvia, as well as from some countries in Africa, Europe and the Americas. Alfter’s (2015) work uses her experience and her colleagues’ to highlight the issues that might arise along the different moments of the
investigation process, and suggests ways to increase the effectiveness of cross-border dialogues between journalists, including consideration of cultural differences as an important variable to manage:

Not just the technological but also the cultural side of communication has to be considered, since well-functioning communication within the team is paramount in the work phase. In law and business studies as well as in psychology and sociology, communication is taught, including intercultural communication. These insights can be useful for journalists within the team and in general to prepare interviews, etc. (Alfter, 2016)

Before June 2016 there were no publications that specifically discussed or proposed a workflow for the best practice of transnational (or cross-border) investigative journalism, when Alfter published a paper titled: ‘Cross-border collaborative journalism: why journalists and scholars should talk about an emerging method’ where she proposed six stages, from networking to publication. Her method includes a conversation about ethics, highlights the need for clear agreements between the journalists and values the importance of cultural differences.

Alfter’s method has some similarities with the first version of the methodology designed in this research, as both of them are structured as a series of steps that start with a hypothesis. This research has evolved from this chronological model into a double-entry table where ten areas interact with the time variable to create a nonlinear model that respects the complexity of investigative production process that are unlikely to be encapsulated in a linear process.

We include two examples of rather complex investigative reports across borders, developed and published in Latin America, that had very little international media coverage, but that are illustrative of the quality of the work being done in this part of the world. This is one of the reasons I focused on these experiences to start developing the proposed methodology. One of the examples of the complexity of transnational investigations is ‘Empire of ashes’, led by Mauri Konig, multi-awarded Brazilian journalist. The hypothesis of the investigation was to measure how involved the former president of Paraguay, Horacio Cartes, was in the illegal business of cigarette smuggling. Konig started by finding out how many cigarettes had been confiscated in Brazil in a period of four years, from 2010 to 2013, using only official figures. In Costa Rica, journalist Rodney Rojas, an expert with databases, tracked a large part of
Paraguay’s cigarette exports to certain parts of the Caribbean such as Belize and Panama, and together they managed to establish that the cigarettes were arriving to those countries but not leaving to third countries, which meant the cigarettes went from there to other countries of the region as contraband. This tracking allowed them to put together a map with nine routes of the cigarette-smuggling that started in Paraguay. There were also air routes that left Paraguay and entered Bolivia, and from Bolivia they were distributed to other countries, smuggled into Chile and Peru across their borders.

The second example of an outstanding – and complex – investigation was led by Ecuadorian investigative journalist Monica Almeida, editor-in-chief of newspaper *El Universo*. Almeida led an investigation about Venezuelan, Colombian and Ecuadorian businesspeople who created a system of Ecuadorian ghost companies to fake exports into Venezuela and legally take out of the country dollars obtained from the Cadivi (the Venezuelan Foreign Exchange Administration Commission, a government department that sells foreign currency to Venezuelans because there is no free access to foreign currency). The fraud was done through a compensation system with foreign currency. As Ecuador has a dollarised economy, these were ghost exports from Ecuador to Venezuela: the money left Venezuela at a rate of 1 dollar equivalent to 4 or 5 Bolivares (the Venezuelan currency). This foreign exchange stayed for a while in Ecuador and then went to third countries but was now treated like foreign exchange, so when it entered Venezuela again, at black market rates, it was 100 Bolivares. So the people were making extraordinary profit. Almeida tracked more than USD 357,000,000, (estimated to be more than 510,000,000 Australian dollars) that came from Venezuela, went through Ecuador and on to Hong Kong, Miami, the Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, the Caribbean and Peru. Even though they were different cases, it was the same strategy the companies used, and some of them operated in more than one country, which means they were coordinating these operations.
CHAPTER 3: THE METHODOLOGY IN 10 AREAS
3.1 **Introduction**

In this chapter the TIJM is outlined, presented in eleven sections after an introductory section that explains the rationale for how the method was built. Each following section describes one of the ten areas of the standard methodology: the story; the team; the agreement; the timeline; the coordination; the production; the publication; the legal aspects; ethical considerations; and diversity.

This methodology for the best practice of TIJ from a multicultural perspective proposed in this research is a discussion that is both practical and philosophical, where conversations go far beyond the practicalities of daily workflows but the framing of the stories and the voices that build the narrative. More than 40 journalists were interviewed from Europe, Latin America and Australia, and more than 50 from around the globe participated through an online questionnaire to identify the most important areas of the production process as well as the stages in time. In the first group of interviews, I included many open questions to allow myself and the journalists interviewed to reflect on their professional practice as investigative journalists and identify which were the core and recurrent issues when working collaboratively. After this first round of interviews, I managed to put together the first version of the methodology, which had 20 steps that had to be followed in order. Armed with this first draft of the methodology, I did a second round of interviews with a different group of journalists, who were asked to criticise the draft and contrast the 20 steps with their professional experiences and practices. Based on this second round of feedback, together with the survey, I put together the last version of the methodology, which includes ten areas of production that are assessed several times during the production process.

Fabiola Torres, co-founder of Ojo Público, could not conceive of an investigation without some kind of method, even though she was aware this is a matter of great debate among journalists. For Torres, experience and discipline are key to generating good results, and for her working with a methodology means ‘to organise and systematise things’:

> The experience in the job obliges us to have one. Even more when we work with piles of information in data bases, with software to assist us in the analysis of digitised information, and there are many more challenges that make us be more disciplined in what we do. (Torres, 2015)
Torres explained that mostly the amount of information journalists and audience are exposed to make a methodology increasingly necessary to filter the information we communicate, and to do so we need to work in order, know what to choose and go from the initial research question to the sources and to prove what we want to prove. Ultimately, ‘arriving to the proof implies a methodology’, she concluded.

In this chapter, the methodology is graphically represented in a two-entry box (see Figure 3.1). In the left column there are ten areas that summarise the journalists’ views – through face-to-face interviews and an online questionnaire. They are the elements identified as part of the collaborative production process. The horizontal fields along the top are the different stages of the investigation in each production area, monitoring its evolution over time. The three stages mirror the standard process of content production in journalism: preproduction, production and postproduction. Stage one corresponds to the preparation for planning the investigation, the second stage is the actual development of the research and the third stage is the review and preparation for publication.

In a recent investigation of a transnational financial fraud, Almeida said how important it was to have good planning to be more efficient and save time:

> In this case [transnational financial fraud between Ecuador, Venezuela and other countries], almost at the end we realised we should talk with a journalist from *El Nuevo Herald* in Miami … We should have guessed from the beginning where the money was going to, since it’s known the money of rich Latin Americans goes to Miami through Panama because it’s a tax haven. We should have thought about this from the beginning, to work with someone in Miami and start working on it with more time. (Almeida, 2015)

This chapter details the ten production areas: 1) defining the story through a hypothesis; 2) building the team that will carry out the investigation; 3) arriving at an agreement in terms of both editorial ownership and the resources each participant will commit to investing in the investigation; 4) a timeline that estimates the production and publication dates; 5) who is in charge of coordinating and managing the production and how they will do it; 6) production agreement; 7) the publication decisions about the platforms and outlets; 8) the legal risk
assessment; 9) the ethical considerations; and finally 10) the voices and angle that will frame the story, respecting the diverse cultural views involved as equally important.

It is not uncommon to find Latin American journalists who frame journalism diversity through the lenses of so-called Global North and Global South tensions. However, the dialogue towards an agreed methodology should go beyond this tension, and build trust on the pillars of acknowledgement, respect and understanding of cultural, religious, political and philosophical differences (Bruner, 2002).
3.2 Production area 1 – Story

The production area Story involves definition of the first hypothesis. Formulated as a statement, the hypothesis is the starting point of the investigation. During the fieldwork journalists will try to verify or refute the truthfulness of the hypothesis. This first hypothesis is proposed by the journalist – or journalists – who have the initiative to investigate a topic; it is the first impulse around which a team of journalists and experts in different disciplines will be built. The process of defining the hypothesis is important as it will frame the course of the investigative report. Even if the hypothesis is not confirmed when contrasted with reality, this finding is still new and relevant knowledge.

Once the subject matter is identified, the intellectual process used to go from the topic to the hypothesis is crucial. Asking some key questions about the topic can help the process to guide the journalist to arrive to the hypothesis. This statement – sometimes a question – will
guide the course of the investigation as it gives the journalist the specifics of what they need to verify. The *African Investigative Journalism Manual* (Groenink et al., 2010) suggests a list of standardised questions to help analyse any topic and formulate the issue as a hypothesis. This is a summary of the suggested questions:

What’s the news? What’s the story? What could the story reveal that wasn’t previously known? Has the story been covered before or elsewhere? So what? Why should our audience care? What went wrong? How did it go wrong? Why did it go wrong? Who did it? How did they do it? What are the consequences? How can it be put right? What’s the rationale? (Why are we doing this story?) Who will benefit/who may suffer if we do this story? Whom does the story challenge or call to account? Will the story highlight faulty systems or processes? How important is the issue beyond the case? Will the story stir debate around values or behaviour?

To be relevant, a story needs to go beyond the concern of a person or group. One case study can be useful if it leads to finding a systematic failure in the system (or wrongdoings as a pattern of behaviour).

As the investigation progresses, the hypothesis needs to be reviewed to analyse whether the course of the research and its preliminary findings still relate to what it aimed to verify or if the journalist needs to reframe the investigation. This hypothesis review is a dynamic process that in some cases is a constant assessment during the investigation, not limited to three stages. At least there should be three moments when the hypothesis is discussed: at the beginning, during the production process and during the final editing of the story before publication.

3.3 **Production area 2 – Team-building**

The methodology proposed in this research for the practice of investigative journalism is designed to be applied in investigations involving journalists of two or more countries.

After the hypothesis has been defined (formulated as a statement or an open question), the journalist designing the project identifies all the countries that are potentially involved in the
story, before deciding on the countries that will actually be invited to participate in the investigation – according to relevance and feasibility. In general, in a global story some countries tend to have greater involvement than others, which will determine the relevance of each country to the story. But it is not always possible to involve journalists from all the countries related to the story, so participation in the collaborative reporting will also depend on what is possible in each case. While ideally all the countries involved in the story should be part of the investigation process, this might not be possible in many cases. After the countries to be part of the project are identified, the search for the journalists/media organisations starts.

All the journalists interviewed for this research agreed that they prefer working with journalists they already know. This knowledge could come from: having worked with the journalist before; being familiar with the journalist’s work; or a personal recommendation. To support the TIJ Methodology, the website designed as part of this PhD includes a list of investigative journalists and institutions where these professionals can be contacted. This compilation (detailed at the end of this chapter) is an inclusive list and it is so far the most comprehensive list worldwide: https://tijmethodology.com/2017/05/09/find-investigative-journalists. It includes the GIJN and its 70 associates in 35 countries. In an effort to map worldwide human resources in the sector beyond traditional media organisations, the GIJN’s director, David Kaplan, identified 106 non-profit investigative reporting organisations in 47 countries, including reporting centres, training institutes, professional associations, grant-making groups and online networks.

When building the team, as well as journalistic organisations it’s very important to also consider: universities with academics/students experienced in investigative journalism; media unions that can suggest relevant journalists in the field; and independent organisations that produce investigative reports. This is a very significant human resource that media organisations do not normally use; it is a large capacity built within Australia. Investigative teams also increasingly need to include other kind of experts, like developers, software engineers and hackers who can facilitate data visualisation and understanding (mainly in data-based investigations, but not only).
Expertise and experience are basic requirements when choosing any person for a job. For this kind of team, the match-making faces some challenges journalists need to be aware of to maximise the resources when putting together a team. Firstly, generational differences might affect the group dynamic if the coordinator is unable to minimise the technological generational gap. This conversation goes beyond using Google Docs or sophisticated data-analysis software. The tech gap affects the production process itself and even the relationships with the sources. That’s why it is important to have an open and honest conversation about the channels of communication with both whistle-blowers and sources that need to stay anonymous.

For example, whistle-blowers are not protected in the legislations of many countries (including Australia). The old school of journalism used to ‘sort out’ this problem by guaranteeing their sources they would not disclose their identity even if that meant facing legal consequences. In an era of metadata, all digital communications put anonymous sources at high risk; not understanding how metadata works could put the journalists’ sources in danger. Journalists’ duty of care towards their sources is assessed differently according to the levels of information and understanding of how the government could track sources using technology.

Peruvian journalist Gustavo Gorriti explained that, in most cases, the approach to journalists is not blind; there is some orientation or understanding of who is who because they have an idea of who does what, or at least who does what that has relevance:

> Many of us belong to international consortiums of journalism and investigative journalism; and many of us belong to more than one. So we know them, we know their work or we know people who can inform us about them. This way we can have an initial approach. Then the chemistry that happens in the course of the investigation – which can often be demanding, that provokes a certain level of tension, stress – that is very difficult to predict. It changes and of course the fact that many of the ones who do this job have – we have – difficult egos and frequently volatile characters makes it not so easy. (Gorriti, 2015)

Coming across egocentric personalities in professional journalistic teams is not uncommon, according to most interviewees with decades working in media. Argentinean investigative reporter Matias Longoni reflected:
Otherwise you have a clash of egos. The coordinator should be a recognised journalist who is also respected … let’s say … journalists are a piece of crap, beyond all of our values … when we have a story we want to publish it now and we want to have the local impact first. (Longoni, 2015)

I identified degrees of tension between journalists who have big egos and their rejection of using a methodology, which reflects nothing else but their rejection of feeling controlled or managed. Castilla from Ojo Público said that, in investigative reporting, journalists have been standing on high altars:

We’ve had our egos fed for a long time; we’ve told the audience what’s important to them. The internet has democratised things and changed behavioural patterns, but there are still journalists who see themselves as gurus. (Castilla, 2015)

Founder of the ICIJ Charles Lewis gave an extensive answer about the human nature of investigative journalism and how characters, personalities and egos influence the production process, describing many investigative reporters as:

Some of the biggest pains in the ass on planet Earth. They’re by definition curmudgeonly sometimes or at least stubborn or disbelieving or incredibly sceptical, and it’s a real challenge to get everyone to be on the same page on the same story, on the same moment even, you know, and let alone agreeing with it. So it is slightly amusing on one level, but it can be maddening also. (Lewis, 2016)

Lewis explained that in the Consortium they used to call the old journalists ‘queen bees’ and the dynamic young workers ‘worker bees’. Working with the old bees was challenging because at the end of their career their reputation was very important to them and, as commonly said, ‘you can’t teach an old dog new tricks’:

They were so convinced of their own brilliance and their own certitude about everything, they knew everything … so you’re getting the prestige of their involvement but not much else, and then on the other side you would have young whippersnappers, really excited and aggressive energetic journalists who – young journalists – who might not have much experience but they were extremely courageous almost to a fault … The other thing is the old competitive news organisations that were arrogant beyond words, and frankly many of them still are … There’s still a lot of that arrogance by the so-called elite … the bastions of traditional
journalism … they’re so full of themselves they’re insufferable. But occasionally you must work with them, but I find the added the arrogance and the attitudes sometimes get on my nerves … it is really a challenge. (Lewis, 2016)

Knowing ‘the market’ of investigative journalists in the world is a must to find the right partner. Castilla said that, to do a transnational investigation that has impact, you need to find the right partner in another country and that requires you to know the market of journalists in the other country. This involves researching who is who because an unknown journalist might be the right candidate for a specific project:

He might be unknown and not have many twitter followers, he doesn’t have an opinion about everything but he publishes crime or judicial stories, has access to sources and has probably mimetised with the source and became reserved as well. That’s the kind of people we target to work with … The same rigour we apply to the people we are denouncing, also apply to the journalists we work with. Investigate them; how well regarded they are. (Castilla, 2015)

Hugo Coya, investigative journalist from Peru and specialised in historical investigations, thought the team members of a collaborative investigation need to have a similar level of training:

This doesn’t mean they all need to have the same studies or knowledge, but they need to have a minimum level of training. If you work with someone with a PhD together with an intern in another country, the distance between both will be too big. The academic training needs to be quite similar to put together a multinational team. The team needs to have a similar trajectory. (Coya, 2015)

During the course of this project, I faced this challenge. My response was to create a webpage that allows a safe communication channel for whistle-blowers. In a recent journalistic investigation I coordinated at SBS with journalists from four different countries – Vietnam, China, India and Brazil – the team came across the challenge of deciding what was the best practice for engaging with sources who were infringing Australian law. In this case, not only are the relevant authorities (a judge or the Department of Immigration) able to request access to the journalists’ computers to track the source, but they can also find out this information through the metadata, without touching the journalists’ computer or even making a request to SBS. To address the issue, a webpage was set up to give the audience a communication
channel that enables them to provide information anonymously and that is difficult for the authorities to track (See Figure 3.2) (www.sbs.com.au/radio/explainer/have-you-got-confidential-news-leads).

Figure 3.2 Website screenshot: SBS website to receive anonymous investigations leads

It is therefore important that the coordinator is a skilled person well versed in how to use technology in journalism and able to understand the younger generation’s approach to digital technology.

For some journalists it is important to have strong leadership that determines the rules of the game. Guillermo Garat, Uruguayan investigative journalist, said that:

a big investigation with funding, provided it is well coordinated, it’s easier to arrive at agreements between the journalists involved because the guidelines come from the top, from the direction of the project; you accept them or you don’t. I think that would be a good way of approaching it, but I haven’t experienced it. (Garat, 2015)
The generation gap mentioned above plays a role when assessing the risk of an investigation, on various levels: editorial, ethical, legal and even physical, making the match-making even more complex. It is important to share information within the team and provide training when necessary. Keeping open channels of communication within the team is a must during all the stages of the investigation. This is a double opportunity: to train young journalists through real experience to do a proper risk assessment, making use of senior journalists’ experience; and on the other side, it is also a chance for the more experienced journalist to learn some digital skills.

**Networking alternative proposals**

The EIC ([https://eic.network](https://eic.network)) is an initiative that addresses the opportunity of the generation gap in its constitutional description: ‘We take a long-term approach and therefore involve in our collaborative projects the generation #25 to work together with senior reporters and editors’. The EIC’s governing principles, listed in 2015, bring some light on the different approach to networking and match-making in cross-border journalism. The ETC’s principles as outlined below are in line with the methodology proposed in this PhD:

- In a healthy network all nodes (participants) should profit from the network
- Keep the network alive, open to fresh ideas and people following new suggestions on partnerships
- In order to achieve a healthy growth, better network density and kick-starting the whole process, we will act as a laboratory for networked (investigative) journalism
- We start with basic research projects that are also used to establish networking tools and collaborative platforms
- Decentralise the network’s decision-making process on new stories, new partners, new projects
- Understand and follow a set of predefined routines for each new project
- We believe networks are here to stay. Due to their structure and methodology, collaborative networks are one of the few mechanisms able to keep up with the globalised power structures (e.g. governments, corporations), thus becoming the only way forward for investigative journalism.
3.4 Production Area 3 – Agreement

Each media outlet/university involved needs to be part of an agreement about governing the collaboration. The agreement involves a range of issues from copyright discussions to staff resourcing, as well as any other resources, a publication date estimate, what the output will be in terms of platforms and content. It is important to discuss from the beginning what is the minimum story expected and what is the best possible editorial scenario.

Even for journalists like Fabian Werner, who is familiar with collaborative processes within Latin America and whose experience working in that region and in Spain is that most journalists have similar practices, he stresses the need to agree on the publication date, this being one of the core issues to agree on. While agreeing on the date might initially seem something easy to do, Argentinean investigative journalist Rodis Recalt explained that the publication date involves a good level of detail and coordination. For example, when there are time differences between the countries and the language of publication is the same, there might be an issue around who leads with the story:

For example, you might collaborate with someone from Spain and in Spain they publish your story at five am Argentina’s time, and the local newspapers are already publishing it. And when it’s published in your magazine, you are eight hours late. So you need to coordinate and there are many details to fine-tune. (Recalt, 2015)

This agreement might get more complicated than the situations journalists and editors are used to managing, because there will be many outputs in different countries in various languages that also have to match the audience profile of each media outlet where the investigation will be published. The impartiality of the coordinator will play an important role in these conversations. The agreement also involves defining what is expected from the coordinator and what role each journalist will play. How the information will be systematised and classified using databases needs to be agreed on as well.

It is important to distinguish that these structural agreements are different from editorial consensus. In an investigation project, the differences can be the core of the richness of the story if they are used as an opportunity where all the parts have a voice. Werner, director of
Sudestada, said that ‘disagreements give birth to the best content. I can make a mistake – I make mistakes every day – and in a complex investigation the chances of making a mistake are much bigger. And if another person reads my work – with intellectual honesty, trust and professional rigour – the product will be much better’.

In terms of journalistic standards, the team needs to agree on what are the requirements to validate and verify information and sources. The management of sources is one of the most delicate parts of the conversation, as it presents practical challenges between trust and keeping the confidentiality of the source. Pereira, director of La Diaria, exemplified the difficulty of personal sources management:

For example, a Brazilian journalist tells me that a certain source is confirmed by two more and the three of them are confidential. [As an editor] I tick the box that it’s been checked, but from Berlin it is very difficult to know if it’s validated or not. What you need to validate sometimes is unknown even to the editor [and you have to trust your journalist]. So it’s much more complex when this is part of an international network. (Pereira, 2015)

The periodicity of the communications, as well as the channels, need to be agreed from the beginning as well, including the definition of which secure communications strategies should be put in place to exchange information across countries. The validation and verification of the information involve setting minimum acceptable requirements to validate and verify information and sources.

In terms of ethics, an agreement is needed when there are substantial differences in the editorial approaches and/or the methods during the production process. In an interview for this project, Alfter said that the ethical approach has to be discussed ‘during the preparation, during the research phase and then when you approach publication’. The different moments of the ethical assessment in collaborative investigations pointed out by Alfter affected the initial methodology, which included the ethical checking as one step in the initial linear process, to include three moments of the ethical assessment.

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16 The journalist means ‘from the other side of the world’, as Berlin is very far from Uruguay. The example is not about this city specifically.
The legal risk agreement needs to contemplate the legal frameworks in the countries involved, and the legal risks each media is willing to undertake, individually and collectively. The risk evaluation requires special attention due to the diverse situations reporters face in each country. Understanding the context and conditions of each journalist is fundamental not only to protect the staff, but also to put in context the decision-making of the partners in each country. Without understanding the risks on the ground it is very difficult to make decisions and design a strategy for the team. When evaluating the risk it is important to analyse who is the potential enemy and what is the threat in each country. The Manual for Investigative Journalism published (in Spanish) by Connectas (Salamanca et al., 2014) identifies potential threats and proposes ways of evaluating and minimising the risks. A threat is evaluated based on three elements: the group/s of power that might be affected by the investigation, their capacity to damage and their will to damage the journalist.

The main threats are: assassination, disappearance, death threats, kidnapping, arbitrary detention, trespassing and theft of equipment, threats to family and legal assault with civil or criminal lawsuits. These risk factors have been represented graphically in Connectas’s manual: see Table 1.
In order to assess the risk, it is important to evaluate the interaction between threat, vulnerabilities and strengths. The more vulnerable we are, the higher the risk of an attack. Once the interaction is assessed, journalists have to compare the probability of occurrence with the magnitude of the damage. The risk assessment must determine whether the threat has the capacity and willingness to put at risk some of the conditions of the integrity of the journalist or the team; see Table 3.2.

### Table 3.1 Potential threats to journalists (Connectas)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Power group</th>
<th>Ability to damage</th>
<th>Will to damage the journalist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drug traffickers, public officials linked to drug traffickers</td>
<td>Armed operating units/cells</td>
<td>Murder or disappearance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public workers involved in corruption schemes</td>
<td>Hawks or street monitors</td>
<td>Severe hitting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private companies involved in corruption schemes</td>
<td>Spies in the newsroom</td>
<td>Death threats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paramilitary groups</td>
<td>Corrupt policemen, military or local officials</td>
<td>Firearm attacks against media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armed groups</td>
<td>Corrupt reporters, editors or managers</td>
<td>Kidnapping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gangs</td>
<td>Electronic surveillance devices</td>
<td>Forced order of silence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enraged crowds</td>
<td>No susceptible to political pressure</td>
<td>Office trespassing and equipment theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-riot groups</td>
<td>Illega use of official intelligence systems</td>
<td>Legal aggression with civil or criminal lawsuits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hired assassins</td>
<td>Together with corrupt officials, these companies can participate or finance physical attacks against journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use of private intelligence systems</td>
<td>Armed attacks against journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collusion with policemen, military or local officials</td>
<td>Physical attacks against journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Territorial control</td>
<td>Equipment theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Massive concentration of people willing to take action</td>
<td>Arbitrary detention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Organised anti-riot force</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3.2  [Risk assessment evaluation (Connectas)]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk to the individual or team’s wellbeing</th>
<th>Damage to physical integrity</th>
<th>Damage to psychological integrity</th>
<th>Damage to digital integrity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude of the damage</td>
<td>Level of risk</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophic</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>Very high</td>
<td>Non-remediable injury</td>
<td>Severe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Remediable injury in the long term</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Remediable injury in the medium term</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Remediable injury in the short term</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You can also evaluate the risk by comparing the probability of occurrence with the magnitude of the damage. If the magnitude is catastrophic but the probability of it happening is very low, then the level of risk is also low. In the opposite case, where the magnitude is still catastrophic but the probability of occurrence is imminent, then the level of risk is extreme (Salamanca et al., 2014); see Table 3.

Table 3.3 - Risk assessment comparison probability against damage magnitude

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probability</th>
<th>Imminent</th>
<th>Very close</th>
<th>Close</th>
<th>Far</th>
<th>Very far</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Magnitude</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catastrophic</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>Extreme</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mild</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Risk management is another of the areas of concern for Pereira. He elaborated on how the risk taken by an individual is difficult to assess for a second person to agree to take on. In his view, this area could be a blind spot in the coordination of an investigation across borders:
The risk is sometimes undertaken as an individual decision because there is no way to share the risk reasonably; you cannot ask other people to put their safety at risk. Many times the fundamentals of that bet cannot be put in a spreadsheet so others can evaluate if they agree to share the risks. Putting your safety, your prestige and your future credibility at risk is a personal bet. (Pereira, 2015)

In some cases, risk evaluation can result in the identification of opportunities. For example, when journalists feel it is unsafe to publish the story – or part of it – in their country, or under their name, this means that if the journalist was working alone, the story would never come out. As a consequence, collaborative work will allow publishing the story in the safest way in the platforms and countries where the physical and legal risks are lower. In fact, doing investigative reporting in a small country or a country town is more challenging than in a cosmopolitan city because of the village way of thinking, where everyone knows everyone.

Pablo Alfano reflected on the many relevant investigations produced in Uruguay by small teams that are mostly ignored by mainstream media. Reflecting on the issue – which shows parallelism with the behaviour behind international news and current affairs coverage that relies on the main news provider agencies – Alfano thinks in Uruguay there is also a component of fear because there are important investigations that were totally ignored by mainstream media and never made it to the newspapers front page or the evening news:

I think it’s fear. It can also be fear of investigating someone who is friends with a friend of … in a small country … everyone knows everyone … and it does affect the investigation.

Doing investigative journalism in country towns is much more complicated because [imagine a situation where] the journalist is denouncing the police commissioner … he could live across the road; or that the local governor is corrupt and he lives two blocks away and you regularly see him in the bakery. [In Uruguay] these dynamics operate like they do in a small town because everyone knows each other, even though it’s the capital city. (Alfano, 2015)

There are some cases, for example when investigating any narco-traffic-related stories, where the risks are so high that even the assessment needs to be done carefully, because drug traffickers tend to have infiltrated many media organisations. Doris Gomora, a Mexican investigative journalist, said that investigating collaboratively with many colleagues the
finances of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) was one of her greatest experiences and she travelled to the USA, Colombia and around Mexico. The investigation uncovered that, in all Colombian embassies in the world, there were relatives of FARC members appointed as diplomats, allowing FARC leaders to move from one country to another doing illicit activities. In an operation of this magnitude, the investigation clearly required a very high level of trust between the team members:

Here, as in everything in life, trust has a crucial role, especially with drug trafficking stories. You cannot come and say … ‘I just met you and I’m going to work with you on this topic’. No, because there is a big problem: most of the drug cartels have infiltrated people in the media who are paid and you don’t know who they are. (Gomora, 2015)

This was such a delicate investigation that all the journalists involved had a copy of all the documents, in case they had to defend themselves in court.

Following the Connectas risk assessment proposals, there are other risk assessment and security guidelines. These are some of the most well-known in the field:

- GIJN’s Resource Center lists groups that provide emergency aid to journalists, including financial help and moving them out of danger. [http://gijn.org/2014/07/14/new-resource-guide-emergency-assistance](http://gijn.org/2014/07/14/new-resource-guide-emergency-assistance)
- Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma. Provides journalists around the world with the resources and guidelines to report on violence, conflict and tragedy. [http://dartcenter.org](http://dartcenter.org)
**Production agreement** – governing the collaboration

[www.tijmethodology.com](http://www.tijmethodology.com)

This template can help teams to manage the process of collaboration and have clarity on its governance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>Names and profiles of the journalists and other staff to be part of the team, including details such as previous relevant experience, country, contact details, country and media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other resources</td>
<td>Contributions of the media organisations involved as well as external funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time management</td>
<td>Timeline (initial estimate) and publication date</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Output</td>
<td>Balance between a shared editorial and the different audiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>What is the minimum story expected and what the best possible scenario is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team communication</td>
<td>Secure communication channels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expectations of communication frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles definition</td>
<td>What is expected from the coordinator and the role each journalist plays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information management</td>
<td>How the information will be consolidated, systematized and classified using databases</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Validation and verification of information</td>
<td>Set minimum acceptable requirement to validate and verify information and sources. The Admiralty System is a practical method to evaluate the reliability of the source and the credibility of the information:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Source reliability:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Usually reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Fairly reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d) Not usually reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>e) Unreliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>f) Cannot be judged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information credibility:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a) Confirmed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b) Probably true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c) Possibly true</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical and legal agreement</td>
<td>An agreement about ethics is needed when there are substantial differences in the editorial approach and/or the methods during the production process. An agreement about legal risks needs to contemplate the legal frameworks in the countries involved, and the legal risk each media is willing to undertake, individually and collectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk assessment</td>
<td>Understanding the context and conditions of each journalist is fundamental to protect the staff. We need to understand the risks in each country in order to make decisions and design a strategy when needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 3.5 Production area 4 – Timeline

The timeline involves the (tentative) publishing date, the meeting dates, and the delivery dates of the content within the team.

Coya acknowledged that the suggested timeline might not be followed in all cases. However, he thought it helps focus:

> You need to agree on a clear timeline: ‘In this month we are going to do this, in this other month we’ll do x and that’s how we progress’ … It’s true, they can be just referential but they help to keep you stay organised and be disciplined. (Coya, 2015)

It is important to allow time for a number of postproduction tasks that are normally not considered as part of investigative journalistic teams’ workflow: translations; cross-checking texts in the same language; cross-checking texts in different languages; and publicity and social media strategy that amplify the reach of the content.

During the interviews, most experienced journalists in cross-border investigations highlighted that time management is one of the most common reasons for tension in teams. When the
roles are not clear and the levels of commitment – in terms of time invested – are very diverse, the team spirit starts to be affected. Agreement on the roles and time committed to the investigation is a key part of the initial agreement, as well as the role of the coordinator, who is expected to be a good influencer to make all parts to deliver in time and be accountable.

The capacity to investigate is directly linked to the working and personal conditions of each journalist in each country. In this sense, some journalists will be able to dedicate all their time to the investigation because they are part of a media organisation that supports the collaborative investigation. In other cases, freelance journalists will do it because of their conviction or will expect some kind of reward or to sell the story to a media outlet once it is finished. But in most cases, journalists will try to fit the tasks as part of their workload and continue doing their usual work plus the investigation. The capacity for delivery of each journalist will depend basically on the time they have to invest in the project, together with the conditions of the country, as for example, freedom of information requests in some countries take much more time than in others. Torres used the image of a marathon to describe the process in some transnational investigations: ‘Many times it’s like a marathon: we all start running and some abandon in the way because of diverse reasons’ (Torres, 2015).

In ‘Empire of ashes’, the investigation into cigarette smuggling, the journalist tried to measure how involved the former president of Paraguay was. The team started with seven journalists from seven countries, but finished with journalists from only three countries. Only two of them published the story: Gazeta do Povo in Brazil and El Tiempo in Colombia. The Costa Rican La Nacion supported the production process with Rodney Rojas working with the data and the infographics, but decided not to publish the story.

In some cases, the different levels of commitment result in frustration. Longoni said that the beginning of the transnational team he was part of was a good experience, the hypothesis and objectives definition stage. But after this, he felt disappointed because he did a lot of the analytical work of the treaties but the part of the investigation to be done in Venezuela wasn’t done and he felt frustrated because the investigation in Venezuela could have been much deeper:
In fact, I discovered there were very irregular Argentinean companies, even related to the Argentinean ambassador in Caracas, as I crossed lots of information in Buenos Aires, but we had to check on the ground. These companies had received significant beneficial contracts from the Chavez government, but sadly none of the Venezuelan journalists spent the time to verify all of this, that involved travelling, costs, etc. So my first reflection about working on a story of this kind is that you need to have time, resources, have clear objectives, and very consolidated team (and) the tasks have to be agreed on and done. (Longoni, 2015)

For Longoni, working in a team means choosing a coordinator, certain research processes and some obligations.

Alfano believes time constraints are one of the biggest limitations for investigative reporters in some countries, where multiple employments is the norm:

I work in Sudestada Portal, where we do investigative journalism, but it’s almost honorary work. Not almost, it’s honorary. I work in a radio station and I work as a teacher. Imagine how much time I have left to investigate. Fortunately we are a team and we take turns. Sometimes I do most of the work and in other investigations I’m just a side contributor. It’s case by case; it depends on the time availability of each of us. With more financial resources, and with more time, I’m sure we can produce many more investigations and more in-depth ones. (Alfano, 2015)

Time constraint is a common reason argued by journalists as a limitation. Peruvian investigative journalist Oscar Libón explained that, in the previous two years, he was assigned to day-to-day coverage: ‘what I’ve needed the most is time, and I can sense it, because you have a hypothesis, you have a topic to investigate and you can’t do it because you don’t have the time’ (Libón, 2015).

However, Canela thinks that the business model is the most difficult aspect of the agreement, more than time. In his view, when an editor in chief or media owner wants to do an investigation, they find the resources and the time. For Cancela, the problem isn’t time or space, but agendas that are intentionally ignored:

They don’t want to assign a space for them. There are human rights declarations, discussions about media’s role in democracy, issues around the economic interests of big media’s advertisers, media organisations that
are owned by politicians. These are things the so-called ‘alternative media’ are doing and are not in the big media’s interest. Not because they are competing but due to the content they are publishing. And [these topics] aren’t of their interest now, and they weren’t in the past either. (Canela, 2015)

The changes in media organisations and the prioritisation of multimedia journalists who are supposed to file many stories on all platforms in the shortest period of time are functional in a media business model that does not allocate resources to investigative journalism. In line with Canela’s view, Libon explained his view about the changes in the media landscape:

I also think media managers don’t have the vision and believe that bringing corrupt practices to light can only be published if the sources of the information are the prosecutor or the police or the judicial power. As if that was the only credible information … To do this you need time and media organisations continue cutting jobs [and] moving into the multiplatform model and one person does many tasks … Sometimes I think they do it because they don’t want to cover some stories. (Libon, 2015)

On an individual level, the drive behind an investigative journalist is normally so strong that they tend to find a way to follow a story, even with very limited resources or no resources at all. The way this is carried out is not probably the way they would like it to be, but they still do it. Uruguayan journalist Walter Pernas explained the nature of investigative journalists beyond borders:

Investigative journalists have a deep commitment with the truth. That’s basic. A non-committed journalist isn’t an investigative journalist. He’s not going to care about the story. When you start investigating and you discover there’s something wrong, that’s something is unfair, that feeling of fairness experienced by the investigative journalist is the engine that makes him work to find the best possible information to publish. (Pernas, 2015)

Roger Rodriguez, one of the most experienced investigative journalists in Uruguay, said:

The issue is how much you dig to find it. Sometimes you need financial support, but you don’t need money to think. You do not need money to define the hypothesis of the project, the angle of journalistic topic. It is free to investigate, without money we’ve have done many things. (Rodriguez, 2015)
There is a sort of sense of belonging to the community of investigative journalists that is
difficult to define. Connectas director Huertas managed to put some of these feelings into
words: ‘to start building a collaborative work and a relationship that it’s in essence a
relationship of camaraderie and complicity, to do in in-depth stories using investigative
journalism techniques’.

3.6  Production area 5 – Coordination

The coordinator needs to be a person with strong journalistic experience and a respected
individual by all the team members. Selecting the coordinator is a high-level decision that
should also include a consultation process with the team members whenever this is possible.
It is very important that the coordinator has experience working with diverse cultures and is
flexible enough to apply different ways of communication according to what is suitable for
each journalist and cultural background. The coordination role involves managing meetings,
keeping the team up to speed with the agreed commitments, helping negotiate the differences
between members – particularly diverse editorial views – as well as helping systematise the
information provided by all the team members.

Discussion of the coordinator’s role was part of the interviews done with investigative
journalists for this PhD. They all considered it is a key role. Almeida stressed the importance
of the journalistic experience of the coordinator:

Management and experience. It can’t be a young new journalist who is just
starting. The person also needs to have managed sources and different
topics. So [he can compare with previous cases] and say … ‘I remember in
x case, I think we put the emphasis on the legal aspect. This case
resembles to it, we might need a criminal lawyer’ … It needs to be
someone with experience. And with an open personality, who is able to
enforce agreements, but who doesn’t provoke disagreements with the
people involved. (Almeida, 2015)

It is crucial the coordinator finds the right balance between attention to detail, including being
across the editorial developments across all the teams involved, and micro-managing the
team. Even though journalists tend to avoid micro-managers, they also expect the editorial
leader to ask the right questions, which means being across the details of the content they are
producing. Generic questions about the development of the investigation usually lead to diminishing the respect of the team for the coordinator. Journalists are likely to perceive the coordinator’s role as an administrative task when they do not add editorial value or facilitate relevant data exchange between teams.

The coordinator manages legal frameworks from each country in relation to Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, undercover operations, anonymous sources, whistleblowers and hidden cameras, helping the journalists manage the data consistently. Each project requires different databases. However, there are four databases (see Figure 3.3) that can be useful in most investigations: document records; source records; facts and events timelines; and contact log databases. For Almeida, it is very important to set standards of how the information is logged: ‘Don’t send me data for me to add, or things of this kind. No. It’s preferable to have it as Google Docs, or any other shared document. And we are all adding information’ (Almeida, 2015).

Samples of the databases are included in the TIJ Methodology template in Excel, where each tab is a database.
Figure 3.3   Samples of databases included in the TIJ Methodology production tracker

What we call ‘contact log’ database are what other journalists and investigators may call ‘roadmaps’. The investigation of Gomora and her colleagues about FARC leaders using relatives in diplomatic positions in embassies around the world to conduct illicit activities required consistent data entry of updates to make sure no one stepped on anyone else’s toes.

Chilean investigative reporter Carola Fuentes stressed the importance of using shared databases:

     Now that you can upload anything to the cloud, even though that information [security] can be quite uncertain. If we are talking about FOI, I think we can share databases saved in the cloud amongst the teams working together … I’m not afraid of public access … when information is made public it is more fertile than being very encrypted or secured. So as I’m always after collaboration instead of competing, I’m not afraid of the possibility of someone finding some information to reveal, or having the scoop. (Fuentes, 2015)

However, there are cases when information needs to be encrypted, so each case should be assessed individually. Libon described the challenges he faced when he was tracking the
accounts of who was going to be the Peruvian first lady, because he had to exchange information with Venezuelan colleagues. At that moment, Hugo Chavez was in the government and it was evident they were doing interception of all kinds of communications, so they used encryption methods:

We used to do it, and I think the [Venezuelans] were used to doing it. I think it’s a very good alternative, depending on the case. If we made it a general procedure, I think it would be safer for journalists. (Libón, 2015)

When facing powerful organisations, the risks tend to increase. Peruvian journalist Pedro Salinas said that protecting the information was vital:

You’d think that with religious organisations, that somehow project a kind of saint image of dignity and well meaning, you wouldn’t face things that seem like taken from a movie: hacking, phone tapping, attempts to stop the investigation through law firms, some of them like threats and other pretending to be trying to buy the book, in other words, to bribe you and stop the investigation so you end up not publishing. (Salinas, 2015)

When managing documents that will be accessed by a variety of journalists and editors in different locations, it is suggested to index all documents. As simple as these suggestions may seem, the absence of agreed procedures delays investigations or even affects the outcome. A usual process of indexing consists of: highlighting the relevant parts in each document; giving the document a title or a number; entering the document data in a spreadsheet (e.g. the one provided as part of the TIJM Excel template); filing the document on paper and digitally, scanning each document to produce a digital copy for filing and sharing; and in all cases keeping a backup copy in a hard drive in a different place from the office/home.

The richness of sharing experiences and methods has no limits and can all fit into the proposed TIJM, which is a flexible framework that allows innovative contributions like one of the tools created and used by Lizarraga from Mexico, who discovered that the former president Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife, Angelica Rivera, owned a hidden mansion valued at 7 million American dollars in an expensive suburb in Mexico City that they could not have bought with their incomes. As this was a complex investigation in terms of the framing and the methodology, they started with a hypothesis and, as they advanced in the investigation, they refuted each hypothesis and created a new one, more solid and resistant to fact-checking and testing. One of the main challenges was the amount of information that had to be
organised so that it made sense. To do so, Lizarraga used concentric circles to identify the owners of the properties and created a method that he called ‘simultaneous timelines’. Firstly, they cross-checked the ownership of the property and one address took them to a house and the house to a name, the name to 30 companies and more houses, until they could make sense of the relations of property ownership. The timelines were created by Chilean investigative journalist Monica Gonzalez, who founded the organisation CIPER. The two timelines were chronological and showed how the money moved, and then both lines were crossed. But in this case, Lizarraga could not use these timelines because it would have been too long and there were many stories within one. So building on Gonzalez’s concept, he created the simultaneous timelines, and created four timelines and then crossed the dates of all four. This process took him one year and eight months with a team of seven people:

What I’ve learned is that when you put the information in order you understand what happened. So I think that if you don’t understand how something happened, how can you explain it properly? (Lizarraga, 2015)

There are very simple tools available that make the coordinator’s work easier, like the World Clock Meeting Planner (www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meeting.html). These are some other digital tools useful for the coordinator’s role:

**ScraperWiki**: https://scraperwiki.com Online platform where you can download information from the web and group it neatly in a database (Excel, CSV, etc.).

**DocumentCloud**: www.documentcloud.org Platform to manage documents. Extracts text from an image using optical character recognition software. It can highlight data, annotate and organise it into links that are easy to access. It helps you search by subject, embed documents and place them in a public catalogue.

**Visual Investigative Scenarios (VIS)**: https://vis.occrp.org A tool of special interest to investigative journalists. It allows you to establish relationships between people and organisations and attach documents to prove these relationships.
3.7 Production area 6 – Production

The ICIJ developed a private social network called thr Global ICI hub (Boland-Rudder et al, 2014), an online platform where member journalists share information and publish the progress of their projects. They also feature the Blacklight, a cloud interface to upload and scan documents, together with Linkurious, a data-visualisation program to analyse connections between different data. DocumentCloud (www.documentcloud.org) is a tool for organising and working with large documents that makes it easier for journalists to share material with readers and also becomes a large archive of public access to documents used by reporters during their investigations. There are many digital tools for data-based investigations; the Data Driven Journalism website regularly updates its resources section (http://datadrivenjournalism.net/resources).

For secure digital communications, Securereporter (https://securereporter.org) is a platform developed by the ICIJ and OCCRP through which registered journalists can safely share information about their research. In 2015, Mar Cabra, editor of the ICIJ’s data and research unit, published an online guide titled ‘Security tools for investigative journalists’, but it’s not the only reference. Due to the proliferation and wide variety of tools for secure communications, this TIJM suggests a guide that was produced as part of this academic project called ‘Cybersecurity for journalists: basic tools for journalists working on transnational investigative reporting’ (Melgar, 2016), which prioritises some of the most common and easiest tools for digital communications and digital information exchange; see Figure 3.4.
In the first stage of the production process, journalists identify human sources, documents and archival information, as well as media records in each country. All journalists explore relevant open sources to answer the research questions of the hypothesis. For example, Investigative Dashboard is an online tool to help journalists anywhere in the world to access databases in order to trace people, companies and assets across the globe (https://investigativedashboard.org). Also, Offshore Leaks databases are very useful (https://offshoreleaks.icij.org).

The second stage of production involves interviews, recordings, data collection, data analysis and FoI requests. Crossing information between journalists and countries is a complex process that varies case by case. It involves finding relations and connections between the information produced by each country. The role of the coordinator is once more vital to the success of the investigation to guarantee all the content gathered and approaches used are being considered.
Finally, as part of the third stage of the production process, validity and credibility need to be checked, following the standards agreed. If the databases are used correctly, recording the reliability of sources and credibility of information, verification and validation of the content will be easier to assess. A book dedicated only to this process, *Verification Handbook For Investigative Reporting* ([http://verificationhandbook.com/book2](http://verificationhandbook.com/book2)) can bring good insight for all journalists. We also suggest using the Admiralty System as a practical method to evaluate the reliability of a source and the credibility of information. There are many ways of measuring the reliability of a source. This is one of the scales that can be useful:

A – **Completely reliable:** No doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness or competency; has a history of complete reliability

B – **Usually reliable:** Minor doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness or competency; has a history of valid information most of the time

C – **Fairly reliable:** Doubt of authenticity, trustworthiness or competency but has provided valid information in the past

D – **Not usually reliable:** Significant doubt about authenticity, trustworthiness or competency but has provided valid information in the past

E – **Unreliable:** Lacking in authenticity, trustworthiness and competency; history of invalid information

F – **Reliability cannot be judged:** No basis exists for evaluating the reliability of the source

The credibility is calculated based on likelihood and levels of corroboration by other sources:

1 – **Confirmed by other sources:** Confirmed by other independent sources; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the subject

2 – **Probably true:** Not confirmed; logical in itself; consistent with other information on the subject

3 – **Possibly true:** Not confirmed; reasonably logical in itself; agrees with some other information on the subject

4 – **Doubtful:** Not confirmed; possible but not logical; no other information on the subject

5 – **Improbable:** Not confirmed; not logical in itself; contradicted by other information on the subject

6 – **Truth cannot be judged:** No basis exists for evaluating the validity of the information
The production model will vary according to the kind and degree of collaboration of the different parties involved. Alfter from the Journalismfund has created a typology that describes the different kinds of transnational collaborative investigations, depending on the nature of the investigation and the different degrees of involvement of each of the parties. The first kind of collaboration is ‘organisations stories’, which are for example about the European Union or World Trade Organization or some international organisation which affects all members and the team. The second in this classification is ‘chain stories’, which are investigations of an issue that involves several countries and transit countries. The third kind of story is ‘comparative stories’, when the same issue is repeated in different countries. Chain stories are challenging to produce. For example, when you have a very poor country at one end of the chain where people are desperate to get a job, some are so desperate they would go into prostitution or at least they’re desperate to get a job somewhere else somehow, that they trust anyone who says ‘job’. And so they follow this person and then end up as prostitutes or slave workers for a company owned by a wealthy country: the chain is, Alfter explained, how extremely poor labourers are kept in a sort of transit, not-too-well-organised not-too-well-controlled country and at the end of the chain is a very wealthy country where the investor makes the profit.

3.8 Production area 7 – Publication

The three stages of publication involve an initial discussion of what will be published on what platform and who will sign off the material before publication, including conversations between editorial and legal teams in each country. This agreement on the narrative usually changes along the production process, so ongoing communication and the coordinator as an articulator are crucial in these decisions.

An initial publication decision that needs to be made in all cases is whether all the partners will publish the same story on different platforms in different languages – and/or English – or each partner will publish their own version of the same story. As Huertas, director of Connectas, said: ‘it’s important to establish a win–win relationship with the partners and to be clear about this in the agreement’ (Huertas, 2015).
The decision-making process around publication is complex and also involves deciding whether all the media organisations cross-check the final version of the partners involved or they accept the publication of the partners without doing the cross-checking themselves. How much power in the decision-making will the coordinator have in each case? And who has the last editorial call in each media/platform?

For Torres from Ojo Público, one of the biggest challenges is to find the regional editorial angle and find partners who are not so focused on the local immediate story but have a more in-depth understanding of the issues, which in most cases are by nature regional:

- Normally they are very interested because many media outlets are hungry for ready-to-publish reports or stories that are already in production. But in some cases, there are some challenges: if it’s not part of the newspapers’ agenda they are not willing to publish transnational stories, even when the story is happening in that country as well. But these are the least cases. In fact, most of the regional media is starting to realise that stories with a global or regional approach have a bigger impact. (Torres, 2015)

Publication editorial decisions include what is shared on each media social media platform, as posting on social media is normally understood as an endorsement of the original publication, which involves an editorial decision that is based on both the content and the legal implications. Even when the narrative is agreed between the media organisations involved, the same story published in different countries will have differences because of the diverse legal frameworks and what is allowed to be published in one country may not be in another one, or at least represent different levels of legal risks.

Uruguayan journalist Monteagudo thought each country’s legislations and ethical values frame the conversation:

- Each country has its rules and legal framework. But there are things in common that can be done. There are minimum standards that can be agreed on … Then, not taking more risks than the ones allowed by the law in each country. (Monteagudo, 2015)

In terms of the return/investment in the investigation, each media organisation is likely to demand/expect a high engagement, social impact and traffic to their website. The editorial
decision of who shares what on social media is also affected by the traffic to their websites that sharing will bring.

The second publication stage will be determined by the ways the investigation unfolds during the production process, as there might be changes from the initial agreement and flexibility is necessary. At the moment of shaping the story in a narrative, it may occur that the partners realise they have a different approach to history. Ongoing communication and the role of the coordinator as an articulator are crucial in these decisions. The publishing date is also a potentially contentious aspect of the collaboration, as each media organisation has its own agenda, publication priorities and audiences. Agreeing on a common date always needs to be the result of a negotiation.

The third stage of the publication area involves ‘line by line’ accuracy checking of the information to be published, as described in the Investigative Reporter’s Handbook (Houston, 2009). It also involves the decision on how to amplify the investigation, which includes a social media strategy, networking and publicity. Once the story is published, the evaluation of the outcome as well as the production process is crucial to improve the workflows for future collaborative reporting. In the third stage, the agreement around publication becomes tangible and it takes time to design a content output strategy that involves social media, networking and the publicity departments of each media involved.

This is a very new area in development when it comes to investigative reporting results. Morello from El Tiempo (Colombia) puts a lot of focus on exhausting all possible analysis to present the information to the audience in a way that is comprehensible and meaningful. That is why she incorporated user’s experience feedback before publication, instead of doing it afterwards. They brought in a panel of people from different ages and education levels and asked them some basic questions to assess the accessibility of the data:

‘Do you understand what we are saying here?’ That ‘user experience’ gives us very important information: do we continue or not? What do we improve? This is not worthy … In this way the users are like your editors and they can tell you if you are doing it right or wrong. After this we publish. Then we review with other people what kind of impact it is generating. (Morello, 2015)
In all cases, use the social media networks of each media outlet involved, as well as those of international investigative journalists and relevant universities and community groups as platforms to make the story reach a broader audience.

Once the story is published, it is important to evaluate the results of the published content – including the impact – and the process of the investigation to assess how to improve the workflow for future collaborative investigations.

As part of the evaluation, there are some key points to be addressed:

- **Hypothesis.** Did the investigation answer the questions?
- **Impact** in each country: audience reach, social media, public opinion, legal, political
- **Problems** during the production process: what challenges couldn’t be addressed properly?
- **Lessons.** What did we learn from the problems to avoid them in future investigations?

### 3.9 Production area 8 – Legal

This first legal risk evaluation is a preliminary assessment of how the production and/or publication would pose any risks to the journalist and/or the media. It starts as an initial legal assessment that involves evaluating the relevant legal frameworks of all the countries involved, including the FoI legislation and the access to public records – including the definition of what is considered public and private. This is relevant for the production plan, as information that is public in one country might not be in another. Understanding what is available is also important beyond the restrictions. Particularly in countries with a history of repression or that have gone through a dictatorship, or even experienced a government with limited accountability, journalists do not tend to look for public records because they are not aware of the level of documented information available. Uruguayan journalist Pernas highlighted this as a core part of the investigative process that needs to be stressed because there’s much more information in public records than what journalists normally think. He suggests to his journalism students to avoid the conspiracy thinking that leads to suspect that all relevant information is intentionally hidden:

There are investigations of that kind, that’s true but there are also many investigations where you can go to public records and the information is
there waiting for someone to find it. What happens is that journalists don’t go to get the information. And journalists don’t know these public records exist. That’s a lesson we need to learn. (Pernas, 2015)

It is also important to know the restrictions on undercover filming and recording, as well as the legal risks the journalists – or the team – might face in terms of defamation laws and similar restrictions to free speech. Before publishing the investigation, all the content to be published on any platform should be reviewed by a legal adviser who is familiar with the legislation in each country.

During the production process, unexpected situations and new information sources will involve re-assessing the legal risk of the information-gathering procedure. For example, in Australia – and many other countries – it is illegal not only to broadcast a conversation that was secretly recorded; it is also a crime to record it. In these cases, several legal assessments need to be done during the production process.

Finally, before publication each story in its multiple formats and platforms should be reviewed by a legal adviser before publication, according to the legislation of each country. When content from another country – or media within borders – is going to be shared, a legal cross-check might be needed.

3.10 Production area 9 – Ethics

All journalists work within a framework of professional ethics, whether this is a specific workplace-related professional standard or a set of values and practices they believe in. Media outsiders would be surprised by the differences in ethics between journalists and media organisations around the world. Hence, an explicit conversation about some key issues should be part of any collaborative work, both within and across national borders.

As an example, for Pernas the understanding that a journalist or a media organisation does not own the information but the public does is the core value of journalism, so not publishing information that is in the public interest is seen as deeply unethical. If we tried to explain this concept to most media managers in Australia, including public media, it would create, in the
best scenario, a long debate. Both Pernas and Chilean journalist Carola Fuentes agreed the audience is the priority. Fuentes confessed that she has been trying for many years to ‘avoid working for the journalistic scoop and instead work to serve our audience, our public. Whether is one team or another one, it’s important the information is published’. For Pernas, and for many investigative journalists, if the media organisation the journalist is working for decides not to publish a story without a valid reason, then the information needs to be passed onto another journalist who can publish it, and if that requires the journalist to quit the job, that is what’s expected:

Power operates in unexpected ways. That’s why we need to be sure the journalist is willing to do that kind of things … or if in a certain moment the investigation slashes the media company he works for, how is the journalist going to behave? (Pernas, 2015)

Discussion of the ethical pillars of the practice of journalism is nothing less than an exercise of comparative ethics that needs to allow for diverse cultural journalistic practices. The academic discussion of an agreed global ethics in journalism is more than ten years old, with Canadian professor Stephen Ward proposing a global media ethics that is discussed in the literature review. The Society of Professional Journalists, the Ethical Journalism Network, the Journalist’s Toolbox and the Center for Journalism Ethics have all proposed manuals on ethics.17

The examples used by Alfter are useful for understanding the nature of comparative ethics discussions:

I am from a Nordic journalism school and we are very careful with [the use of] hidden cameras and some other parts of the world are not so careful with hidden cameras …

So how do we deal with hidden cameras and then we have a huge discussion and then

17 Some of the reference manuals on ethics in journalism:

- Society of Professional Journalists www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp
- Worldwide list of codes of ethics by the Ethical Journalism Network http://ethicaljournalismnetwork.org/en
- Ethics toolbox – Wide range of ethical guidelines www.journaliststoolbox.org/category/ethics
- Center for Journalism Ethics – Canada https://ethics.journalism.wisc.edu/resources/ethics-in-a-nutshell
… who makes decisions. Sometimes it’s also a legal question because if I take pictures with a hidden camera in some countries I cannot publish this so I cannot use this as a document. Or how do you deal with leaked documents? In some countries it’s illegal so you are breaking the law by using them, whether you quote them or summarise or whatever, it’s potentially a criminal breach of privacy, breach of secrecy. (Alfter, 2016)

Aware of the challenges of cultural diversity and journalistic practices, Gerard Ryle, head of the ICIJ, said that American ethics cannot be imposed to the rest of the world, so each country involved needs to respect their own codes: for instance, in a place like India it is perfectly normal to pay for someone to find a court document for you, whereas in America that’s a no-no, absolutely not paying for anything. But I’ve learned is that you need to allow the journalist to do whatever it is that’s the normal practice in their country and you can’t impose American or English ethics or rules across the whole world. (Ryle, 2016)

Even though important, these discussions and proposed standards have not yet arrived at a worldwide agreement. Thus, a practical approach is needed as journalists continue working collaboratively across borders. In ‘A toolkit for reporters, 2009’ American journalism professor and ethics and values scholar Bob Steele suggested a list of questions to start a conversation on ethical issues. These questions are included in the TIJ Methodology:

1. What do I know? What do I need to know?
2. What is my journalistic purpose?
3. What are my ethical concerns?
4. What organisational policies and professional guidelines should I consider?
5. How can I include other people, with different perspectives and diverse ideas, in the decision-making process?
6. Who are the stakeholders – those affected by my decision? What are their motivations? Which are legitimate?
7. What if the roles were reversed? How would I feel if I were in the shoes of one of the stakeholders?
8. What are the possible consequences of my actions? Short term? Long term?
9. What are my alternatives to maximise my truth-telling responsibility and minimise harm?
10. Can I clearly and fully justify my thinking and my decision? To my colleagues? To the stakeholders? To the public?

Werner, Uruguayan journalist, thought we should use the manuals of ethics that already exist as a reference, instead of assuming we all agree on the ethical guidelines. He does not necessarily think we need to create a new code of ethics for transnational investigations, but should use what already exists. Werner thinks we should put into place the old newsroom figure of the ‘mentor’ to tackle some of the issues around ethical dilemmas: ‘I think we should have education not only in the university classroom, but also within the newsrooms. It would be good to have mentors’.

3.11 Production area 10 – Diversity

The most authentic way to achieve a multicultural approach to a story is procuring a diverse newsroom, because the insights and cultural competence of journalists from different cultural backgrounds cannot be substituted for. A transnational team of journalists is by nature the best scenario for this practice, provided all the journalists treat each other as equals and all the voices are respected equally. Diverse views should be seen as an enriching contribution rather than an obstacle.

The TIJ Methodology details the areas to consider: languages involved and publication languages; as well as the inclusion of experts from different cultural backgrounds who have diverse views on the same topic. In the first stage, the languages involved are identified and the planning follows the needs towards producing in those languages. It is important to identify diverse views about interpretation of current affairs or historical facts from the very beginning and plan a workflow to do translations during the investigation and during the stage of publication.

During the production process, more translations are done according to need. There are two main spaces where differences in languages are a challenge (and an opportunity): firstly during the production process, when the team is composed of a number of journalists from different countries who speak different languages. Even though to be part of the team it is
vital that they speak the lingua franca chosen for the project (usually English), for many of them this is their second language and so navigating language differences and accents is an extra problem. At the same time, having team members who understand the language of the countries involved means access to more sources (both people and documentation) as governments and companies produce documentation in the language of the country. In an event organised by the Frontline Club in 2015, British journalist and fellow at the CIJ in London Craig Shaw commented on the limitations of British journalists who do not speak other languages, which consequently ‘limits the scope of their investigations’ (Gonzalez-Prendergast, 2015).

The second moment of the production process when language differences become an opportunity is when the report is ready to publish and needs to be translated into different languages. The editorial angle of each of these stories in different media outlets and languages needs to be agreed on from the beginning. In some cases, they will be different stories, with different angles that prioritise certain data and information according to what is relevant to the audience of the media organisation in each country. In other cases, the production agreement would mean all the countries publish a literal translation of the original story, so many replicas in different languages are published in different countries across the globe.

David Gonzalez, Venezuelan journalist, highlighted that the time initially assigned for the translation was not enough because the interpretations were part of the process, as some departments of one government did not exist in another country and hence the language of the second country did not have a word for it and it was necessary to find a way to explain the concept beyond the word. For Gonzalez, the revision in each language was a very demanding process he did not expect: ‘it was difficult to explain that the Prosecutor’s office is a public ministry. Our colleagues thought they were an audit office, but it’s not, it’s different. It takes time to explain what the institution you are referring to is’ (Gonzalez, 2015).

The more experienced the journalists are, the deeper their understanding of the complexity of transnational investigations. Almeida of El Universal (Ecuador) said that translations are important because an accurate translation needs to consider meaning, not just words: ‘it’s important to know what [the word] manager means, what [the word] owner means; what [the
word] legal representative means, what [the word] shareholder means … [in each country involved in the investigation], how things are organised, if there’s superintendence or any kind of authority, or not’ (Almeida, 2015).

Still, not many media outlets think about translating their content into different languages as part of the production process. Connectas and Ojo Público are two leading bodies in Latin America that are aware of the importance of publishing content in different languages. Torres from Ojo Público explained that, when they publish stories they think have many elements of global interest, they make an important effort to translate and make it available on all the online network platforms, so the story reaches the right people. But she is aware this does not happen normally in more traditional media because the mindset and the approach are still very local.

An interesting contribution to rethinking the output media format of collaborative investigations was brought up by D’Alessandro of FOPEA. While discussing the challenges and opportunities of transnational investigations, D’Alessandro said that, even though language differences are an important barrier, newsworthiness is still measured by the impact and so he suggested thinking of ways for an international audience to break through to that content market:

Perhaps the very important investigations about corruption, about violation of human rights, about environment issues, that have had a big impact in the region in the last years – maybe we should have thought how to rewrite them or subedit so that they have an impact in other countries. You were thinking about the standardisation. But sometimes the different ways of receiving the information also modifies the content. (D’Alessandro, 2015)

Finally, when the investigation is finalised it is normally published in more than one language, after cross-checking the texts and scripts in different languages. Even when the agreement involves using the same information for different stories, I believe it is important to know what the other partners are publishing ahead of the publication date. This increases the levels of trust, accountability and quality.

On publications in diverse languages, Candea thinks more investigations in diverse languages should be documented, both as a way of having newcomers join the industry, but also ‘as
some sort of protection for the people who do this kind of jobs in dangerous places. The more you have [doing it] the less pressure it is on the few doing it’ (Candea, 2015).

3.12 **Database – Find an investigative journalist**

The list (and related web links) of investigative journalism is organised under the website section titled ‘Find an investigative journalist’: [https://tijmethodology.com/2017/05/09/find-investigative-journalists](https://tijmethodology.com/2017/05/09/find-investigative-journalists), with categories to facilitate the search. The first group includes worldwide organisations of investigative journalists like the ICIJ, the GIJN and the OCCRP. The second group of contacts are lists of investigative journalists managed by different organisations (like IRE or GIJN). The third list summarises a number of online databases or resources for journalists, from the Offshore Leaks databases to the Universal Human Rights Index.

When partnering, the options are wide, from organisations of different natures to educational institutions like – but not only – universities, individual, non-government organisations and
media outlets. There are different models of collaboration from just sharing some contacts to a full model of collaboration when all parts are equal partners. In all cases it is important to understand why the other part is joining efforts with us, what they are winning, what the values of that organisation are. Using an unusual but effective analogy, Connectas director Huertas said:

If I accept to partner with a media outlet that I know has a certain editorial line, that editorial won’t change because they are partnering with me. It’s like the girl who gets married hoping that her husband will change after they are married. I mean, that’s not going to happen. (Huertas, 2015)

The sections are divided into regions of the world, including a breakdown by country. The regions are: Africa, Asia, Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, Middle East, Pacific Region, and USA and Canada.

This is probably the largest and most inclusive open data source of investigative journalists available, a space that will continue growing as the website allows ongoing additions, something that would not have been possible if this PhD by project was a published book instead of a website. It is my intention to make a double contribution with this project: 1) to reflect on the journalistic practice of transnational investigation and propose a methodology problematising and discussing the professional experiences of key protagonists in the field; and 2) to facilitate tools for journalists and editors to improve their practice by using both the methodology and this database of networks of journalists, which should minimise the doubling up of resources spent by media organisations and NGOs in finding relevant, trustworthy media partners across the world.

Had this network existed 20 years ago, another story would have been with the Uruguayan investigator Monteagudo, who in 2000 uncovered the complicit behaviour or Uruguay’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs not only to hide Nazi doctor Joseph Mengele in the town of Colonia, but also to help him with documentation that enabled him to marry his sister-in-law and allowed her to move to Uruguay. Monteagudo is an experienced investigative journalist who works for public radio while directing the weekly local newspaper El Eco, and he explained what they could not do because of lack of resources or contacts in other countries:

We would have wanted to follow the Argentinean lead, we would have wanted to investigate further the connections with Foreign Affairs, how it
started; what kind of relations they had. It’s evident Uruguay was connected with the Nazis that allowed this to happen. The story had a broad impact on international media. It was picked up by CNN, it was picked up by the big media networks. But in our investigations there are always leads we never follow because we don’t have the resources. (Monteagudo, 2015)

In order to continue amplifying the reach of the TIJM and include more reporters to the data base of journalists, the TIJ Community Facebook was created as part of this project. It aims to be a platform where relevant information on journalism and methods is shared: 
www.facebook.com/TIJcommunity.
CHAPTER 4: BUILDING THE METHODOLOGY
4.1 Initial stages: starting the conversation

This methodology proposal is the result of analysis of theories and practices of investigative journalism within and across borders. More than 40 investigative journalists were interviewed for this PhD. They shared their views and criticised the different versions of the methodology that preceded the final methodology. Their generosity in sharing their experiences, lessons learnt and honest criticism is hugely relevant, as the methodology outlined on this site is itself a collaborative construction of dozens of investigative journalists from around the globe: Latin America, the USA, Australia, Europe, Asia and Africa.

The intention of the methodology to enable diverse cultural approaches in cross-border investigations has the purpose of allowing and facilitating alternative narratives – from the dominant to the minor – to explain the complexities of the world. A questionnaire answered by more than 50 journalists, including the regions of South Asia and Africa, has enriched the diversity of views in the building of this methodology.

Beyond the process I chose for putting together this proposal of methodological practice, the common denominator that stands out in all the interviews is the need for initial agreements and clear workflows that are conducive to a good journalistic outcome. The alternative is a recipe for failure, not only because it is unlikely to bring to light any significant discovery but, what could be much worse, if the process is not professional enough, the credibility of its outcome (and the team) are at risk:

   But they are still applying it nevertheless, even though they might not be aware of it. But what happens? When you follow an internalised methodology, it’s not transparent for the rest of the team members, and it doesn’t anticipate good results … and there may be fractures along her process, etc. I think a minimal methodology is useful. (Gonzalez, 2015)

The graphic in Figure 4.1 below represents the three stages of the interviews that led to the methodology, together with the analysis of related methods and a questionnaire.
Cross-border investigative journalism is a new discipline in the history of journalism that has increased with the internet era and has facilitated the exchange of information and data. The ICIJ, the biggest global network of more than 200 investigative journalists in 70 countries, was founded 20 years ago by American journalist Charles Lewis with the objective of ‘focusing on issues that do not stop at national frontiers: cross-border crime, corruption, and the accountability of power’ as detailed on the ICIJ’s official website: [www.icij.org/about](http://www.icij.org/about).

Australia has six representatives in the ICIJ: Bill Birnbauer, Jan Mayman, Linton Besser, Marian Wilkinson, Neil Chenoweth and Ross Coulthart.

Latin America has been involved in many of these investigations, with the 2016 *Panama Papers* the most widely known with the participation of 96 Latin American investigative
journalists (Bueno, 2016). In 2017, a net of corruption discovered initially in Brazil extended to at least 13 countries in an investigation of money laundering that became popular under the name of ‘Lava Jato’ (López Linares, 2017b). Linares described Lava Jato as ‘a case study in cross-border investigation … that could not be tackled without collaboration (Linares, 2017b).

Peruvian journalist Pedro Salinas, author of the ground-breaking book *Half Monks, Half Soldiers* about abuse in the heart of the religious organisation Sodalicio, thinks collaboration is key investigative reporting. In the case of his book – which cost him a suspended sentence of one year of prison for defamation in April 2019 – he had the support of Paola Ugaz, a very recognised Peruvian investigative journalist:

I couldn’t have done it by myself, let alone finish it. Collaboration is essential. It’s not only Paola’s collaboration but also other people who want to help, or that we contact to ask for information for the book. This book is not done by one person; two hundred people participated in this book, many of them with a pseudonym, who have been vital to put together the investigation. (Salinas, 2015)
The investigations were based on court documents shared by newspaper *Folha de Sao Paulo*, which were uploaded on an online platform called Overview that allowed journalists from 13 countries to search, view and review the documents. The countries involved were: Peru, Brazil, Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Uruguay, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and the Dominican Republic. This investigation also resulted in a new alliance called the Latin American Network of Structured Investigation (see Figure 4.2). However, these networks and the results of their investigations have been invisible in Australia’s coverage of international news.

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Years before, Monteagudo, Uruguayan journalist and director of the local newspaper *El Eco*, had tracked the money from Argentina to the town of Colonia in Uruguay:

> What happened in Argentina, with the capital going overseas, the money laundering [operations], we realised it was happening in Uruguay as well. This allowed us to progress in an investigation on money laundering, and we found local personalities and others involved. It was a phenomenon that was occurring in our town, we were asking ourselves: why is this happening? And this is connected to regional movements; it’s all interconnected. (Monteagudo, personal interview, 2015)

When I attended the Latin American Congress of Investigative Journalism in Mexico City in 2014, to present a cross-border investigation published on SBS ([www.sbs.com.au/theother911](http://www.sbs.com.au/theother911)), I became aware of the development of cross-border investigations in Latin America and a network of journalists. Every year, this growing group of reporters exchange the practices and methods they used to investigate topics that ended up breaking important stories in the region. This acknowledgement led me to focus my attention on Latin American journalists as a starting point.

In an interview for this research, Gabriel Monteagudo reflected on the Latin American agenda. He thinks most countries in the region have problems in common and there are many topics that can be investigated collaboratively:

> Drug trafficking; money laundering; capital going overseas; crime; domestic violence and human trafficking. We do have a common agenda, including environmental issues like the massive production of soy or the use of agro toxics. Today in Paraguay there are Uruguayans planting four million hectares of soy. This represents twenty-five per cent of the agricultural land in Uruguay. This twenty-five per cent is now being exploited by Uruguayans in Paraguay. (Monteagudo, personal interview, 2015)

Pablo Alfano is one of Uruguay’s most respected investigative journalists with more than 20 years of experience in the field. A few years ago, Sudestada, the website that brings together his and Fabian Werner’s and Walter Pernas’ investigations, did a deep dive into the Bárcenas case – also known as the Bárcenas Affair. This was a corruption scandal in Spain that involved the People’s Party (PP) after it was brought to light that the party treasurer and senator Luis Bárcenas had 48 million euros in a Swiss bank account, where illegal cash
donations were kept. The Uruguayan investigation, mostly unnoticed by the rest of the media in the world, explained the triangulation and found out that part of Bárcenas’ money had gone through Uruguay and was connected with Uruguayan ghost companies, or with land and properties that he had bought in Uruguay through figureheads.

In 2015 the Sudestada team did a rather long investigation about all the properties owned by Eugenio Figueredo, a Uruguayan and American association football executive who presided over the Uruguayan Football Association for 10 years and the South American Football Confederation CONMEBOL for 20 years. In May 2015 he was banned by the FIFA Ethics Committee after being arrested in Switzerland as the result of an FBI investigation into corruption in FIFA. The Sudestada team, which had been following Figueredo’s finances for a long time, published their investigation as the FIFA scandal unfolded. It included a number of properties in California under either his name or those of his wife or other family members. He also owned an offshore ghost company in Panama that enabled him basically to sell or buy anything.

The details of these investigations did not travel far, even though it was a breaking story in the international news coverage. Capturing the experiences of these journalists was vital to give credibility to the model proposed and to capture the accumulated knowledge in the model.

4.2 First destination: Uruguay – Exploratory interviews with Uruguayan journalists (Montevideo, June 2015)

During the trip to Uruguay in June 2015 I contacted eight of the most respected investigative journalists in the country and interviewed them: Roger Rodriguez, Walter Pernas, Fabian Werner, Pablo Alfano, Gabriel Pereira, Sergio Israel, Gabriel Monteagudo and Guillermo Garat. These exploratory interviews were the first step of the fieldwork and an initial analysis is published in the paper ‘Uruguay’s best investigative reporters discuss first TIJM’ (Melgar, 2015).
Even though the procedural element is key for cost-effective practice of TJ, the best practices this PhD project is trying to convey are not limited to a methodological series of actions. Geopolitical, cultural and historical differences influence the different approaches to the profession of journalism and even the understanding of what truth is. The eight exploratory interviews I carried out with Uruguayan investigative journalists in June 2015 took the construction of this methodology to a different level that includes a conversation about ethics as part of the agreement in each collaborative journalistic investigation. These interviews were crucial to exploring the diversity of professional practices, which was key to answering the research question of this PhD. The discussion about ethics and about the motivations of the journalists to investigate a topic is seen as a mandatory step before agreeing to work in collaboration with colleagues from overseas. This first series of exploratory interviews showed that the novelty of the subject and the diversity of views of what a methodology should look like would make it impossible to bring together the opinions of more than 50 journalists to arrive at one methodological proposal.

At the risk of imposing my own framework, and despite my commitment to grounded theory, the circumstances obliged me to use my professional experience, journalism handbooks and the content from the exploratory in-depth interviews with the first set of journalists in Uruguay to design the first draft of a methodology in 20 steps that was used to narrow down and frame the conversation in the second series of interviews with investigative journalists, as explained in this exegesis.

4.3 Building a methodology – draft 1

In this first draft of the methodology, the proposal is a linear step-by-step process of 20 steps divided into five stages. It took months to distil the concepts and ideas, and finally systematise them in such a way that a methodology could be proposed as the main contribution of this research.

This proposal was translated into Spanish and taken to Peru in November 2015 to start the conversation with Latin American colleagues who attended the annual congress of investigative journalists organised by IPYS. Their answers focused on the commitment of investigative journalists to the truth, and the challenges of building trust between journalists...
in different countries. This fits into the profile, as the engine that moves most Latin American journalists is social injustice, as well as unfairness and wrongdoings, motivations that have become a shared feeling.

**Figure 4.3** First TJM proposed in 20 steps, detailed workflow
Transnational Investigative Journalism Methodology (TIJM)

What are the four chapters of the TIJM (TIJ Methodology)?

A) AGREEMENT

B) REFINE

C) PRODUCTION

D) PUBLICATION + Evaluation and follow up
Transnational Investigative Journalism Methodology (TIJM)

A. AGREEMENT
1. Hypothesis 1
2. Countries involved
3. Identification of media/journalists/organisations
4. Resources agreed and timeline
5. Protocol agreed (includes code of ethics and code of practice)
6. Review of Hypothesis 1

B. REFINE
7. Hypothesis 2
8. Source mapping (Backgrounding and human sources)
9. Research (open sources in all countries)
10. Exchange and systematise - data from all countries
   • Key actors (individuals and institutions);
   • Key issues that concern actors
   • Key dates and events
11. Review of hypothesis 2 (leads to future stories)
12. Resource and timeline reassessment
4.4 Second destination: Latin America – In-depth interviews

In November 2015 this first methodology was scrutinised during the annual congress of Latin American investigative journalists, celebrated in Peru, where more than 30 investigative journalists were interviewed for this PhD. Their views were gathered to continue refining the proposed methodology for a more efficient practice of investigative journalism.

Latin American investigative journalism goes back to the 1950s. It suffered a major historical setback during the dictatorships of the 1970s and 1980s. However, in the last 20 years it has experienced a revival. It is a journalistic genre that benefits greatly from the new digital platforms of news dissemination. Despite very limited resources, Latin America’s common history has helped the development and growth of what has been called the journalism of outrage (Protess, 1992). This intrinsic motivation has worked as an engine for the development of highly professional investigative journalists. In Global Muckraking: 100 years of investigative journalism from around the world Schiffrin (2012) brings together relevant investigations of journalists from all over the world and includes work from Peru, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile and Nicaragua.

When I travelled to Mexico to participate in the Congress for Investigative Journalism that was taking place in 2014 (Colpin) I was prepared to share with an audience of investigative journalists attending the event the main findings of an investigative report that showed the active participation of Australian Secret Services (ASIS) in Chile’s coup by supporting their CIA counterparts in September 1973 (www.sbs.com.au/theother911). To my surprise, most sessions during this congress were about the methods and rationales behind the investigations, not about the outcomes. This experience was the seed that started growing to become this PhD by project today, and started collaborative agreements with colleagues from Latin America. During this congress I interviewed two key members of Ojo Público: Oscar Castilla and Fabiola Torres, directors and founders of Ojo Público. Before, they both had long trajectories at El Comercio newspaper. After the interviews in 2015, they stayed in contact and in a couple of months I was doing the translation of the successful manual The Swiss Army Knife for Journalists: digital investigative tools in the era of Big Data, which was published in August 2016 (https://navaja-suiza.ojo-publico.com/static/Manual_OjoPublico_English.pdf).
Margaret Looney published an article (Looney, 2014) on the website of the GIJN titled ‘Spurring cross-border collaboration on journalism investigations in Latin America’, supporting the idea that investigative journalism in Latin America is thriving in the digital space. Around the same time, Gabriela Manuli (2015) published on the GIJN website some extraordinary news: IPYS was publishing a database with 300 Latin American investigations. The data bank, called BIPYS (Bank of Investigative Journalism), is an initiative supported by UNESCO and has become a repository of many of the best examples of investigative journalism in that region, including a methodology guide explaining how a story was researched and reported. One of the creators of the bank was Peruvian Ricardo Uceda, notable for his award-winning coverage of military and government corruption, who explained to me the selection criteria for the stories bank. In an interview for this project, Uceda said that the collection process of the investigations that form the BIPYS includes the methodological practice behind the report:

The first thing we did was asking Latin American journalists who had done emblematic investigations, what did they discover in their work. Then, how did they discover it. And that implies a methodology, right? And within the methodology there are some very important questions. For example, how long did you work? How much did you spend? What’s the final cost? (Uceda, 2015)

At that stage I started thinking about the benefits of sharing the Latin American experience with Australia and the world. Australia is a multicultural nation and the potential links that we have with our countries of origin could be the source of a more diverse approach to transnational stories, with Australia as a kind of ‘multicultural headquarters’. Previous experiences of transnational journalism in Australia have had a very short life, even though they have been very successful, and the Global Mail is an example. Graeme Wood, a well-known Australian internet entrepreneur, philanthropist and environmentalist, founded the Global Mail, a not-for-profit multimedia site for journalism, which became the first institutional member of the ICIJ and partnered with OpenAustralia.org (www.openaustralia.org.au), DetentionLogs.com.au (www.detentionlogs.com.au) and RightoKnow.org.au (http://rightoknow.org.au). In February 2012, Wood invested $1.5 million to start this funding body to support cross-border investigations and committed to
funding the project for five years, but the initiative closed in February 2014 when he told the staff he would cease funding the newspaper.

In this Australian context, my interest in the Latin American experience increased. In 2015 I travelled to Peru to attend the Colpin congress and among other journalists I had the privilege to meet Carlos Eduardo Huertas, director of Connectas, and interview him for this PhD. Specifically, D’Alessandro of FOPEA, who was attending this congress, said the organisation is also looking for some methodological standards, and that’s what he was asked to work on:

Let’s see what comes out of this meeting. And it’s only the beginning. Surely there will be a road to follow in the coming congresses. The idea is to take advantage of the presence of colleagues from the region and other areas of the world to discuss methodologies, processes. (D’Alessandro, 2015)

Looney’s analysis (2014) matched my own experience: ‘Latin America is an excellent setting … because of the obvious advantages of having a common language, history and culture [and] because many of the things that are changing the reality on the continent are cross-border, from organised crime to the main trends in investment in the region’.

In the course of the following two years, very relevant investigative reports across borders were published in Latin America. In June 2017, more than 20 journalists from at least 11 media outlets in more than 10 countries, including Latin America and African regions, came together to launch the online platform Investiga Lava Jato (Investigate Lava Jato http://investigalavajato.convoca.pe) to develop and disseminate in-depth reports on a corruption scheme that has spread beyond the continent. This information is shared among media outlets in different countries; they also share the research processes they used. This way other journalists can search for patterns of corruption in the nations involved in the scandal. In July 2017, Aleszu Bajak from the GIJN identified exemplary investigative online stories produced in Latin America in an article titled ‘Eight interactive stories to check out’ (http://gijn.org/2017/07/10/eight-interactive-investigative-stories-to-check-out/?mc_cid=31d5a21ad0&mc_eid=d13701961d).

Uruguayan journalist Monteagudo identified the common agenda framed by Latin American wrongdoings, such as drug trafficking; money laundering; capital going overseas; crime;
domestic violence; human trafficking; the environment, etc. The response of investigative reporter Roger Rodríguez, when asked what potential transnational investigations would be doable in a small country like Uruguay, should not surprise the reader of this research. As if he had memorised the list before the interview, he answered:

The SAFIs [offshore companies] and their crimes; the anonymous societies created by ‘Ignacio Posadas y vecinos’; Who has really benefitted from the forestry industry in Uruguay? Who are the actual owners of the soy plantations? Who owns Uruguay’s cold storage companies? What happened to pirate fishing and the black hake scandal? What is the net product of the country; how much stays and how much leaves? How is money laundry still happening in Uruguay? Foreign Affairs: Army official’s escapees; the impunity of Uruguay’s diplomats; The Argentinean–Brazilian business lobby in Punta del Este city; Who are the rich foreigners in Uruguay; Professional gamblers in Maldonado’s Casino; American soldiers with war crime records who are protected by Uruguay; Who is in Interpol’s list of Uruguayan criminals and for what reasons—who is included in that list and who isn’t; Technology traffickers in the health sector; The soccer and the basketball mafias; Children trafficking in sports; The D.E.A and drugs in Uruguay; Smugglers in Uruguay; past and present; The Korean and Chinese mafia operating in Uruguay; Nazis in Uruguay who are still active and they might be linked to the murders of transgender people; The traffic of diamonds and precious stones in Montevideo’s old city; The criminal groups called ‘polibandas’; what’s their background and the connections with high profile politicians; Security companies: what are they securing? (Rodriguez, 2015)

The dialogues with a series of experienced investigative journalists were the next stage in the building of this methodology. They shared their experiences and analysed the first version of this proposed methodology against their own methods and professional practices.

4.5 Different views

The 2015 exploratory interviews in Uruguay was a good experience that triggered the conversation and helped me identify the main contentious topics and concerns. Even though the interviews were longer and more in depth than the four questions used to design the methodology, the distinct difference in the following interviews from the previous ones is
that all the journalists interviewed were asked to read and interpret the suggested methodology before answering the following questions.

1. Tell me about your most important experiences in transnational investigative reporting.
2. Do you think it would be useful to have a methodology/minimum quality standard/protocol to have a more efficient practice of transnational investigative journalism?
3. Based on the methodology proposed that you have read, what is missing that you think should be included?
4. Based on the methodology proposed that you have read, what would you not include?

4.6 Building a methodology – draft 2

This attempt was a graphic simplification of the first draft. It also provided a clear mapping from beginning to end of the process, something that was necessary, as the perception during the interviews with Latin American journalists was that the initial model was complex and long. However, from a methodological point of view there are no substantial differences between draft 1 and draft 2.

The analysis of each of the elements of the production process – and their interactions – allowed me to propose this method, which theorises on the basis of the accumulated knowledge gained through professional journalistic practice.
4.7 Third destination: Australia and worldwide experts

This content section is the most diverse in terms of the variety of topics brought up by the interviewees, which were very similar to the ones previously discussed with their Latin American colleagues. These interviews helped shape the third and last version of the methodology. The interviews were done face to face or via Skype because of the geographical distances. Amanda Gearing (Australia), Ben-Hur Demeneck (Brazil), Brigitte Alfter (Denmark), Charles Lewis (USA) and Stefan Candea (Romania) have all studied the process of collaborative investigative journalism and their in-depth views and academic research lines are clearly reflected in the interviews. The conversations with Gerard Ryle (USA), Hamish McDonald (Australia), Michael Carey (Australia) and Vivien Altman
(Australia) were also very important because they reflect years of working experience in investigative reporting.

4.8 Building a methodology – draft 3

The full interviews with these journalists can be watched on the website: https://tijm2016world.wordpress.com The transcripts are also available in the Appendix section of this exegesis. Their experiences and perceptions are based on vast experience and/or deep analysis of the discipline.

Vivien Altman, Australian multi-awarded investigative journalist and TV producer, was very positive about ethical values from journalists from around the globe, which is in line with the view that demystifies the idea that Western values and ethics need to be taught to journalists in other regions of the world. Based on more than 30 years of experience working with journalists from around the globe, Altman said: ‘most serious investigative journalists are keen to get the story out. Whether it’s in their interest or not, very often they cooperate. Investigative stories tend to attract certain kind of journalists. In my experience I’ve been quite impressed about most journalists’ ethics’.

Mike Carey is an Australian Walkley Award–winning journalist and producer who was executive producer of SBS Dateline for eight years. Reflecting back on the 1996 investigation that brought to light the financial links between a Singaporean government firm and a branded Burmese drug lord, Carey said: ‘I relied too much on my own, on me doing it myself, because I was afraid that if I talked about it too much then I would lose the story’. Carey reflected on how journalism used to be done in the past as opposed to now, where collaboration is a value that is growing in relevance over competitiveness.

Gerard Ryle, who leads the ICIJ headquarters staff in Washington, D.C. and oversees the Consortium’s more than 190 member journalists in more than 65 countries, highlighted the importance of understanding cultural differences and how they impact on journalists’ practice. ‘Understanding culture: for example, in a place like India, it is perfectly normal to pay for someone to find a core document for you. Whereas in America that’s a no-no; paying
for anything … absolutely not. But you have to allow the journalists to do whatever the normal practice is in their country. You can’t impose American ethics or rules across the whole world’. The clarity of his statement is very relevant because it means that the model of the ICIJ is to respect diversity within their teams, something that not all organisations have embraced.

Ginna Morelo, from Colombia, also put emphasis in the importance of understanding and decoding cultural differences: ‘when you thoroughly study and value the cultural differences with the other part; you’ll have much better results. Journalists normally don’t spend too much time on this’ (Morelo, 2015).

Danish journalist Brigitte Alfter is author of a handbook for journalists on cross-border journalism. She’s also a co-founder of Wobbing Europe, which supports journalists in using FoI laws, as well as Scoop, a Danish project that works with journalists in south-eastern and Eastern Europe. As well as Altman and Ryle, Alfter has a strong focus on investigative journalism ethics, which reinforces the idea of the importance of this discussion in cross-border investigations: ‘The ethical approach has to be discussed during the research phase and then when you approach the publication. Once active journalists and journalism students discuss comparative journalism ethics, it’ll be much easier to understand what to watch out for in the practical process’. Alfter’s suggestion of having more discussions on comparative journalism ethics means she also considers the importance of understanding the diversity of ethics.

Hamish McDonald is an Australian investigative journalist and author of books on Indonesia, India and Japan, and takes a keen interest in Australia’s ethnic communities. McDonald has won two Walkley awards and held very relevant positions in Australia’s international coverage. He was Asia-Pacific editor of the Sydney Morning Herald, foreign correspondent in Jakarta, Tokyo, Beijing and New Delhi, and senior editor at the Far Eastern Economic Review in Hong Kong. McDonald is supportive of this initiative: ‘I think it’s probably a good idea to have some articulation of practices and rules because I suspect a lot of investigative work … follows [the story] intuitively, without stepping back and making it systematic. It’s a useful exercise’. 
Charles Lewis is an investigative journalist based in Washington D.C. Lewis founded the Center for Public Integrity among other non-profits. He is familiar with the challenges of cross-border investigations, since he is one of the worldwide pillars of the discipline. As he did not see the last version of the methodology, Lewis was not sure of the final outcome of this PhD. However, he also encouraged this attempt at proposing a methodology:

You are trying to do something in the systematic, thoughtful, international way and kind of lay out a template for how things ought to be done when, as far as I can tell, almost no one has attempted that or succeeded in doing it. (Lewis, 2016)

Amanda Gearing is an Australian investigative journalist and Walkley Award winner who completed her PhD in the field of journalism at Queensland University of Technology in 2016. Her thesis, ‘Global investigative journalism in the network society’, explores Castells’ network theory and Berglez’s global journalism theory to conceptualise global investigative journalism and the emergence of a global Fourth Estate. Gearing, who deeply understands the challenges of proposing a methodology, guidelines or model for the practice of global (or cross-border) investigative journalism, did not think a methodology would help to improve the quality of reporting:

There’s no quality assurance of the way journalism is done or the output that it makes. I wonder if the quality assurance status that you want to make is something that could be adopted by peak bodies of journalistic organisations around the world in any country. (Gearing, 2016)

Her suggestion, however, starts a new and fascinating conversation: is it possible to agree on a global quality standard for investigative journalism, where professionals could voluntarily submit their works in order to have them certified? Would that be useful to increase the levels of trust in content produced by freelance journalists or NGOs around the world that do not have the big media brands to back them up? Future work in the field should focus on this aspect as a new innovative approach to the issue of trust building across borders. Uruguayan journalist Sergio Israel, who investigated the murder of Colonel Ramon Trabal, confessed that on top of all the levels of communication and agreements, the main challenge is trust in both directions: ‘What I find difficult is to find a college who trusts you’ (Israel, 2015).
Stefan Candea, a Romanian journalist with a very active professional life across Europe, is the co-founder of the Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism (CRJI), member of the ICIJ and founder of the EIC network. The EIC’s objective is to facilitate the joint reporting and publication of investigative journalism with a focus on European topics to understand how power structures affect European communities. In his PhD, Candea analysed the structures of cross-border investigative networks, opening another conversation about the centralisation versus decentralisation of media organisations and workflows, which is also part of the discussion in this exegesis. His concerns are considered in this methodological proposal as they can be applied to media organisations, NGOs and individuals working together.

Ben-Hur Demeneck is a Doctor of Communication Sciences from the School of Communications and Arts at the University of São Paulo and his 2016 thesis is titled: ‘Transnational journalism: practice, method and concept’. My dialogue with Demeneck and his work started in 2016 after I interviewed him over Skype between Brazil and Australia as part of my PhD on TIJ. During the conversation, Demeneck said something that resonated with me far beyond the interview:

A methodology of transnational journalism is a systematic practice of communication counter power to the globalisation asymmetries [as] transnational journalism is an antidote to the asymmetries of globalisation.

(Demeneck, 2016)

Demeneck’s phrase perfectly encapsulates a series of concepts that connected his work with my own experience as a Latin American–Australian investigative journalist. We both had concerns around the hegemonic thinking reflected in the Anglo-dominated global media landscape and the ethical dilemmas behind the editorial decisions in collaborative work. Demeneck’s research explores the need for real commitment to a pluralistic approach to collaborative global investigations in order to produce quality journalism.

Both Candea’s and Demeneck’s views open a door to further academic analysis of the role of TIJ and how the different practices in terms of networking and models of collaboration have an impact on the narratives journalists are building. The methodology in itself deconstructs the old individualistic processes and so the usual narratives are challenged by this
deconstruction. It is an opportunity to build new narratives using this deconstructed space as a new starting point.

4.9  **From the discussion to the areas**

The common denominator in the second and third stages of the interviews, as well as the questionnaire responses, was the need for a more flexible methodology. The step-by-step model suggested so far did not allow this flexibility. That is how the third model developed, considering areas of production over a period of time which can be applied to any investigative report by applying the production area to the particular case.

Table 4.1 summarises how the topics discussed in the interviews were analysed to identify categories and subcategories. The commonality of the categories and subcategories allowed simplification in the ten areas that define the methodology.
### Table 4.1 [Categories and subcategories of topics of discussion in interviews]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics discussed with journalists in the three series of interviews</th>
<th>Categories and subcategories</th>
<th>Related areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public sources/records</td>
<td>Production Sources</td>
<td>Production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Timeline</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Software</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Data bases consolidation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More training, more method</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Team and networking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important to build networks</td>
<td>Journalists in different countries</td>
<td>Information exchange</td>
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<td>Importance of conferences and exchanges</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Agreement to manage resources, publication and time</td>
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<td>Resources agreement</td>
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<td>Need to travel to follow up stories/related costs</td>
<td>Time to invest in the project</td>
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<td>Need more time/related costs</td>
<td>Money to be invested</td>
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<td>Limitations are manageable</td>
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<td>You don’t need money to think</td>
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<td>NGO financial model and universities</td>
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<td>How to manage the risk when collaborating</td>
<td>Safety and trust Agreement on the level of collaboration</td>
<td>Ethics and team</td>
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<td>Trust</td>
<td>Working in teams as much as possible</td>
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<td>Face to face</td>
<td>Agreement on the safety risks</td>
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<td>Face-to-face meeting to build trust</td>
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<td>Respect legislation in each country</td>
<td>Legal</td>
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<td>Legal advice during and at the end of the investigation</td>
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<td>Agree on minimum standards/validation</td>
<td>Quality</td>
<td>Story and production</td>
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<td>Checking quality of data and hypothesis</td>
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<td>Investigations should be teamwork</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>Coordination Team</td>
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<td>Help on the ground when overseas</td>
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<td>Production Team</td>
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<td>Safety</td>
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<td>Diversity</td>
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<td>Important to identify levels of collaboration</td>
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<td>Most journalists work alone/not the best option</td>
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<td>Legal/illegal</td>
<td>Ethics and values</td>
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<td>Ethical/non-ethical</td>
<td>Hypothesis to frame the investigation between: Legal/illegal Ethical/non-ethical</td>
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<td>Common feeling of justice</td>
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<td>Commitment with truth</td>
<td>Ethics agreement</td>
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<td>Theoretical framework</td>
<td>motivations to investigate a topic/story</td>
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<td>Cosmo vision</td>
<td>What’s the final objective</td>
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<td>Capacity of suspicion related to theoretical thinking of the society in structural terms</td>
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<td>Accountability/freedom from financial source</td>
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<td>Protection of sources</td>
<td>Method</td>
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<td>Technology is promising for regional investigations</td>
<td>Hypothesis</td>
<td>Story</td>
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<td>Data collection</td>
<td>Production</td>
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<td>Methodology isn’t a protocol</td>
<td>Systematisation</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<td>UNESCO manual as a good start</td>
<td>Cross-checking data</td>
<td>Coordination</td>
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<td>Coordination, leader, director that establishes the rule</td>
<td>Use technology efficiently</td>
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CHAPTER 5: ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRE
5.1 The purpose and the design

After finalising more than 40 interviews face to face that mainly targeted Latin American and Australian investigative journalists – as well as a few European and American journalists – the aim of a multicultural approach to the methodological proposal called for a broader and more diverse range of opinions. In order to expand the number of opinions – which also worked as a triangulation of the trend of the responses collected in the face-to-face interviews – a questionnaire was designed to gather some quantitative and qualitative data.

In my working experience, which involves supervising investigative reports across platforms of some 300 journalists from more than 70 countries sharing a newsroom, I have come across interesting cultural challenges. Many of the journalists who answered the questionnaire were born overseas – or live overseas. Out of the 52 participants who answered the questionnaire, three of them did not include their personal details so we do not know their contact details or their nationality. Another two answered the questionnaire twice. The journalists who participated by answering the questionnaire identified themselves with 33 different nationalities or groups: Lebanese, Austrian, English, Burmese, Armenian, Vietnamese, Colombian, Uruguayan, American, Indian, South Asian, Iraqi, Brazilian, Canadian, Tamil, Indian, Danish, Ghanaian, West African, Swiss, Romanian, Korean, Ethiopian, Scottish, Thai, South African, Rwandan, Afghan, Chinese, Croatian, Sri Lankan, Greek and Peruvian.

The breakdown of the participants is detailed in Appendix E of this exegesis.

5.2 Main findings applied to the methodology

The answers to the questionnaire showed similar trend as identified in the interviews – both based on the answers included in the survey – and the figures.

The graphics and figures are provided in Appendix F.
The need for a methodology

Only 6% disagreed with the statement that a methodology would help TIJ to be more effective, with 94% supporting it.

Out of this 94% who had a positive view in regards to an agreed methodology for the best practice of TIJ, 56% said a methodology will help in all cases and 38% thought that it will be useful in some cases.

Three of the comments in this question add value to the analysis:

Without appropriate methodology, there will be chaos … will end up chasing one’s own tail and/or validating the bias in the reporters’ minds.

As long as the methodology takes into account the cultural disparities and aligns journalists with a similar mindset transnationally. For instance, the way journalists work and think in Russia will be very different to those in China and quite different from Aus!

Although it may not be practical or possible to apply in all circumstances, as a general rule it would be very useful to ensure uniformity of scope and focus and therefore useful data and conclusions.

Their methodologies and others’ methodologies

Only 31% of the participants had their own method to do investigations; 12% did not have a method at all and 18% said they sometimes use a methodology.

When asked to compare their methodology with other colleagues’ methodologies, only 8% thought theirs was better than others’; 17% said their method was not better than others’ and 53% were of the opinion that the method evaluation needs to be done case by case.

Only 4% said they would try to impose their method over others’ when working in a team; and 57% said they would not, with 75% of the interviewees willing to discuss someone else’s method if it was suggested as a better process. This is an encouraging result because it
indicates they are prone to start an open conversation and reflect on what a best practice in their field of expertise would be.

One of the respondents said:

For a team project to work, the method used needs to be an integration of all the methods used by the colleagues. I believe imposing a workflow will make some team members left out. So trying to get the best practices from other methods used is the way to go. I have worked within a group environment on one of the investigations I’ve done and we agreed to work on the story based inquiry method. It worked well for us.

Another stressed the importance of making the best use of each participant’s skills:

Whenever I have to work in a team, I ensure that the responsibilities are understood and agreed to by everyone in the team. Otherwise the team will be inefficient or worse, ineffective. Usually a team will have people who work differently. The team members each bring a strength that I don’t have. Otherwise there is no need for a team.

It is also important to keep in mind the main values of high-standard journalism and basic questions that would apply to any investigative workflow, as one of the survey participants suggested:

It is more instinctive/intuitive and relies heavily on the basic principles of who/when/why/where/what, and an openness of mind that is able to analyse facts gathered without prejudice (without trying to fit things into a hypothesis). All of this is of course underpinned by fairness, balance and corroboration.

Using a hypothesis to start an investigation

In terms of the hypothesis as a starting point for any investigative report, 20% used a hypothesis in all cases, 20% in some cases and 4% never used a hypothesis. Half of the participants did not opt for either of the available options and reflected on the use of a hypothesis.

One of the strongest opinions on why a hypothesis is necessary was from Lebanese journalist May Rizk, who is now working in Australia for SBS’s Arabic24 channel:
Keeping in mind that the hypothesis could be amended as more data is collected, I find that having a broad research question makes it harder to investigate, especially if there is a time frame to the story. When the question is broad it’s hard to coin it down into one angle or it makes it harder to find the most interesting angle in it. It also makes data collection whether it’s from human resources or open data harder and broader, so it becomes more labour intensive.

Some of the participants said a hypothesis does not always work and they preferred to start an investigation with broad questions. However, nobody argued against the use of a hypothesis: ‘Sometimes you know what you’re looking for and you can have your “one liner”, but other times you’re scratching around to see what you can dig up.’

The importance of an initial agreement

In relation to the agreements that need to happen when you work with colleagues, only 2% said there is nothing to coordinate or to agree on; 35% said it is important. There were no comments in the survey results from the only participant who argued an agreement is not necessary.

The detail provided in the answers about the aspects the agreement needs to include is very rich. We have cross-checked all of them with the methodological proposal suggested by this PhD by project, and they are all included:

- Publication date agreement
- Timeline
- Responsibilities and tasks
- Clear roles
- Sources management (documents and people)
- Clear hypothesis
- Regular meetings
- Tracking down progress of information
- Trust
- Allocation of resources
• Ethics
• Diverse perspectives
• Language barriers
• Cultural barriers
• Open discussions
• Coordination/leadership role
• Secure communications to share documents
• Ownership – By-lines – Intellectual property
• Legal issues
• Sources reliability
• Journalist safety
• Cross-platform production workflow

Ethics discussion

When asked about agreeing on a code of ethics or basic ethic rules, 56% said it is necessary; 6% did not consider it relevant and 4% believe it is desirable but cannot be implemented.

Most considered a discussion or agreement about ethics is very important:

I think this is very important, especially when the team comprises of people from different cultures and backgrounds. This step will help avoid problems within the team and with dealing with human sources or the way the investigation is tackled.

A minor group made comments such as: ‘ethics are presumed’; ‘journalists have a code of ethics and that should be enough’; ‘Unnecessary. The code of ethics is implicit, if we are among professionals. And if proof arrives that we aren’t, then it’s time for me to leave the party’. What they were trying to say is either that all journalists should have the same ethics – without considering the complexities of cultural diversity – or at the other extreme that it is not possible to agree on one code of ethics because cultural differences and professional practices in different contexts might not allow it.
In this sense, some other journalists who participated in the survey understood the spirit and the meaning of having an ethical discussion, which does not necessarily mean agreeing on the same code of ethics, but arriving at agreement on what is acceptable and what is not in some key decisions:

It should be unnecessary but there are different approaches in different cultures so if not a code of ethics, at least a list of what is acceptable for the project.

Ethics (and law) vary from country to country, so hard to agree on a one-size-fits-all model. But it’s very important to agree on rules of cooperation, routines of decision making on a team.

**Using open sources of information**

In relation to the use of open sources of information in their investigations, 16% said they used them a lot, 25% said sometimes and only 2% did not use them.

This seems to show there is no consistent use of open sources of information that are available to the public, confirming the feedback on this matter collected in the interviews. Most journalists believed they are not exploring the available open sources enough before digging into materials that require, for example, FoI requests.

**Systematising and exchanging data**

In terms of data systematisation, which is a key element in collaborative works, a surprisingly high 21% said they did not systematise it at all and 42% used databases to do so. Aside from specifically designed secure platforms to exchange information, most journalists used Dropbox, Google Drive, Google Sheets or Google Word. But, as one of the participants explained, this is a very fast moving area and it is important to keep up with technology innovations.

The European Investigative Journalism and Dataharvest Conference organised by Journalismfund.eu in two events in May 2017 came up with two useful resources: ‘Editorial
coordination across borders – Which tools are necessary?’
(https://eijc17dataharvest.sched.com/event/9nf2/editorial-coordination-across-borders-which-tools-are-necessary) and ‘Knowledge sharing in collaborative teams – The tools available’

These were the moderators during these networking events and they are important references for future investigations in this area. Stefan Candea was interviewed for this PhD.

- Paul-Olivier Dehaye (co-founder, PersonalData.IO)
- Stefan Candea (investigative journalist, CRJI and EIC.network)
- Benedikt Hebeisen (developer, virtualworx)
- Friedrich Lindenberg (coder and data journalist, tech coordinator, OCCRP)
- Cécile Schilis-Gallego (data journalist and researcher, ICIJ)
- Sebastian Mondial (investigative data specialist and lecturer, Liquid Investigations)

**Trusting the partner**

Trust in the quality of the information provided by the other partners was a recurrent challenge mentioned by all the journalists interviewed. In different ways, all journalists interviewed invested time, resources and expertise to find the right partner they could trust. In some cases, finding the right partner – also known as ‘match-making’ – was identified as the key element that can determine the success or failure of an investigative report across borders.

Some journalists had had bad experiences. Rodis Recalt, investigative journalist for the Argentinean Perfil publisher, said all his collaboration experiences had been negative:

> When I investigated about the intelligence services, I tried to contact journalists from the New York Times, who worked in investigations about the CIA … to ask if they could be the connection between their sources and I, to find an Argentinean spy living in the United States. My plan was to find him to knock at his door, but they didn’t want to collaborate
arguing that they work for a media company – the New York Times – and it wouldn’t be highly regarded if they collaborated with another media outlet that in Argentina is Perfil publisher/Noticias magazine, where I work. Then I tried with Spain, with a former journalist of El Mundo newspaper. I tried to exchange information with him … not really. (Recalt, 2015)

We asked the journalists how they decided they could trust a journalist they had never met before or worked with: 37% said they assessed the journalist through their work; and 14% only trusted a colleague if they were recommended by a person they knew and trusted. More than 27% never trusted anyone completely.

The survey asked the journalists if they fact-checked the information provided by their colleagues: 13% did not do it and 27% said they followed an agreed standard to validate the data.

Peruvian investigative reporter Fabiola Torres has learned that, to do this kind of work, a key element is trust:

> Without trust, who will share the findings with a colleague from another country who also needs to be aware of the overall investigation? Trust is vital. I’m not going to fact-check the colleague’s topic or report. That’s not the way. Even though there is rigour in our procedures, there is also a very important element of trust. (Torres, 2015)

**Legal risks**

When it comes to evaluating the legal risks, 20% did not consult a professional legal adviser, doing the legal assessment themselves. Another 36% found advice from a lawyer they trusted and 44% left this legal decision to the legal department of the media organisation they worked for.
Amplification

Once a story was published, 70% were using social media to amplify the reach and 35% used the publicity department. A strong 40% used their colleagues’ networks as well and 10% did not think about promotion at all.

Evaluation

A surprisingly positive result is that 50% evaluated the investigation process after publication in order to reflect on and implement better practices in future investigations; 25% said they did not evaluate.
FINAL REFLECTION

In an era of global data, this is probably the moment in history with the highest number of investigative reports and data-based research. ‘There can be no question that, if you’re a reader with access to the Internet, you’re living in a new golden age of investigative journalism’, argued Anya Schifrin (2014) in an article. However, beyond iconic transnational investigations like the Panama Papers or Swiss Leaks, we do not see many investigative reports from other parts of the world. Most people – anyone who is not part of the industry of in-depth journalism – never hear about these investigations. Globalisation seems to move very slowly when it comes to reporting stories that are not listed by the big international networks.

Interesting enough, this is a process that happens at the same time that most academics, journalists and the general public agree how important it is to increase regional and/or global approaches to understanding the complex globalised reality. This reflective practice into the daily practice of investigative journalism is helping to visualise the key processes behind the content production machine, a conscious examination of the editorial decision-making process behind the news. This analysis is intended to lead to an improved understanding of the profession and hence the opportunity to fill the gaps.

The transnational approach to investigations is not only perceived as an addition to improve the quality of the content, but also as the key factor that enables full understanding of the ‘why’ of the topic. There are two main scenarios: the first is when the same story replicates in different countries and each journalist follows how the same phenomenon operates in each country; the second scenario happens when the relations and interactions across countries explain the nature of the issue being investigated. In this second scenario, the transnational approach even defines the object of study.
To build trust between journalists it is of key importance to start a transnational conversation on how we do investigative journalism in different societies, cultures and political systems. Trust is by far the biggest asset journalists have – as well as the biggest challenge – when doing match making. Trust – or the lack of it – is also the main reason why most international news bulletins follow the agenda set by the big networks and would not dare to explore an investigative report produced by a local TV channel in another country where they speak another language.

Most news bulletins – and Australia is no exception – put together their international news based on packages from their providers that are usually the large networks like BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera. Any investigative story produced by an NGO or media organisation in another country, in another language, will never be picked up by Australia, even if it is also in English, unless it goes through very detailed scrutiny and postproduction.

The very fact that most Australian journalists – let alone the Australian public – do not know about the multi-awarded investigation ‘Fatal Extraction: Australian mining in Africa’ ([https://projects.icij.org/fatalextraction](https://projects.icij.org/fatalextraction)) is clear evidence of this disconnection between the Australian mainstream media and in-depth, high-quality journalism – when it is not produced by Australian media. The investigation shows how Australian companies – the most numerous Western mining companies in Africa – are linked to more than 380 deaths in on-site accidents and off-site skirmishes in Africa since 2004: ‘Never-before-seen court documents, legal complaints, community petitions, contracts and confidential company emails reveal the extent of Australia’s controversial imprint across Africa’ (Bell and Fitzgibbon, 2014).

The challenge of quality international media coverage is mentioned by data journalist Eva Constantaras (2016) when she analyses why cross-border collaborations are still limited: ‘Cross-border reporting must also focus first on … creating content that can be repurposed to fill the dearth of quality international news coverage.

It is argued that assigning a journalist to produce a TV news package is too expensive as it takes too much of the journalist’s day, or more than one journalist. This is the assessment that has dominated the decision-making in most newsrooms; not an editorial evaluation but a
decision based on the production cost. But if the investment was made, the uniqueness of these stories – which are not normally available in English – is likely to have such traction that, even from a cost-effectiveness point of view, the translation and repackaging in English would be worth the investment. Not to mention the recent improvements in translation technology that have already made this process quick and affordable.

The methodology proposed in this PhD by project is an objective in itself, but also a means to start a conversation about trust, diversity of editorial views and agenda setting across borders in a world dominated by an agenda around the Middle East, China, the USA, India and Russia.

A methodology is also necessary because it cannot be assumed that journalists will behave in a professional way and that no personal traits will affect group collaborative workflows. In fact, personality issues, unexpected human behaviour and egocentrism are common factors that negatively affect the flow of media collaborations, and we need to acknowledge the imperfection of humans putting the methodology into practice, instead of pretending journalists are programmed robots that will perform without involving their emotions.

Peruvian journalist Oscar Castilla understands the need for and the purpose of collecting experiences from experienced journalists. In his view, as a collective of professionals of Journalism, we haven’t had the time to systematise and conceptualise all the accumulated knowledge. He calls this loophole a “deficiency in origin”:

At some stage in our lives maybe we have to sit down, do the minimum academic work of collecting the stories we’ve done, how we resolved the cases. You share them in the pub with colleagues but it’s an anecdote; so I think the academic work about investigative journalism is very valuable … To have a more integral approach to the work, I think you need to bring both of these things together: follow the instinct but also systematise behaviours. (Castilla, 2015)

Uruguayan journalist Walter Pernas thinks this PhD project:

is very interesting, because it would be the first time we can systematise something. I’m not sure if everything you are proposing will work, but the exercise of systematising something of what we normally do in the field … that’s a very good thing and has a lot of value. (Pernas, 2015)
The understanding of the relevance of a project of this nature is widespread. Charles Lewis, founder of the ICIJ and the Center for Public Integrity, said:

What you’re thinking about and trying to do here both as a journalist and as an academic is actually unusual. Most journalists are very good at doing but they’re not very good at chronicling what they’ve done or how they did it. The methodology part of it is always seat of the pants, as you know, and kind of helter skelter, kind of frenetic and disorganised essentially … What you’re doing is a very useful thing because, as you noted yourself, I think there’s very little literature about the methodology for collaborations by large numbers of journalists across borders; it’s actually an extremely new field really in just the last few years. You’re ground-breaking in what you’re attempting by itself. (Lewis, 2016)

I have included a wide range of voices from journalists from all over the world in discussing their views and experiences on collaboration and collaboration across borders, and this is intentional. It was key in this research to capture a wide variety of experiences and cultures, and ultimately it is the core of Schön’s practical approach applied to journalism, because my purpose when putting together the accumulated know-how in investigative journalism was to capture the trial-and-error experiences of dozens of top investigative journalists across the globe. The interviews pushed the journalists to think about their practice and rationalise their judgement, which is behind what Schön (1987, p. 25) called ‘spontaneous, skilful execution of the performance’.

There are topics that were mentioned but have not been explored in this research. They were part of the initial exploratory part of the research, but ended up being out of scope. One of the most important is the role independent public media should play in investigative journalism and, as a consequence, in TIJ. The angle of the financial support of transnational investigations has not been explored so far and it is potentially a field in itself for future research. As Uruguayan reporter Guillermo Garat explained, there is a failure in the information market as media organisations are not able to support the production process inherent to investigative reporting:

We have a problem about how we finance the information we consume. We got used to not paying for information because it’s all there on internet, but information has a cost that media companies are able to cover only partially. So the state somehow should take care of this failure of the
market economy. So whether it’s for investigative journalism, data journalism or just journalism, it would be interesting that society assumes this responsibility, and that there is an honest approach to it. (Garat, 2015)

Creative models of financial support are leading the way as they enable larger investigations while maintaining the independence. From Chile to Europe, the NGO CIPER model in Chile has created a system through which ten companies support two years of investigation without interfering with the editorial control. If for any reason any of these financial supporters wants to pull out, they have to notify the organisation in advance to allow the journalists find another supporter.

While the sustainability and independence of the financial model are relevant, there are other factors that affect investigative journalism, including the projects that have public funding. In an increasingly globalised world where social media is taking over the news agenda, traditional media outlets are still perceived as reliable sources of information, but they are running behind what could potentially allow them to make the difference, and this is to distance themselves from the Anglo centric news agenda and view of the world, and from the news machine count minute by minute, second by second. Instead, they could play the role of what is missing in the media landscape: provide in-depth, reliable journalism that explains the world we live in from diverse views and perspectives.

One of the meaningful conversations relevant media organisations are having at the moment is about the impact of the stories they produce. What impact do they intend them to have? Is the impact measured by digital and social KPIs, or actual social impact like changing laws, holding politicians and bureaucrats accountable, influencing decision-makers, etc.? The increasingly common KPI-led editorial agenda is a dangerous space we are transiting that should be researched in depth as a separate theme. It is a massive distractor for content makers when their focus moves from the content production to the number of clicks a story gets. There is a concerning increase in commissioning editors and pitch forms for journalists to fill in that consider the number of estimated unique browsers as a crucial factor in deciding if a story is commissioned or not.
Danish investigator Brigitte Alfter sees two big content challenges in journalism: digitalisation and internationalisation, which we need to respond to with new ways of research and storytelling using digital tools and matching the digital power structures. But at the same time, investigative reporting needs to match the power structures of politics, business etc. that are international. So for Alfter her attempts, together with Candea’s and my own through this PhD by project, are some of the very few initiatives to develop a method that matches these changing structures of power: digitalisation and internationalisation.

Uruguayan journalist Pablo Alfano gave an example of an investigation with important social impact in Uruguay that was not picked up as an important story by mainstream media. A rural primary school was caught in an aerial fumigation that contaminated the area, causing breathing issues for a number of children. The person who did the fumigation had to pay a fine but he did not go to jail. If the case had not been picked up by a journalist who travelled to the place, collected the testimonies and the evidence, and published them, it would have stayed a local story. If the commissioning of this story had depended on the potential audience likely to read it, the journalist would not have done the story because it was ‘too local’. However, once it was published the pressure started to prevent accidents of this nature happening again, and ended up with a ban on fumigation in that area.

In a bigger international case, the alleged torturer and murderer Adriana Rivas, a former Pinochet agent who has been hiding in Australia, was exposed through one of my investigations as part of an investigative report in 2013. At that moment, it did not have the traction that it should have since it was such a historical event, both finding Rivas in Australia and the declarations she made in one of the interviews where she incriminated herself. At that moment, related communities and human rights advocates showed a significant interest in the story and the findings. But in terms of audience reach, the online story did not have many views or unique browsers. Had the story been commissioned based on the potential digital traction and social media impact, the investigation would have never been done. Six years afterwards, and after multiple extradition requests from the Chilean government to the Australian government, in February 2019 Rivas was arrested and denied bail and has been in detention since then, facing an extradition process. The transnational and social impact of this story, which will set a precedent in human rights–based extradition cases, is undoubtedly more relevant than the number of people clicking on the story. What is
also interesting is that, once Rivas was arrested, the story became one of the most popular on the SBS website in the past months.

It is not difficult to imagine how the pseudo-editorial commercial criteria of KPIs and unique browsers – posing as audience-focused decision-makers – can affect the editorial conversations in transnational and multicultural collaborative investigations, where the impact should always be measured in social change as well as the maximisation of audience reach based on the quality of the content, not the ‘best sell’ and ‘engagement’ under social media parameters.

But even in a scenario where engagement is the priority impact measurement, how are we measuring engagement? At the moment, most media organisations assess audience engagement through the number of ‘likes’, reactions and comments on Facebook. We do not know how informed this audience is when they comment on Facebook or ‘like’ a story. In many cases they do not read/watch the story and make a judgement and start a conversation based on the headline on social media and previous beliefs. Is that the kind of engagement journalism wants to foster? How much will it affect transnational investigations?

When the interviews for this PhD by project were carried out, the pressure on social media impact was only starting and it was not part of the conversation. However, given the dimension of the challenge and how it is affecting editorial decisions, I believe it is relevant to include the issue in these final reflections as it is a debate that is taking over editorial conversations across the globe and will soon reach the organisations of investigative journalists. In this sense, I believe that the creation of an app for internal use by media organisations that manages to capture an algorithm of the social impact of a potential story before it is commissioned and that can be used to implement the methodology could be the bridge to fill the gap between complex editorial discussion and practice of how to implement the method in the most effective and welcoming way for a consumer (the journalist) who is highly skilled, critical and resistant to change. The development of an algorithm and an app could be my postdoctoral project.

It is a big responsibility to tell stories to the public. Through them we build the narratives that frame the reality in a certain way that honest journalism calls ‘possible truth’ or ‘objectivity’.
When we propose an alternative understanding of the world – and this is always the case in investigative stories – we should be able to raise the standards of transparency and share with colleagues – and even the public at some stage – the production process (or methodology) that led us to the story.

I am aware that some traditional journalists resist any methodological practice suggestion which is seen as an unnecessary and invasive proposition that challenges their processes and workflows. Resistance is part of the normal reaction and in all industries there are always individuals who are afraid of change because it means, at the very least, moving away from their comfort zone. Ultimately, this research also hopes to be a contribution to the production of knowledge about how to innovate in the practice of TIJ.

Guilherme Canela, UNESCO adviser for MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay), expressed his surprise when asked his opinion about those journalists who resist discussing and/or using a methodology:

It scares me, the resistance to use a methodology in common, because one of the ways to generate trust is to agree on the rules of the game. And working together depends on these common rules, which doesn´t mean everyone has to work the same way, but everyone has to agree with a certain working scheme … When we all know the rules of the game in a collaborative work, it will be more efficient. (Canela, 2015)

For Gustavo Gorriti, one of the most relevant investigative journalists in Latin America in the last 30 years, the point is that every investigation involves somehow a methodology but naturally he pointed out that there is no one methodology that is applicable to most investigations because the topic, the circumstances and perspectives require adjustment of the methodology. However, Gorriti agrees any investigation needs to follow some basic rules:

They are the ones related to the search for the evidence, the identification and the necessary steps to ensure the evidence is solid, valid and verifiable. And the revelation corresponds to the truth of the facts. (Gorriti, 2015)

This TIJM is a framework that can help some teams in some contexts and I expect experienced journalists who are getting good outcomes using their own processes to continue following the workflows that are bringing them good results.
If this project helps start a conversation about how we do investigative journalism and how to agree on some basic standards and processes, we could make visible the invisible. The invisible is the lack of trust in any source of information that does not have an internationally recognised brand to support it. Why do we trust them? Because we believe they have high standards to validate the information and decide when a source is reliable. Validity and reliability are two main values of the quality of information, but there is no reason why journalists from different countries cannot have this conversation without the filters and perspective of the main international networks.

A horizontal transnational dialogue between journalists favours redefinition of ‘the other’ and hopefully helps to counter the world fragmentation. A grassroots transnational dialogue – that does not exclude media organisations or big companies – can help us to start seeing the peoples of other countries as part of one human race we are all part of. We are all facing similar global issues of transnational crime, climate emergency, waste management problems, shortage of clean water, pollution increases, pressure on health systems, fear of each other, but still … most of the media in the world approach their coverage by dividing national and international news, where ‘national’ is what happens within a border created at some stage of history and ‘international’ is all ‘the others’ who are outside that border.

I believe one of the biggest achievements of the Panama Papers – together with the extraordinary impact the findings had on society – was to bring together a very large number of journalists working together, which has helped to build the notion of a worldwide community where the people who want to do the right thing are one side and the corrupt who abuse the system to the detriment of the less privileged are on the other side. And in each group there are hundreds of different nationalities, so it was a very healthy exercise to build the notion of a global town where the core values define the dialogue, not the national borders. There seems to be room for a broad, inclusive conversation about how we frame transnational, national and international news coverage, and how we explore the best ways to incorporate alternative narratives so that collaborative works do not end up reproducing the North–South inequalities where the small brother journalist of the South becomes the production support following the lead of the big brother of the North. Instead, we need the
big brother to start considering that the South’s framing of the stories might add value to the kind of content produced by the North.

The diversity that multiculturalism brings to the editorial approach looks similar to what Demeneck called ‘multifaceted objectivity’, an evolved version of the concept of objectivity of the 19th and 20th centuries:

It’s a more critical realism, based on a more systematic practice, and journalistic knowledge of high cognitive value. It’s a more multifaceted approach that includes the views of the others … I think it exposes a critical dimension and a deontology of a global journalism. (Demeneck, 2016)

If journalists interested in cross-border investigative reporting start a conversation about how to validate information and when we decide a source is reliable, this knowledge will spread and start changing the mindset of future decision-makers in the newsrooms. By then, they will hopefully have built trust in alternative sources of information beyond the four or five networks that channel most of the world’s information today – and will understand the benefits of diverse and multicultural narratives in news.
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APPENDICES

- Appendix A: The Methodology
- Appendix B: Ethics approvals and consent forms
- Appendix C: Questionnaire interviews
- Appendix D: Survey
- Appendix E: Survey participants
- Appendix F: Survey responses
- Appendix G: Interviews transcripts
Appendix A: The Methodology

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<th>Stage 1</th>
<th>Stage 2</th>
<th>Stage 3</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. STORY</td>
<td>Hypothesis 1</td>
<td>Hypothesis 2</td>
<td>Hypothesis 3 (final)</td>
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<td>3. AGREEMENT</td>
<td>Resources and ownership</td>
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<td>4. TIMELINE</td>
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<td>Timeline 2</td>
<td>Timeline 3 (publication date)</td>
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<td>5. COORDINATION</td>
<td>Content Coordinator (COMMUNICATION STRATEGY)</td>
<td>Coordinator - data bases</td>
<td>Cross Info to find Relations/Connections</td>
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<td>6. PRODUCTION</td>
<td>Background info/Open sources/Human sources</td>
<td>Key actor/issues/dates/events</td>
<td>Quality control: Verification / Validation</td>
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<td>7. PUBLICATION</td>
<td>Initial agreement</td>
<td>Interviews/Data collection/Data analysis</td>
<td>Social Media + networking</td>
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<td>8. LEGAL</td>
<td>Initial legal risk evaluation</td>
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<td>Final legal assessment</td>
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<td>9. ETHICS</td>
<td>Discussion/motivations. Agreement</td>
<td>Legal assessments on merit (findings)</td>
<td>Final product (+ analysis stage 1 and 2)</td>
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<td>10. DIVERSITY</td>
<td>Languages Involved and sensitive topics</td>
<td>Methods used</td>
<td>Publication in different languages</td>
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Appendix B

Ethics approvals and consent forms

- INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT
- SAMPLE QUESTIONS
- RISK ASSESSMENT
- CONSENT FORMS

- INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

June 3, 2015

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

Transnational investigative journalism:
an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo, Senior Lecturer, School of Media and Communication

Dear Sir or Madam:

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by RMIT University, Melbourne – Australia.

Please read this sheet carefully and be confident that you understand its contents before deciding whether to participate. If you have any questions about the project, please ask one of the investigators.

Who is involved in this research project? Why is it being conducted?

The researcher on this project is Dr Antonio Castillo, Senior Lecturer, School of Media and Communication, RMIT University and PhD Candidate Ms Florencia Melgar.

The RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved this project.

You are being approached with this invitation because of your experiences in investigative journalism in Latin America.

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: [Contact Information Redacted]

School of Media and Communication
23–27 Cardigan Street, Carlton 3053
Melbourne City campus Building 94
Australia
Tel. +61 3 9925 4815

Florencia Melgar Hourcade 2019 147
The aims and purposes of the study are to examine contemporary experiences of transnational investigative journalism (TIJ) in Latin America, as well as explore – and suggest – collaborative professional practices between Latin America and Australia.

If you agree to participate you would be asked to speak to us about your experiences in investigative journalism or transnational data collection and sharing. We expect an interview to take no more than 1 hour.

We would like to video record the discussion to include segments in the audio-visual report we are producing.

As a participant, you would be identified by name in any video arising from the interview. We will seek your formal permission to use the video footage at the interview. Subsequently, for print-based research purposes, your formal permission to use this interview material will always be sought.

There are low risks outside an interruption to your normal day-to-day activities. As a participant, you would be identified by name in any video arising from the interview. We will seek your formal permission to use the video footage at the interview. Subsequently, for print-based research purposes, your formal permission to use this interview material will always be sought.

The benefits to you which may result as a consequence of your participation is the chance to speak about your experiences as a professional which you are passionate about, and reaching a wide audience.

The anticipated outcomes of the research include the production of a book (accompanied by an audio-visual report) and presentations at internal and external seminars and national and international academic conferences, and articles submitted for publication in leading peer-reviewed academic journals.

You are under no obligation to take part in the study and I am afraid there is no payment available for participants. However, as a participant, you have the right to:

- Withdraw from participation at any stage for any reason, without being required to explain your reasons
- Request that any audio and / or video recording cease
- Have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, provided it can be reliably identified.
- Have any questions answered at any time.

You will not have the right to withdraw any of your video material from the film once it has been completed. However, you will be shown the film and the book prior to completion and your permission to use your material will be sought at this stage.

The results from the study will be available to you upon request. Your personal data collected in the course of the research will be available to you on request.

The research data (i.e. the raw video and/or audio information) will be kept securely at RMIT for 5 years after publication, before being destroyed.

Should you have any question please don’t hesitate to contact the chief supervisor Dr Antonio Castillo, Senior Lecturer, School of Media and Communication, antonio.castillo@rmit.edu.au

Dr Antonio Castillo
RMIT University
SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Sample questions for participants on the topic of transnational investigative journalism (Latin American journalists)

1. Describe the most important investigative journalistic pieces you’ve broadcast-published in your career.
2. Out of those experiences, which ones had or could have had a transnational approach? Describe the scope of the investigation / Explain why it didn’t happen.
3. Which lessons did you learn from the transnational investigative pieces you produced? Both in terms of achievements and outcomes, as well as the investigation process and methodology.
4. Which is the potential of transnational investigations in Latin American journalism?

Sample questions for participants on the topic of transnational investigative journalism (Australian journalists)

1. Describe the most important investigative journalistic pieces you’ve broadcast-published in your career.
2. Out of those experiences, which ones had or could have had a transnational approach? Describe the scope of the investigation / Explain why it didn’t happen.
3. Which lessons did you learn from the transnational investigative pieces you produced? Both in terms of achievements and outcomes, as well as the investigation process and methodology.
4. Which is the potential of transnational investigations in Australian journalism?
5. Why do you think Australian investigative journalism hasn’t looked at Latin America?
6. Have you ever explored Latin America as a partner for cross border investigations with Australia?
7. Apart from the financial difficulties, which other challenges do you think Australian journalists face in terms of transnational investigations?
8. What are the most important elements you would propose in a shared methodology in investigative journalism if we were to agree to use the same method?
9. Which opportunities of bringing to light transnational wrongdoings do you find in Australia? And in the coordinated efforts between Australian and Latin American journalists?
10. Would you use techniques and methods of data exchange learnt from Interpol and other transnational information and intelligence agencies if they proved to be useful for investigative journalism across borders? Why yes? /// Why not?
11. I’m going to mention you a list of potential topics of investigative stories that relate Australia and Latin America. Please let me know which of the following you think they are stories of public interest:
   - Australia giving refuge to Latin American war criminals
   - Increase of Australian mining investments in Latin America
   - The expected involvement of Australia in the Canal that China is planning to build in Nicaragua because it could affect Australia’s growing investments in the region.
   - The unprecedented case of an Australian mining company suing the government of El Salvador, and the recent involvement of Canada as a third party to protect El Salvador’s public interest against Australian’s private sector’s interest.
- The transnational mafia that operates from Bogota and Melbourne to blackmail international students
- Cuba’s successful literacy program with indigenous communities in Australia
- Australian fundraising initiatives, posing as NGOs to support disadvantaged populations in Latin America have been used for political purposes.
- Traffic of drugs and arms from Latin America into Australia or using Australia as a bridge to reach other.
- Organ trafficking. From Australia to Costa Rica and other Latin American countries.

Sample questions for participants on the topic of transnational investigative journalism (Journalists from other countries, not involving Latin America or Australia)

1. Describe the most important investigative journalistic pieces you’ve broadcast-published in your career.
2. Out of those experiences, which ones had or could have had a transnational approach? Describe the scope of the investigation / Explain why it didn’t happen.
3. Which lessons did you learn from the transnational investigative pieces you produced? Both in terms of achievements and outcomes, as well as the investigation process and methodology.
4. Why do you think we don’t hear much about investigative stories from Latin America?
5. Apart from the financial difficulties, which other challenges do you think journalists face in terms of transnational investigations?
6. What are the most important elements you would propose in a shared methodology in investigative journalism if we were to agree to use the same method?
7. Would you use techniques and methods of data exchange learnt from Interpol and other transnational information and intelligence agencies if they proved to be useful for investigative journalism across borders? Why yes? // Why not?
Sample questions for experts in cross border data collection, analysis and exchange.

1. What are the most important manuals that guide transnational data exchange in Interpol and other similar agencies?
2. Why are Australian communication experts from ASIS (Australian Secret Intelligence Service) considered the best in the world? What can Australian investigative journalists learn from their skills?
3. Which are the last data collection and dissemination software you would recommend?
4. Are investigative journalists seen as potential partners by Interpol and other similar agencies?
5. How do you think transnational investigative journalism could help identify and expose international wrongdoings?
6. Which techniques you think investigative journalists should learn from you and your colleagues?
7. What can you do that investigative journalists cannot? And the other way around?
PART A: RISK ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

The following Risk Assessment Checklist will determine the level of risk associated with the research to be undertaken. Based on the outcome, the appropriate application form will need to be submitted to either the CHEAN (negligible or low risk) or the Human Research Ethics Committee (more than low risk). The risks identified below may apply to the participant, the research team, the University or the wider community. These questions should assist you to identify risks that exist and then to develop strategies to negate, minimise or manage these risks.

1. Initial Assessment of Research Topics and Procedures

If you are unsure whether you have answered any of the following questions correctly, seek further information via the secretary of the appropriate CHEAN (see above) and/or continue to complete the risk assessment.

A research project may be classified as ‘exempt from ethics review’ if certain criteria can be met.

1.1 Do any of the following criteria apply to your research project?

1.1.1 Are you using an existing dataset (e.g. information, statistics, materials, etc.) and conducting a secondary analysis of the data?  

   ☒ No ☑ Yes

1.1.2 Are the data of this existing dataset non-identifiable to you or any of the investigators?

   ☒ No ☑ Yes
1.1.3 Have you received written permission to access and use information from this data set? □ No □ Yes

If you responded ‘Yes’ to all of the above three questions then your research may be classified as ‘exempt from review’. You do not need to seek formal ethics approval for your research project.

If you responded ‘No’ to any question, continue to complete the risk assessment.

The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* defines negligible risk as no foreseeable risks of harm or discomfort and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience to the participants (Section 2.1.7). The *National Statement* describes inconvenience as the least form of harm that is possible for human participants in research. The most common example of inconvenience is participating in a non-identifiable survey and giving up time to do so. Does this research only involve negligible risk in your opinion?

Continue the risk assessment to confirm whether your proposed research is eligible for consideration for negligible level risk review by the College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN).

1.2 Are any of the following procedures, activities or participants included?

1.2.1 Participants are identifiable or re-identifiable (i.e. codes are used) □ No □ Yes

1.2.2 Some form of deception is involved □ No □ Yes

1.2.3 Participants are aged less than 18 years □ No □ Yes

1.2.4 Participants are cognitively or emotionally impaired □ No □ Yes

1.2.5 Participants consider themselves to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people □ No □ Yes

1.2.6 Participants belong to a cultural minority group □ No □ Yes

1.2.7 The procedure or activity used in the research involves any experimental manipulation, including the use of any stimulus other than question asking □ No □ Yes

1.2.8 The questions asked include personally sensitive and/or culturally sensitive issues □ No □ Yes

1.2.9 There is a power-dependency relationship between researcher(s) and participant(s) (e.g. the doctor/patient or teacher/student relationship) □ No □ Yes

If ‘No’ has been answered to ALL questions, the project may be considered of negligible risk and is eligible for review by the CHEAN. Please proceed to complete the negligible risk application form. Go to the end of risk assessment form and select Negligible Risk.

If you responded ‘Yes’ to any question, continue to complete the risk assessment.

2. Further Assessment of Research Topics and Procedures

2.1 Are any of the following topics directly under investigation in part or in whole?

2.1.1 Any disease or health problem □ No □ Yes

2.1.2 Any psychological disorder, depression, mood states and/or anxiety □ No □ Yes

2.1.3 Cultural issues that may be sensitive to a particular community □ No □ Yes

2.1.4 Eating disorders □ No □ Yes

2.1.5 Fertility □ No □ Yes

2.1.6 Gambling □ No □ Yes

2.1.7 Gender identity □ No □ Yes
2.1.8 Grief, death or serious traumatic loss  
2.1.9 Illicit drug taking  
2.1.10 Information or issues that may be sensitive to an individual  
2.1.11 Parenting behaviour  
2.1.12 Race or ethnic identity  
2.1.13 Self report of criminal behaviour / illegal activity  
2.1.14 Sexuality and sexual behaviour  
2.1.15 Substance abuse  
2.1.16 Suicide  
2.1.17 Termination of pregnancy  
2.1.18 Young people under the age of 18, except in a normal educational context involving standard procedures

2.2 Are any of the following procedures to be employed?

2.2.1 Administration of drugs or placebos  
2.2.2 Administration of ionising radiation  
2.2.3 Administration of physical stimulation  
2.2.4 Audio or visual recording  
2.2.4.1 Audio or visual recording without consent  
2.2.5 Collection of tissue / blood / body fluid / genetic material  
2.2.6 Covert observation  
2.2.7 Deception of participants  
2.2.8 Invasive physical procedures / risk of physical injury  
2.2.9 Physical exertion / risk of physical injury  
2.2.10 Procedures inflicting pain  
2.2.11 Psychological Interventions or treatments  
2.2.12 Substance abuse  
2.2.13 Use of potentially hazardous substances or other materials  
(e.g. carcinogens, glues, teratogens, latex, explosive materials)  
2.2.14 Use of medical records where participants can be identified or linked  
2.2.15 Use of microorganisms (e.g. bacteria, fungi)  
2.2.16 Use of personal data obtained from Commonwealth or State Govt Department/Agency  
2.2.17 Withholding from one group specific treatments or methods of learning, from which they may "benefit" (e.g. in medicine or teaching)  

2.3 External Obligations  
2.3.1 Is the research funded externally?

Page 3 of 16
3. Participant Vulnerability Assessment

3.1 Does the research specifically target participants from any of the following groups?

3.1.1 Members of a socially identifiable group with special cultural or religious needs or political vulnerabilities  □ No □ Yes

3.1.2 People able to be identified in any final report when specific consent for this has not been given  □ No □ Yes

3.1.3 People highly dependent on medical care  □ No □ Yes

3.1.4 People in a workplace setting with the potential for coercion or problems of confidentiality (e.g. employer/employee)  □ No □ Yes

3.1.5 People in a dependent or unequal relationship with the researchers (e.g. lecturer/student, doctor/patient, teacher/pupil, professional/client)  □ No □ Yes

3.1.6 People not usually considered vulnerable but would be thought so in the context of the project  □ No □ Yes

3.1.7 People unable to give free informed consent because of difficulties in understanding the Plain Language Statement or Information Sheet (e.g. language difficulties)  □ No □ Yes

3.1.8 People whose ability to give consent is impaired  □ No □ Yes

3.1.9 People with a physical disability or vulnerability  □ No □ Yes

3.1.10 People with existing relationships with the researcher (e.g. relative, friend, co-worker)  □ No □ Yes

3.1.11 Residents of a custodial institution  □ No □ Yes

3.1.12 Aboriginal and Torres Islander individuals, communities or groups  □ No □ Yes

4. Research in Overseas Settings Assessment

4.1 Does the research involve any of the following?

4.1.1 Research being undertaken in a politically unstable area  □ No □ Yes

4.1.2 Research in countries where criticism of government and institutions might put participants and/or researchers at risk  □ No □ Yes

4.1.3 Research involving sensitive social / cultural / political / ethnic / religious issues  □ No □ Yes

5. Risk Assessment Outcome

Please indicate the Level of Risk associated with your research, based on your response to the Risk Assessment Checklist (using the information below as a guide). Once you have selected a checkbox below, proceed to Part B.

□ Negligible Risk (CHEAN)  □ Low Risk (CHEAN)  □ More than Low Risk (HREC)
RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee
Risk Assessment and Application Form

Negligible Risk. If you answered ‘No’ to all of the questions in Section 1, select the Negligible Risk checkbox and proceed to Part B to complete an application for CHEAN review.

Low Risk. If you answered ‘No’ to all the above questions OR you answered ‘Yes’ to any of the above questions, but ‘No’ to all of the related sub-questions, your research would normally be deemed Low Risk and eligible for review by the CHEAN. Select the Low Risk checkbox and proceed to Part B to complete an Application for CHEAN review.

Research into learning and teaching practice. If you answered ‘Yes’ to question J.1.5 and the research is into learning and teaching practice, your research would normally be deemed Low Risk and eligible for review by the CHEAN. Select the Low Risk checkbox and proceed to Part B to complete an Application for CHEAN review.

More than Low Risk. If you answered ‘Yes’ to any questions that did not have sub-questions OR you answered ‘Yes’ to several questions and their related sub-questions, your research would normally be deemed More than Low Risk. Select the More than Low Risk checkbox and proceed to Part B to complete a Full FREC Application.

Exception: if you still believe that, due to the particular nature of the project or the participants, your proposal may still be eligible for review by CHEAN, please provide details below. Then, select the Low Risk checkbox and proceed to Part B to complete an Application for CHEAN review.
# RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee

## Risk Assessment and Application Form

### PART B: CHECK APPLICATION FORM

Please complete all of the following sections. The questions displayed in this Application form are specific to the Level of Risk associated with the project you are undertaking, as indicated by the checkbox selected in the previous section. Please note answer boxes expand.

### 1. General Details

#### 1.1 Project Title

Transnational Investigative Journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

#### 1.2 Chief Investigator / Senior Supervisor

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Title &amp; Full Name</th>
<th>Dr. Antonio Castillo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Position</td>
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<td>School of Media and Communication</td>
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<tr>
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</table>

Position / Other Affiliations Relevant to this Application: Co-Editor Global Media Journal & Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research (JILAR) Coordinator, Features and Story Telling & Photojournalism

Have the relevant online training modules (Human Research Ethics & Research Integrity) been completed? [ ] Yes [ ] No

If no, then see [here](#).

#### 1.3 Principal Research Student

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<th>Title &amp; Full Name</th>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<td>PhD by Research</td>
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<td>School/Institute</td>
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Have the relevant online training modules (Human Research Ethics & Research Integrity) been completed? [ ] Yes [ ] No

If no, then see [here](#).

#### 1.4 Co-Investigator(s) / Associate Supervisor(s)

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</table>

Position / Relevant Experience / Other affiliations relevant to this Application: If student, provide details on level and course of study

Have the relevant online training modules (Human Research Ethics & Research Integrity) been completed? [ ] Yes [ ] No

If no, then see [here](#).
### 1.5 Proposed Project Duration

**Proposed project commencement date:** 10/06/2015  
**Proposed project conclusion date:** 10/06/2017

**Project Summary**  
(50 words or less)

The aim of this thesis is to examine contemporary experiences of transnational investigative journalism (TJ) in Latin America, as well as explore – and suggest – collaborative professional practices between Latin America and Australia.

Transnational Investigative Journalism (TJ) appears as the most significant new paradigm in current journalism. It is also the least studied by academic research, as observed by Lewis, one of the most relevant investigative journalists worldwide (Lewis, 2013).

TJ has an increasingly relevant role that none of the new technologies has or will be able to substitute: critical thinking, contextualisation and in-depth analysis.

Whereas the number of experiences of cross border investigative journalism in the world is increasing, Australian journalism is still new in this discipline and some parts of the world, like Latin America, remain unexplored.

Once this PhD thesis identifies the journalists and relevant investigative organisations in a comprehensive data base, the first significant challenge to answer the research question is to find a TJ methodology that will enable a productive data exchange between regions.

However, this method doesn’t exist. TJ has been a de facto practice worldwide and there isn’t an agreed methodology (as used in academic research) to enable the systematic exchange of information across countries. In fact, this methodological discussion hasn’t taken place yet. This thesis aims to start this academic and professional conversation.

Through this research, I aim to systematise the methods used by investigative journalists for data collection and analysis, as well as the ones chosen by transnational agencies – such as INTERPOL – who are experts in data collection, analysis and sharing across borders.

A proposed methodology for the practise of TJ will be one of the outcomes of this research. This proposal will be one of the answers to the research question that tries to find out which are the “practices” – and indeed the professional ontology – needed to create an Australian-Latin American net of investigative journalists.

The second part of the research involves connecting Latin America with Australia, through an investigative journalistic project that will be carried out by journalists of both regions working together, using the TJ methodology proposed in this research.
The absence of academic literature in translational investigative journalism led me to borrow theories and academic reflections from disciplines, such as political sciences, international relations, and security and international law. The journalistic narrative of transnational investigation adds depth to the global public sphere (Hebermann, 1991) and could potentially alter the perception of international issues from being a matter of “the other” to belonging to the global community.

Academics from the US and the Netherlands (Van Der Balk et al, 2012) have called this the use of “Networked Journalism” (NJ) in which journalists’ analysis, context, explanation, and storytelling skills become more relevant as large amounts of data become available. Global governance includes TJ. Whereas the competition for credibility used to be based on government sources, Nya (2011) argues that in an “information age”, “news media, corporations, NGOs, intergovernmental organizations, and networks of scientific communities” are competing for credibility. This is how TJ became one of the actors of public opinion building, good governance, accountability, and the social mobilization theory (Protest, 1992).

This PhD thesis aims to explore how the combination of knowledge and cultural context makes transnational journalism a growing form of collective intelligence (Böhmen, 2007 and Althann, 2011), challenging the traditional individualistic journalistic behaviour (Lee, Skewis, 2003).

The similarities between TJ collaboration and transnational security information gathering and exchange will also be an important element to conduct this research. Interpol’s investigative processes, data collection and sharing, cooperation agreements and international partners is worth analysing to learn from their techniques to effectively coordinate data exchange, since they are professionals of transnational information exchange. In “Global Media: 100 Years of Investigative Journalism from Around the World”, Columbia University Anya Schifrin (2012) brings together relevant investigations of journalists from all over the world and includes works from Peru, El Salvador, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua.

In summary, this initial and exploratory literature review needs to engage scholarly work of related fields of studies and practice, such as international relations, intelligence gathering, good governance and international communication and media, to propose a TJ methodology, put it into practice and evaluate its efficiency.

Constructivism (Paport, Haier, 1999) is one of the ontological approaches of this research and will be defined by the inclusion of the views and values of the many journalists participating in this research. As detailed by the Grounded Theory (Glaser, Strauss, 1999) the TJ proposed methodology would follow an inductive process.

The Interpretive Theory is the epistemological framework of this research as I believe the different methodologies investigative journalists use around the world, is the result of their subjective interpretation and need of adaptation to their environment.

On the other hand, Ethnomethodology will study the practices and methods used by investigative journalists in Latin America and Australia. As the research will analyse the way journalists understand their interactions with other journalists, there will be a clear component of Symbolic Interactionism in the research design.

The research will use a variety of data collection techniques: archival research, semi-structured interviews, a survey, literature review, participant observation, and film-production.

The interviews as well as the journalists involved in the study case will be filmed. This footage
2. Project Details

2.1 Project Description

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methodology/data collection techniques &amp; analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Describe how data will be collected and analysed (approx. 500 words).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer National Statement section 1.1 (b) &amp; (d)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The methodology will be the main material to edit a short documentary on the study case, the research process and how we arrived to the methodology proposed.

Participants will sign a consent form that outcomes of the project, where the material will be used.

The results of the study will be disseminated through:
- a book centered on the case study
- a documentary including the case study and the investigation process behind it
- journal articles about the case study, its methodology, and about the potential of transnational investigations between Australian and Latin American countries
- conference presentations
- a blog that will include an extract of the book, the documentary on line, and the methodology proposed.

2.2 Project Type (Tick all applicable)

- Research by Academic Staff Member
- Masters by Coursework
- Research into Teaching and Learning Practice
- Other

- PhD Research
- Undergraduate Research
- Clinical Trial

- Contract Research
- Honours Research
- Masters by research

2.3 Is this project part of a larger project?

- No
- Yes

2.4 Does this project involve multi-centre research?

- No
- Yes

2.5 Is this research project specific to research into university learning and teaching practice?

- No
- Yes

3. Participant Details

Does your research project involve:

- Human participants

- Use of data banks only

---

Florencia Melgar Hourcade

2019

160
3.1 Number of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If a gender imbalance in the number of participants is apparent, please explain why:

The number of male investigative journalists is superior to women, and this imbalance will be probably reflected in the interviews.

3.2 Age Range

30 to 80

3.3 Will any participants be ill or frail?

☒ No ☐ Yes

3.4 Are there any criteria that will determine whether participants are included or excluded from the research?

☒ No ☐ Yes

3.5 Recruitment Method

Please state how names and contact details of potential participants will be obtained, from where they will be recruited, how they will be invited to participate, and who will approach potential participants to seek their involvement. Sample copies of recruitment advertisements should be submitted with this application.

Note: Where participants are recruited from schools, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, written permission/approval from the institution or appropriate authority must be provided. See Question 7.

Preliminary contact has been established via email with possible participants to stake out interest and participation in the project. These contact details are part of an extensive data base of investigative journalists that I’ve built over the years, as part of my profession. Before any commitment of participation is sought, further contact will be made, via email, which will include a consent agreement and themes for the interview (both attached to this application).

3.6 Compensation to Participants

☒ Not Applicable ☐ Applicable

3.7 Are any of the participants students of RMIT?

☒ No ☐ Yes
3.8 Does this project require the researchers to have a Working with Children Check? Information about this requirement is available at: [http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/](http://www.workingwithchildren.vic.gov.au/)

☐ No  ☐ Yes

4. Research Using Existing Databases

4.1 If the research involves access to existing databases provided by an institution(s), please indicate:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source(s) and number of records</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whether data to be used will be de-identified, potentially identifiable (e.g. coded), identified or non-identifiable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether permission has been granted by donors to use these data for research purposes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whether formal permission/clearance has been sought or obtained from the relevant institution(s) (see also Section 7 below)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Description of Procedures

5.1 Describe in detail below exactly what participants will be asked to do and emphasise anything that may have adverse consequences.

Respondents will be asked to participate in video and audio recorded semi-structured interviews. They will be also asked to send a list of the investigative pieces they have produced as journalists, prior to the interview. The researcher does not foresee participation in the research leading to any adverse consequence.

5.2 Will questionnaire(s) (including those that are published or commercially available) be used in the project? Please attach a copy to this application.

☐ No  ☐ Yes (please attach a copy to this application)

5.3 If interviews or focus groups are to be held, please indicate the kinds of questions to be asked below or attach the interview schedule in the case of structured interviews.

Themes for the semi-structured interviews are attached.

5.4 Will participants at any time have pictures taken of them, either photographed or video recordings, or be audio recorded?

☐ Not applicable  ☐ Yes
6. Study Location

6.1 Please identify the precise location of the study

If permission is required to use the location, also indicate how permission will be obtained:

ORT University, Montevideo, Uruguay. A permission is not necessary as the University is supporting the investigation providing the infrastructure for a series of interviews. The contact is Sabrina Blanchi - Administrative Secretary of the School of Communication, blanchi@ort.edu.uy

7. External Approvals

If a project requires approval from other institutions or ethics committees, next of kin or guardian, or representative or authority in the case of special groups, copies of such approvals must be provided to the RMIT HREC at the time of application or be made available as soon as possible thereafter.

7.1 Institutional

Name(s) of institution/ethics committee/authority:

☐ Yes (details below) ☐ Yes, to follow (estimate when likely to be obtained below) ☐ No (please explain below) ☒ N/A

8. Informed Consent

8.1 How will consent be obtained?

☒ Written consent form ☐ Informed consent implied by return of anonymous survey

☐ Verbal Consent (explain below how consent will be recorded)

Examples of the proposed written consent form in English and Spanish are attached.
8.2 Will all participants have the capacity to give voluntary and informed consent?
- Yes ☒ No ☐

8.3 Will Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms be used?
- Yes (copies attached) ☒ No (please explain below) ☐ An alternative method of obtaining consent will be used (please specify below)

8.4 Will Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms be translated into the participants' first language?
- Yes (please provide copies of translations) ☒ No (please explain below) ☐ N/A

All participants speak and read Spanish so translations of Participant Information Sheets and Consent Forms will be translated.

8.5 How will competence to give consent be determined and who will make this determination?

Please provide details below:

All participants are adults and fully functional.

9. Recording and Security of Project Documentation

9.1 How will data be recorded? (e.g. written questionnaires, interview notes, photographs, audio/video recording, direct electronic data entry).

Audiovisual recordings, interview notes.

9.2 Will confidentiality of results be maintained?
- Yes ☒ No ☐

Please provide details:
9.3 Indicate how the security of project documentation will be maintained and specify the precise location of the storage place(s):

9.3.1 During the study
The documentation will be saved in three locations: personal computer in my workplace (35S), my home computer and in an external hard drive, with daily updates. The external hard drive will be backed up every 2 months in another hard drive that will be stored in a different location, to be confirmed.

9.3.2 Following completion of the study
The documentation will be stored in RMIT library and the consent forms in the Public Records Office of Victoria.

Project documentation should be stored in secure, lockable locations, preferably on campus. Computer files should be password protected. Data, de-identified where appropriate, and consent forms should normally be kept for a period consistent with the Public Records Office of Vic's Standard (2001) normally 5 years for non-clinical data and 15 years for clinical trial data following publications.

9.4 Will any data (including samples) be preserved for possible future use in another project either by yourself or another researcher?

☑ Yes  ☐ No

Please explain the nature of the data to be preserved, when the data might be used in another project, how that data might be used, for what purpose it might be used, and who might be given access to the data for another project:

The data that could be used in the future includes the data base of investigative journalists, their profiles and contacts. This will be a tool in itself for future investigations on investigative journalism.

10. Dissemination of Results

10.1 Will participants be informed that results from the study may appear in publications, be included in a thesis or report, or be presented at conferences? (If relevant, this information should be included in the Participant Information Sheet and given to participants prior to obtaining informed consent).

☑ Yes  ☐ No

Please provide details: The Participant Information Sheet details interviewees will be updated on the public activities / publications where the research is presented / published.

10.2 Will participants be informed that results from the study will be available to them on request? (If relevant, this information should be included in the Participant Information Sheet and given to participants prior to obtaining informed consent).

☑ Yes  ☐ No

10.3 Will participants be informed that their personal data collected in the course of the research will be available to them on request? (If relevant, this information should be included in the Participant Information Sheet and given to participants prior to obtaining informed consent).

☑ Yes  ☐ No

11. Risk and Indemnity
11.1 Is there any risk of physical, psychological, social, legal or financial and/or community, employment and/or professional harm to the participant or organisation?

☐ Yes  ☒ No
ATTACHMENT CHECKLIST

Ensure the following attachments are included (where applicable):

☐ copy of recruitment advertisement(s) (Section 3.5)
☒ copy of questionnaire(s) and/or proposed interview/focus group outline (Section 5.3)
☐ debriefing documentation for participants (Section 5.5)
☐ evidence of permission to use places off-campus (Section 6)
☐ evidence of external approvals (Section 7)
☒ copy of the proposed Participant Information Sheet(s) & Consent Form(s) (Section 6.2)
☒ copy of translations of Participant Information Sheet(s) and Consent Form(s) (Section 6.4)
☐ copy of statement from medical practitioner or other relevant health professional accepting responsibility for procedures (Section 11.2 and/or 13.1)
☐ details of arrangements for first aid (Section 11.3)

DECLARATION

By submitting this application, we, the Chief Investigator / Senior Supervisor and Co-Investigators, declare that we:

☒ have read and agree to abide by the conditions and constraints of the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007) and any other relevant University and/or statutory requirements;

☐ accept responsibility for the accuracy of the information provided in this application and for the conduct of this research, in accordance with the principles contained in the National Statement and any other conditions specified by the University Human Research Ethics Committee;

☒ abide by the terms and conditions set by the University Human Research Ethics Committee;

☒ will ensure that the qualifications and/or experience of all RMIT personnel involved in the project are appropriate to their role and/or to the procedures performed;

☒ will ensure that appropriate permits from external organisations or agencies will be obtained and that any imposed conditions will be observed;

☒ certify that the information contained in this application is true and accurate;

☒ understand that the information contained in this application is given on the basis that it remains confidential in accordance with relevant University and statutory requirements;

☒ will seek approval for modifications to the research prior to their implementation.

By submitting this application(1), I, the Chief Investigator, declare that I:

☒ have ensured that the head of school or manager has sighted this application and that they agree that the required academic expertise and resources are available to complete this proposed research. Evidence of this agreement will be retained(2).

---

1 The application must be submitted electronically by the Chief Investigator from their live RMIT staff email account.

2 This evidence may consist of a hard-copy signed document or an email from the head of school acknowledging that they have sighted your application and have agreed that the required academic expertise and resources are available to complete this proposed research.

Note: Where the Chief Investigator is also the head of school, then the Pro Vice-Chancellor of the relevant College must acknowledge that they have sighted your application and have agreed that the required academic expertise and resources are available to complete this proposed research.
CONSENT FORMS

Montevideo, June 18, 2015

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I acknowledge that:

1. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied (unless follow-up is needed for safety).
2. The project is for the purpose of research. It may not be of direct benefit to me.
3. I give my permission to be audio and video recorded.
4. I give my permission for my name or identity to be used.
5. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
6. The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study.

The data collected during the study may be published.

I understand that any images and texts made during the research and that are given to me will remain in the ownership and the copyright of the "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" project.

Researcher's Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Name: [Redacted]
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 6-6-15

Witness to Signature Name: Florencia Melgar
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 6-6-15

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2291 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Montevideo, June 18, 2015

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Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar Hourcade

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Researcher’s Name: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [Redacted]

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 18.6.15

Witness to signature Name:Florenca Melgar

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 18.6.15

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Participant’s Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 6.18.15

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Signature: [Signature Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Name: [Name Redacted]

Signature: [Signature Redacted]
Date: 6.6.15

Witness to Signature Name: Florencia Melgar

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Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Name: [Blacked out]

Signature: [Blacked out]
Date: 18.6.2015

Witness to Signature Name: Florencia Melgar
Signature: [Blacked out]
Date: 06.06.15

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I acknowledge that:

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5. The privacy of the personal information I provide will be safeguarded and only disclosed where I have consented to the disclosure or as required by law.
6. The security of the research data will be protected during and after completion of the study.

The data collected during the study may be published.

I understand that any images and texts made during the research and that are given to me will remain in the ownership and the copyright of the "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" project.

Researcher's Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Signature]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Signature: [Signature]
Date: 10.8.16

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian-Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study “Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian-Latin American methodological examination” have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Signature: [redacted]
Date: 22.2.16

Witness’s Signature: [redacted]
Date: 22.2.2016

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
16th August 2016

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study “Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination” have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [redacted]

Signature: [redacted]
Date: 16 Aug. 16

Witness Name: Florencia Melgar

Signature: [redacted]
Date: 10 Aug. 16

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
March 16, 2016.

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Signature: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

Witness’s Name: Florencia Melgar
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 16 March 2016

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
20 August 2016

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study “Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination” have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [redacted]

Signature: [redacted]
Date: 26 August 2016

Witness to signature Name: [redacted]
Signature: [redacted]
Date: 26.8.16

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer. Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
June 8th, 2016

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study “Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination” have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [Redacted]
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 8.6.2016

Witness: Florencia Melgar
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 8.6.2016

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
14th September, 2016.

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher's Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant: [Redacted]
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

Witness to signature Name: [Redacted]
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Name of Participants: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Signature: [ signature redacted ]
Date: June 3, 2015

Witness to signature: Florencia Melgar Hourcade
Signature: [ signature redacted ]
Date: 14.4.2016

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V Vic 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational Investigative journalism; an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study “Transnational investigative journalism; an Australian - Latin American methodological examination” have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

I have read and understood the information sheet and this consent form.

I acknowledge that:

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The data collected during the study may be published.

I understand that any images and texts made during the research and that are given to me will remain in the ownership and the copyright of the “Transnational Investigative journalism; an Australian - Latin American methodological examination” project.

Researcher's Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 24. 9. 2016

Witness to Signature Name: Florencia Melgar
Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 24. 9. 2016

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

The purpose and details of the study "Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination" have been explained to me. I understand that this study is designed to further social scientific knowledge and that RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee has approved all procedures.

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [redacted]

Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar

Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher's Name: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Name: [redacted]

Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar

Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2478V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher's Name: Dr. Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant's Name: [Redacted]

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: [Redacted]

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Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [redacted]

Signature: [redacted]
Date: 20.11.15

Witness’s Signature: [redacted]
Date: Nov 20, 2015

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [Redacted]

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 20.11.15

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar

Signature: [Redacted]
Date: 20.11.2015

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 24760 VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 20, 2015

Name of Participant: [redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [redacted]
Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [redacted]
Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

Witness to signature Name: Florencia Melgar.
Signature: [redacted]
Date: [redacted]

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 21, 2015

Name of Participant: [Redacted]

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

Project Title: Transnational investigative journalism: an Australian - Latin American methodological examination

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Researcher’s Name: Dr Antonio Castillo

Signature: [Redacted]

Date: June 3, 2015

Participant’s Name: [Redacted]

Signature: [Redacted]

Date: 21.11.15

Witness Participants Name: [Redacted]

Signature: [Redacted]

Date: 21.11.15

If you have any concerns about your participation in this project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers, then you can contact the Ethics Officer, Research Integrity, Governance and Systems, RMIT University, GPO Box 2476V VIC 3001. Tel: (03) 9925 2251 or email human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Lima, November 21, 2015

Name of Participant: 

Name of Investigators: Dr Antonio Castillo

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Appendix C: Questionnaire interviews

1. Cómo ves el periodismo de investigación en Latinoamérica. Lo básico es la falta de recursos asignados, eso es una realidad. Pero si yo te planteara un escenario en el cual los recursos estuvieran dados, entonces qué dificultades hay para el investigador periodístico y qué oportunidades, en el contexto latinoamericano. O el uruguayo al menos.

2. Ves que América Latina es un nicho para realizar investigaciones periodísticas con impacto mundial?

3. Por qué crees que las investigaciones periodísticas en América Latina no trascienden fronteras? 1. Dentro de América Latina? 2. Con el resto del mundo? En el segundo caso, pueden ser tantas las razones: el idioma, que no difundimos lo que hacemos, que no estamos en el radar de otros medios y las agencias se basan en sus corresponsales?

4. Hay lugar en América Latina para crear una red de periodistas de investigación para realizar investigaciones en forma coordinada (dentro de América Latina y entre los países de América Latina y cualquier otro del mundo..)

5. Todo esto que te mencioné arriba, desde tu entender teórico, pero sobre todo desde tu experiencia de campo.

6. Qué temas podrían abordarse mejor con una estructura de coordinación periodística transnacional (con libertad editorial, por supuesto)

7. La inexistencia de una metodología en común en periodismo de investigación es una desventaja en la práctica del periodismo de investigación transnacional (periodistas de al menos 2 países investigando en forma coordinada para descubrir un tema en común). Pensar en las ventajas de un mismo lenguaje en investigación periodística.

8. Comparación con la metodológica científica en ciencias sociales que permite investigar un tema “x” y que los resultados y el proceso de la investigación puedan ser validados o no por cualquier otro experto en la materia en el mundo. Esto es posible gracias a que se habla el
mismo lenguaje metodológico. Pero en periodismo de investigación, lo que un malayo, un colombiano y un filipino pueden entender sobre cómo evaluar la validez de una fuente, como se estructura y guía una investigación, son muy diferentes. Cuando el trabajo es individual, el proceso de investigación no se piensa, simplemente ocurre, es una sumatoria de acciones. Pero al trabajar en forma coordinada, es necesario encontrar un lenguaje de investigación que permita el intercambio de información en forma eficaz. Qué se podría hacer en periodismo de investigación.

9. Qué pasa con el periodismo de datos en América Latina y en Uruguay. Hay espacio e interés en Uruguay por incorporar tecnología y enseñanzas en este campo?

10. Que tiene para ofrecer Uruguay a América Latina y al mundo en investigación periodística. En términos de profesionales, acceso a fuentes, coordinación, masa crítica, democracia consolidada, etc.

11. Manual de Unesco como punto de partida...

http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002264/226457S.pdf Que te parece este manual como punto de arranque?
Appendix D: Survey

www.surveymonkey.com/r/ZXDSF9Q

A methodological proposal for Transnational Investigative Journalism

The use of a methodology

INTRODUCTION
The proposed methodology aims to be a tool that journalists across borders can choose to use to streamline their work and follow an agreed process.

The use of the methodology should help journalists save time, avoid misunderstandings, and frame the investigation in a way that is doable within an agreed time-frame.

To access the methodology proposed please click in this link: [Link]

This is the formal invitation to participate of the research project:

[Link]

Once you complete the survey, you'll receive an email with a consent form in your name for you to sign and return.

If you have any questions or comments you can contact the PhD candidate conducting this research: Florencia Melgar [Email]

1. Would a methodology help transnational investigative journalism to be more effective?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Depends

   Can you explain your answer?

2. Do you have your own method when you do journalistic investigations?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes
   - Can you please explain your method or the reason for the absence of method?

Florence Melgar Hourcade 2019
3. Do you think your way of working in investigation is better than others?
   - Yes
   - No
   - It's case by case
   - Can you explain your answer, please?

4. When you are working in a team (or if you were to work in a team) with colleagues who have different workflows/methods, do you want to impose yours?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Why? How do you resolve it?

5. What would you do if another colleague wants you to follow his/her way of working (or method)?
   - I reject it
   - I accept it
   - I propose to discuss it to arrive to an agreement
   - Can you explain the reason behind your answer?

6. When you investigate, do you guide the investigation through a hypothesis or broad research question?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes
   - Why did you answer yes?
   - Why did you answer no?
   - If you answered "sometimes", when do you do it and when don't?

Florencia Melgar Hourcade 2019
7. Have you ever worked in an investigation with journalists or sources from overseas?
   - Yes
   - No
   - If you answered "yes", how do you describe the experience?

8. In your experience, what are the most important things to coordinate/make agreements when working with colleagues? (in the same country and/or overseas)
   - Nothing
   - A number of different things
   - If you answered "Nothing", why do you think coordination and agreements are not necessary.
   - If you answered "A number of different things", can you please describe them?

9. What do you think about agreeing on a code of ethics/basic ethic rules before working collaboratively?
   - It's necessary
   - It's unnecessary
   - It's desirable but can't be implemented
   - Can you explain your answer, please?

10. How much do you use open sources/data in your investigations?
    - A lot
    - Sometimes
    - Never
    - Why do you use them/not use them?
11. How do you sistematisate the information and data with other team members?

- With databases
- I don't sistematisate
- If you do use databases, can you describe the process clearly and the software used?
  
  If you don't, how do you exchange the information in the team?

12. How do you fact check and do quality control of the information provided by other journalists?

- I don't, I only work with people I trust
- We follow an agreed standard of validation of the sources and verification of the facts
- If you have a standard, can you describe it?

13. When do you trust a journalist from overseas you never met?

- Through his/her work
- Only with a personal recommendation
- I never trust anyone 100%
- Is there any other element that makes you trust a journalist you don't know?

14. Have you worked with journalists another language?

- Yes
- No

- If you cited "yes", can you describe when and in which investigation, as well as how did you manage the interpreters and translations?

15. How do you normally assess the legal risks of an investigation?

- Based on my experience
- I ask advice from a lawyer I trust
- I leave it to the legal department of the media organisation I work for
16. Have you ever worked with journalists from more than one country and thus different legal risks assessments?
   - Yes
   - No
   - If you answered "yes", how did you manage the various legal risks assessments?

17. What do you do to amplify the reach of your story, after publishing?
   - Social media nets
   - Publicity department of my organisation
   - Colleagues
   - I don't

18. Do you evaluate the investigation outcome?
   - Yes
   - No
   - When you do, how do you do it?
19. After publishing, do you evaluate the process of investigation to learn best practices for the future?
   - Yes
   - No
   - How do you evaluate the process of investigation?

20. Do you have comment/thoughts you want to share about a methodology seen as a set of best practices of investigative journalism across borders?
   - Yes
   - No
   - If you answered “yes” please share your thoughts here.

21. Please complete with your name, country and email account.

Appendix E: Survey participants

Out of 52 participants:
2 repeated the questionnaire
3 didn’t include the personal details
Total: 47 measurable answers from 28 countries (country of birth)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country of birth</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Email</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perú</td>
<td>Christopher Acosta Alfaro</td>
<td><a href="mailto:cacosta.pe@gmail.com">cacosta.pe@gmail.com</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>May Rizk</td>
<td><a href="mailto:mai.rizk@gmail.com">mai.rizk@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lebanon</td>
<td>Barda Katieh</td>
<td><a href="mailto:barda.katieh@sbs.com.au">barda.katieh@sbs.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>Michael Leidig</td>
<td><a href="mailto:editor@cen.at">editor@cen.at</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>Paul Halloran</td>
<td><a href="mailto:ponsonbypaul@gmail.com">ponsonbypaul@gmail.com</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Lebanon (Armenian)</td>
<td>Vahe Kateb</td>
<td><a href="mailto:vahe.kateb@sbs.com.au">vahe.kateb@sbs.com.au</a></td>
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<td>Trinh Nguyen</td>
<td><a href="mailto:trinh.nguyen@sbs.com.au">trinh.nguyen@sbs.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>Carlos Colina</td>
<td><a href="mailto:carlosc@sbs.com.au">carlosc@sbs.com.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
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<td>Vietnam</td>
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<td><a href="mailto:freeinfo@gwu.edu">freeinfo@gwu.edu</a></td>
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<td>Jairaj</td>
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Appendix F: Survey responses

Would a methodology help transnational investigative journalism to be more effective?

Answered: 82  Skipped: 0

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Comments

1. Having a systematic work flow will help in making the work more effective, specially when it’s done in group environment.
2. No method matches every story
3. It would pull together strands of investigation
4. A well thought out method will help the journalist to remain focused on the investigation he/she is conducting and give guidance to the novice and more experienced journalist.
5. Like a guideline, different guidelines for different themes/topics
6. Methodologies could not work in all cases
7. How is the system? (consistent and simple)
8. It may in some cases, but likely would depend on the circumstances of the writing of the story, the details of the story and the journalists working on the story.
9. Sometimes methodology could work where all variables are in control but if they are not then methodology may not work
10. Because all help is welcome.
11. Everyone has to understand the methodology and agree with it.
12. Likely to intersect with existing patterns
13. Because it varies from time to time and subject to subject.
14. If it provides necessary solutions to obvious questions. Mainly a methodology should be a tool to help journalists who do cross-border journalism for the first time or students of journalism to think about the steps of the process.
15. Doesn’t everyone’s methodology differ a lot?
16. Yes, there are differing media cultures and editorial standards.
17. There are many variables involved. So, it could help. Sometimes.
18. At a managerial level it might help, but for journalists it could hinder progress - they should be focussing on the story.
19. Without appropriate methodology, there will be chaos... will end up chasing one’s own tail and/or validating the bias in the reporters’ minds.
20. Depends on the methodology
21. You need checks and balances in place to get an investigation to a point of broadcast/publication
22. A methodology is crucial. It’d help clarify and speedy the processes as well as remove hurdles and hesitations.
23. It may depend on the experience and personalities of the reporters and editors and the flexibility of the methodology.
24. A systematic preparation is always helpful to take actions with efficiency
25. As long as the methodology takes into account the cultural disparities and aligns journalists with a similar mindset transnationally. For instance, the way journalists work and think in Russia will be very different to those in China and quite different from Aus!
26. Some project would be helped by it, others hindered
27. Situation and frame is the way.
28. Although it may not be practical or possible to apply in all circumstances, as a general rule it would be very useful to ensure uniformity of scope and focus and therefore useful data and conclusions.
Do you have your own method when you do journalistic investigations?

Answered: 51   Stopped: 1

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<td>▼ Sometimes</td>
<td>17.65%</td>
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<td>▼ Can you please explain your method or the reason for the absence of method?   Responses 39.22%</td>
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Responses

1. I usually follow Mark Lee Hunter method (story based inquiry), i.e I first discover a subject, create the hypothesis that needs to be verified, search for open data to prove the hypothesis, search for human resources, then collect the data and organize it in a way that will make it easy to scrutinize. After that work is done, I start thinking of how to put the data collected in a narrative way and I compose the story. When the writing is done, a final checking is done to make sure all data is factual and correct, and the last stage is publishing it.

2. Start at the beginning and go on til you understand it

3. All investigations are different

4. Once I have a research topic in mind, I write down the areas I want to research, how much time I must dedicate to research and how much time I need to prepare and finalize my research. After the research is done I go through the collected material several times and use only the most relevant information.

5. Sometimes my own method is not applicable.
6. I have a system of tracking and lists using Google Sheets.
7. The story generally dictates the direction of the investigation.
8. I only follow facts and analyse causation based on empirical data either qualitative or quantitative.
9. Use public databases and eventually talk to foreign journalists.
10. Own method - as published in 2015 and summarized in English in 2016
    www.ingentaconnect.com/contentone/intellect/ajms/2016/00000005/00000002/art00008
11. Clip search – exploratory interviews or data gathering – data analysis – more focused interviews – fact-checking – writing
12. Depending on the subject. having a methodology is useful, of course.
13. Check with official or government data and check with legal team.
14. Every investigation is different. We usually do it on a case-by-case basis, depending on the scope of the story and people involved.
15. Reading everything I can get my hands on, to provide myself with context, then speaking to dozens and dozens of sources. Sometimes 50 or 60 or 70. It’s all about persistence.
16. Research / find multiple sources / welfare check for sources / gather evidence / take detailed notes / right of reply / legal checks / refer my findings to senior editorial staff / fact check.
17. I design my approach on a case-by-case basis. Depending on the complexity of the case, the level of external contribution, etc.
18. Each investigation is unique. Some involve FoI, others sources, legwork, observation, multiple interviews and reading. However, in general terms I begin by reading every background document or clip that I can find and then figure out a strategy for approaching the story. The strategy and even the story are pliable, changing according to the new circumstances and findings.
19. It is more instinctive/intuitive and relies heavily on the basic principles of who/when/why/where/what and an openness of mind that is able to analyse facts gathered without prejudice (without trying to fit things into a hypothesis). All of this is of course underpinned by fairness, balance and corroboration.
20. Look for documentation first, then extensive interviews and background research.
Responses

1. Based on my humble experience I’ve had with investigations, I find this technique organized and it helps me to focus on the main angle of the investigation. Sometimes, I get carried away with all the data that I collect and I feel that going back to this technique helps me to go back on track with the main story line. That being said, it’s the only way I know how to do an investigation so I can’t say if it is better than others or not.

2. When I started nobody taught journalism. You just did it.

3. Everyone can learn something from someone else or another investigation.

4. After many years, I’m use to this method.

5. My way works for me, and my team has adjusted to it, but it can be a lot for a newcomer.

6. I may understand the cultural context better when doing a story on the community based.
7. I think it could be hard to have one methodology as each investigation is
different. I think it’s good to meet to discuss things, but there should really be one
person who deals with the back-end, while the content makers/journalists can just do
their work.

8. Some people are better at certain activities than others: I am good at making
calls but less good on FOIs.

9. I have no reference against which to measure my method. There could be
better methods that I do not know of.

10. I can’t pass a judgement on anyone else’s methodology - just like there are
fantastic investigative stories in the media, there are equally trashy ones. But its hard
to fault the methodology - it may just be a case of a brilliant journalist producing an
amazing story or an incompetent one pushing out trash.

11. Resource has a lot to do with it.
When you are working in a team (or if you were to work in a team) with colleagues who have different workflows/methods, do you want to impose yours?

Answered: 49  Skipped: 3

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Responses

1. For a team project to work, the method used needs to be an integration of all the methods used by the colleagues. I believe imposing a workflow will make some team members left out. So trying to get the best practices from other methods used is the way to go. I have worked within a group environment on one of the investigations I’ve done and we agreed to work on the story based inquiry method. It worked well for us.

2. Brainstorming, negotiation, compromising after analysing the different methods.

3. Teams have a natural dynamic. The story dictates the method.

4. By persuasion and results.

5. I have always worked alone but I wouldn’t impose myself on others and I can always learn and improve the way I work. I would keep my method and adopt other steps that I feel would complement the way I work.

6. It depends, do I have experiences with similar topics/context or is there any senior team member in the team.
7. Porque valoro trabajar en equipo y el intercambio entre profesionales es más que válido.

8. Yes. Mine is typically more organized and colour coded.

9. There’s usually a team leader or editor who directs the team.

10. My answer: No. We use talking in team to divide tasks and accelerate results.

   It’s a normal discussion.

11. Sometimes, but ‘impose’ skews this question.

12. I don’t tent to impose my methods except in the case where there might be a negative impact on the outcome.

13. Respect colleague’s opinion and try to discuss.

14. Depends on the situation but if we feel our workflow is better it’s worth discussing to offer suggestions on how the others can improve.

15. It depends who is leading the story. If it’s my story, then I would probably want to have a bit more say in terms of deadlines etc, but I’m happy for people to work in whatever way suits them best. Regular communication is key.

16. Whenever I have to work in a team, I ensure that the responsibilities are understood and agreed to by everyone in the team. Otherwise the team will be inefficient or worse, ineffective. Usually a team will have people who work differently. The team members each bring a strength that I don’t have. Otherwise there is no need for a team.

17. No. I argue my point and seek collaboration. Hence a common methodology would improve efficiencies.

18. Yes and no. I will try my hardest my make others in the team see my point of view. But when others fail to see the merit (or don’t want to take a risk, or want to stick to their methodology), I have let the majority’s opinion prevail, even if I’m leading the investigation. Team comes first if you’re working together. Personally, I work best as an individual, without a team and have produced my best investigative journalism that way.

19. Resolution by discussion, different people bring different skills.
What would you do if another colleague wants you to follow his/her way of working (or method)?

**Responses**

1. I wouldn’t impose my views or way of working on others and I wouldn’t like anyone else to impose their views or methods on me. The best way is to come to an arrangement where both of us would share the investigative work.

2. I am willing to try new things, but my method works for my team right now. We continue to add and change it for individual project needs.

3. It may be possible to combine the methods - taking the best and most agreed upon elements and create a new method for that project.

4. I’m happy to collaborate, and hope that we can all just work in a way that suits us best. As long as there are deadlines, and expectations, that should work best. And a person who is the lead on the story.

5. I’m happy to try new methods so long as all checks and balances factored in.

6. If we are working towards a common goal we can achieve results through negotiations and dialogue.
7. Agreement about process is crucial to team investigations and time needs to be taken prior to the journalism to figure out how the story will be done and who will do what. Otherwise, reporters will be tripping over each other, contacting the same interviewees etc.

8. If there is no consensus, I’m happy to keep my ego aside and let the majority opinion win. Team work can be great and useful, but equally can be counterproductive - if there are too many differences of opinion.

9. I would want to know why, there might be practical or ethical problems.
Responses

1. I think having a hypothesis is key to any investigation. Keeping in mind that the hypothesis could be amended as more data is collected, I find that having a broad research question makes it harder to investigate, especially if there is a time frame to the story. When the question is broad it’s hard to coin it down into one angle or it makes it harder to find the most interesting angle in it. It also makes data collection whether it’s from human resources or open data harder and broader, so it becomes more labour intensive.

2. Broad research questions offer more flexibility when I am investigating.

3. Investigations are always about testing a hypothesis.

4. Broad research question mostly.

5. I like to know what I’m researching and always have one or more research topics that I follow.
6. Allocate time to go with a hypothesis or broad research question first, then elaborate/develop from the result of this stage.

7. Even if the investigation brings new question, it’s very important to follow either a hypothesis or a research question.

8. Yes, the research question is the guideline for my investigation. Am I going to answer it at the end?

9. Yes. We typically come up with a thesis statement and a so what question.

10. It all depends on the information that leads to the investigation. The initial information can be a hunch or a source or data.

11. A suspicion.

12. Sometimes we have off the record information to embasis a hypothesis. Sometimes we use the method more broad to see the question. Sometimes – the most of the time – we use the both techniques.

13. Haven’t used a specific hypothesis but have used a broad research question for the topic I am investigating.

14. A broad research question helps to be open to keep current with any change in assumptions based on feedback from preliminary reporting.

15. Sometimes the starting point may be a hypothesis, and sometimes the starting point may be a broad research question.

16. I may a hypothesis but proven wrong. I am ok with that.

17. Depends on the case under investigation.

18. Sometimes it helps to reframe the investigation methodology.

19. N/a

20. Sometimes. Depends on the topic. Sometimes you know what you’re looking for, and you can have your ‘one liner’, but other times you’re scratching around to see what you can dig up.

21. I would say Yes. Though the broad answer is ‘it depends’, without a hypothesis or broad research question what is one investigating?

22. You have to have a good idea of what the story is before starting.

23. Each investigation is different. It depends on what allegations have been made by sources, or in the public domain.

24. I draw a hypothesis or research question then seek to validate or invalidate my hypothesis.
25. Hopefully research gives you facts.
26. Every investigation begins with assumptions of what will be discovered. Reporters chase angles and stories that can be described as hypotheses. The hypothesis must change along with new findings.
27. Yes, because that’s how most investigative stories begin. It helps the journalist have a clear line for the story right from the beginning and if there are any deviations as the investigation progresses, those can be explained in a clear and concise manner as well.
28. I begin with a hypothesis, and gather interviews/ facts based on that... but am open minded enough to change my hypothesis, if presented with alternate facts.
29. This is how so many investigations start.
Responses

1. Variable. Journalsas have restraints in other countries that I do not have.
2. It’s very helpful as sometimes for financial reasons it’s difficult to travel.
3. It was difficult as some nations do not have the transparent data resource. Plus, language is an obstacle sometimes.
4. Yes. I have document of Panama offshore and I ask for information with Panama’s journalists and lawyers.
5. It was an excellent experience that made for stronger journalism.
6. How do you define ‘overseas’ – would that exclude cross-border collaborative journalism on the same continent?
7. It was great we shared experiences and views.
8. I liked it, much to learn from others, since I work independently.
9. It’s difficult to balance it as the story is presented with the views or evidence you are able to collect.
11. It’s fine, as long as you are on the same page about what you are looking for and the deadlines involved. If the collaboration doesn’t work, then you don’t do it.
13. Had to do extensive research on the journalists on their past work to establish that they were worth engaging. Once we decided to work with a particular journalist, the distance / time difference and differing priorities caused challenges. In the end, we had to complete the stories without some of the ‘selected’ overseas journalists.
14. I have worked on investigations overseas, in Iran, and Sri Lanka, with local sources.
15. I’ve worked with journalists from overseas who are credible, experienced and thorough. So the experience has been good
16. At times challenging. Time differences, different legal frameworks, understanding/interpreting concepts in different cultures and languages.
17. My experience was a positive one, though I often wondered what the final product would look like and what journalists in other countries were finding as my communications were with the editor, rather than other reporters.
18. Okay. Depends on your sources and their competence.
In your experience, what are the most important things to coordinate/make agreements when working with colleagues? (in the same country and/or overseas)

Answered: 51 Skipped: 1

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<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1.96% 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A number of different things</td>
<td>35.59% 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you answered &quot;Nothing&quot;, why do you think coordination and agreements are not necessary. If you answered &quot;A number of different things&quot;, can you please describe them? Responses</td>
<td>62.76% 32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>51</td>
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Responses

1. Tiempos de entrega, cronograma de trabajo, responsabilidades, fuentes a consultar.
2. Dividing tasks according the skills of each person. I found this element a bit hard to coordinate with in the team. And I think it’s important for each person to do the work they can excel in most. Also, agreeing on a very clear hypothesis and nutshell is important as it helps keep the team focused on the same angle.
3. Allocation of tasks, regular meetings, tracking down the progress of information.
4. Coordination of publishing dates.
5. Time frame, trust, integrity, money.
6. I haven’t done any joint investigations but I presume it’s important that before the investigation begins, there is clear agreement and everyone knows what they are researching.
7. Focus of the investigation, revelat material/documents and people to be interviewed.
8. Respect different perspectives, discussion is the key to solve problem, consult experts if needed.
9. Work flow, task assignments, and timelines.
10. Ground rules must be set, such as: who will lead, will you use confidential sources or leaked documents, should you report a single package or write a series of daily stories as your reporting continues.
11. Factual information.
12. List specific information to be sought, 2 – list the means to achieve these information; 3 – establish the steps to gather the information without alerting some sources.
13. A secure system for sharing documents. An agreement about how interviews will be conducted, when they will be conducted. Agreement on when and how the story will be broadcast or printed.
15. What you agree are the facts.
16. Duration, pay, questions to pursue, sources to track, reviewing of assumptions, writing styles.
17. Deadline, who does what, who goes where, who edits, who gets the bylines, what’s the pay.
18. Especially the time frame, objectives and methodology.
19. Coordination of the project, timing of interviews, synchronicity.
21. Finding genuine primary sources, interviewing people on the records, safety, security, time limits.
22. Timeframes for publication across the various platforms.
23. Communication. Deadlines. Making sure you all know what the story is, the one liner, and the angles that you’re exploring. Everyone should be able to have some autonomy to do their own research.
25. Most important thing is to stay focused and be unbiased or swayed by the differing views the other journalists bring.
26. Hard for me to say, as I have never worked in a group.
27. How we approach to sources, how we build trust with sources, cover stories, security concerns, risk management, protecting sources, confidentiality.


29. Communication is essential about new developments and discoveries; timelines, strategy, editorial direction, the key editor or project leader.

30. A number of things. Working with crossplatform journalists, the workflows are a lot different. At times, disagreements could be around the way to establishing a fact, i.e. for TV, if a very concise soundbyte of the talent isn’t available, putting together a story may not be feasible, whereas for print or online, longer quotes will be just fine. Also, disagreement could be around when and how to break the story. Perspectives may also differ if the different platforms are catering to different audience, i.e. World News would want a story to have an international appeal while a radio program addressing audiences in different cities in Australia will be happy to give the story a local colour.

31. Clear vision, clear plan, clear understanding of everyone’s role, regular communication / update and a very good project coordinator would be needed.

Responses

1. I think this is very important, especially when the team comprises of people from different cultures and backgrounds. This step will help avoid problems within the team and with dealing with human sources or the way the investigation is tackled. I have never done this before, but it is something I can see myself implementing in future investigations.

2. To avoid any issues arising from work.

3. Each organisation will have their rules dictated by local laws and readers.

4. Ethics are presumed.

5. Journalists have a code of ethics and that should be enough.

6. Investigations shouldn’t go beyond human rights.

7. SPJ has a good one.

8. It should be unnecessary but there are different approaches in different cultures so if not a code of ethics, at least a list of what is acceptable for the project.
9. Ethics (and law) vary from country to country, so hard to agree on a one-size-fits-all model. But very important to agree on rules of cooperation, routines of decision making on a team.

10. I’ve always worked with professional journalists whose ethics I never doubted. So an enforced code seems unnecessary.

11. Unnecessary. The code of ethics is implicit, if we are among professionals. And if proof arrives that we aren’t, then it’s time for me to leave the party.

12. One has to follow the codes to make it objective, ethical and fair.

13. If you have to agree/explain that stuff to other people you shouldn’t be working with them!

14. You need to be on the same page as your colleagues. You can’t have one person promising something they can’t deliver.

15. It is important to agree on a basic common ground. What is approved in one country might be illegal elsewhere.

16. It is important to agree on an ethical framework: one ethical blunder by a team member could jeopardise the entire story.

17. Because of the different work ethics in different countries, ground rules will have to be established. E.g. in Australia, info gathered by paying a bribe maybe considered illegal, where as it may be an accepted norm in another country.

18. Without ethics-based rules, investigations can quickly become unmanageable.
I use these a lot, and often a lot of the stories come from open sources. These provide facts and information that are crucial to the investigation. I think it also helps with the human sources; because it shows them that we know the story, we are aware of what is happening and it helps to create trust with them.

2. Depends on the investigation.

3. When the source/data is reliable and can be verified from other primary sources.

4. If I do I will always double check.

5. Data supports the investigation.

6. Depends on a given topic, a given research task.

7. n/a

8. Most of the time a starting point of my investigations as they are freely and readily available.

9. There is an amazing amount of publicly available information available.
How do you sistematise the information and data with other team members?

**Answered:** 48  **Skipped:** 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>With databases</td>
<td>41.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't sistematise</td>
<td>20.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If you do with data bases, can you describe the process clearly and the software used? If you don't, how do you exchange the information in the team?</td>
<td>37.50%</td>
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<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
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**Responses**

1. Usually we use Dropbox or Google Drive, Google Sheets or Google Word. These programs allow us to put the information in a space we can all see and amend on, while seeing who is doing what.

2. Email.

3. I haven’t worked with other journalists on a story and have no experience in the field.

4. Google Drive.

5. We use Google Sheets and Excel.

6. Yes.

7. Information is exchanged or made available through a secure platform.

8. That’s an evolving part of the methodology, has to be discussed ongoingly, as the technology develops constantly. Se for example recent discussions from May 2017 [https://eijc17dataharvest.sched.com/event/9nf2/editorial-coordination-across-borders-which-tools-are-necessary](https://eijc17dataharvest.sched.com/event/9nf2/editorial-coordination-across-borders-which-tools-are-necessary) and [https://eijc17dataharvest.sched.com/event/9nf3/knowledge-sharing-in-collaborative-teams-the-tools-available](https://eijc17dataharvest.sched.com/event/9nf3/knowledge-sharing-in-collaborative-teams-the-tools-available)

9. SQL or similar.
10. On the basis of who does what.
11. Different devices – web or mobile applications.
12. n/a
13. Depends on the topic and who we’re working with. Share Google Docs or spreadsheets.
14. Varying software, depending on the team. The key is to make all the relevant information gathered be accessible to everyone who needs to have access to them.
15. I have never worked in a group.
16. It depends on the story.
17. We would talk and use Docs, Drive or other.
18. Regular correspondence/email.
How do you fact check and do quality control of the information provided by other journalists?

Answered: 52    Skipped: 0

I don’t, I only work with people I trust   25.00% 13
We follow an agreed standard of validation of the sources and verification of the facts   81.90% 27
If you have a standard, can you describe it?   Responses   23.00% 12

Responses

1. This step is very important to do even when working with journalists I trust. We verify the sources; make sure the story isn’t being told in an emotional manner, and check the documents we used in the story. This is usually done while we are collecting our data, and once we have written the investigation, we re-read the whole thing, and put down our notes on what we can prove isn’t factual or after checking with the source the data was taken from we find a wrong number or a flaw in the data itself.. After this we meet and discuss what needs to be amended.

2. I haven’t worked with other journalists as a team. If I ever work, then I would like to see the evidence other journalists used before using their information.

3. I always confirm the information and verify the origin of the data.

4. Retrace all steps.

5. Always double check facts. 2 source’s important, unless I completely trust the source.

6. Read also the original documents and not only the reports of team.

7. Needs to be agreed team by team.

8. Subbing.
9. I ask them to provide enough info to fact check so that I’m satisfied.
10. You cross reference with other sources, i.e. other people, or other data or other published stories.
11. It depends on the story. Changes case by case.
12. I resort to good old way of fact-checking, by personally verifying the details to the extent possible.
When do you trust a journalist from overseas you never met?

**Responses**

1. Trust is a big word! I sometimes don’t trust myself because when doing an investigation I might get too carried away with the story or with what I believe is the right version of the story! So when working with a journalist I don’t know, there are a number of factors to consider. His/her previous work, recommendations if that is possible, but the main element to me is making sure the way the story is being investigated is transparent. So updating each other on what we are doing and how we will carry it out, and what we have achieved so far.

2. Prefer to exchange views/ideas through private correspondence and Skype or telephone conversation.

3. I haven’t encountered this yet.

4. I would have to get to know that journalist and his/her work.

5. Networks of trust are build by recommendation, personal meetings, doing research together and doing research together again. Personal meetings are important.
6. Every story needs to be fact checked, so the journalist needs to be able to provide enough info to satisfy questions about their sources/talent etc.

7. Recommendations and experience of the journalist. Previous work.

8. I trust them based on their work but remain mindful that they are humans with strengths and weaknesses just like me.

9. If they are a member of a quality such as ICIJ. Membership works as a reliable filter.

10. Haven’t done this before. Can’t comment. If an overseas journalist does pass me some info, I will always verify it independently.

11. By common cause and reputation.
Responses

1. In a recent investigation I’ve worked on about Au pairs in Sydney, I worked with two French colleagues. They speak English but their French is stronger. We didn’t need interpreters, as we were able to understand each other, and we were able to make use of their language with our human sources.

2. Confidential.

3. Discussion.

4. We communicate without problems.

5. Yes, quite a bit of my work 2005–2008 and most of my work 2018–2019 was in cross-border teams with colleagues speaking other languages. I have four and a bit languages to work with myself and from there it’s about having a look which languages are most suitable for a given team.

6. Through the internet assistance.

7. I worked with journalists who were all able to use English as a working language.

8. n/a

9. I’ve done a number of stories with interpreters/translators. It just takes patience and finding the right people. Making sure you leave enough time to get
translating done properly. Having resources to make sure you can get the right people.
Leaving enough time in production.

10. Arabic.
11. English & Tamil (my native tongue) only.
12. In Iran and Sri Lanka I had very experienced fixers that I trusted. They were expensive - thousands of dollars for two weeks or so of work, but totally worth it.
13. Multiple stories. Always with journalists who speak English as well as their native language. Always get translations checked by another source prior to broadcast.
14. I’m working on several cases in multiple languages (French, English and Kinyarwanda). I have a fluent command of all three. So far no interpreter/translator services required. Though I have come across translations that are more interpretations of events especially in relation to the political/ethnic antagonisms in Rwanda and the Great Lakes Region.
15. A variety of investigations and trusted translators.
How do you normally assess the legal risks of an investigation?

- Based on my experience: 20.00% (10 responses)
- I ask advice from a lawyer I trust: 36.00% (16 responses)
- I leave it to the legal department of the media organisation I work for: 44.00% (22 responses)

Total: 50 responses
Have you ever worked with journalists from more than one country and thus different legal risks assessments?

**Responses**

1. Experience.
2. Rely on their approach to the legal issues.
3. We had a legal risk standard that we all agreed to adhere to in our production.
5. We sought the assistance of different lawyers from our various countries.
6. I do not. The other parties were more keen on assessing the risks, hence they did it for their own media environment. I knew what was mine.
7. Check legal risks for both countries from legal team and basic checking on online info on media law.
8. Never had to consider this.
9. Sought legal advice in Australia and in the country we were filming the story.
10. Dealt with on a case by case basis. Sought ensure safety and wellbeing of sources/victims and other stakeholders.
11. The we worked for did all the legal checking.
12. Try to manage the problems of the law in other countries.
What do you do to amplify the reach of your story, after publishing?

Answered: 52  Skipped: 0

<table>
<thead>
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<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
<th>RESPONSES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social media nets</td>
<td>78.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicity department of my organisation</td>
<td>24.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colleagues</td>
<td>40.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't</td>
<td>9.62%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Total Respondents: 52

Responses
Do you evaluate the investigation outcome?

**Responses**

1. With social media these days, we can see how people are reacting to the story. I like to show the story to other journalists to see their opinions on it and what could have done better.

2. Feedback.

3. Mostly with online/social reports.

4. Based on social media, government bodies’ reactions.

5. Yes. We are constantly tracking the results, mentions and future story potential.


7. What change takes place as a result.

8. Evaluating the outcome: A post-mortem evaluation of the work process with the team / an evaluation of the outcome only if it’s donor supported journalism and a demand from the donor / follow-up a year or so later: If at all possible – most definitely! This is important.

9. I put my contact under my stories so it gives me feedback.

10. I follow the domestic news. If my investigation published in foreign outlets is picked up domestically, then my job was done.

11. Based on the reach and comments from the audience.
12. How much the story is referred to in other media outlets and how much the story is shared on social media.

13. Discussion around the program, online hits. Flow on impacts in terms of followup stories etc.


15. Depends on the story – different each time.

16. Investigative reporters look for some action by authorities to follow their work: inquiries, resignations, denials etc.

17. By measuring impact – if any ... through audience response and uptake by other media outlets.
After publishing, do you evaluate the process of investigation to learn best practices for the future?

Answered: 52   Skipped: 0

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<tr>
<th>ANSWER CHOICES</th>
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<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>25.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you evaluate the process of investigation?</td>
<td>Responses</td>
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**Responses**

1. In a group project by talking to my colleagues about the challenges we faced and how we could have done it better, with investigations I’ve done on my own I write a reflective essay and reflect on what I have done and the outcome.
2. Reader feedback and readership
3. I assess the difficulties I had and try to find new and best ways to deal with issues
4. My team holds quarterly post mortems to discuss best practices
5. Talk with the colleagues on the team / present at conferences and discuss with peers
6. I learn from it and modify the methodology next time.
7. We should do this more
8. You do this unconsciously: you are always looking to improve, and you must learn from your mistakes.
9. Debrief with those involved
10. Yes.
11. Just general discussion about what worked and didn’t; could have been done better.
12. You assess what worked, what didn’t;
13. There is always something new to learn and utilise for a future investigation
Do you have comment/thoughts you want to share about a methodology seen as a set of best practices of investigative journalism across borders?

Responses

1. It depend on the case and the circumstances.
2. Always veify the information and the sources. Ask for legal advise if needed
3. The list of steps to gather information without alert some sources and the validation of documents used in reporting news
4. We’ve talked about this before :-)
5. Each story is different. SO having a basic methodology is a good start but would need to be flexible given the unique circumstances of each story
6. A valid methodology is lacking and should be designed and implemented asap.
7. Journalists, esp investigative types, are highly individual and I think generally would oppose any methodology being imposed on them. Most have been journalists for many years and would hate being told how to suck eggs.
8. I don’t have much experience in cross-border collaborative investigative journalism.
9. It would be good to establish best practice internationally, but one must be careful in who / which overseas journos or s you align with
10. As a basic best practices standard, the methodology is very good.
Appendix G: Interviews transcripts

Stage 1 – Uruguay
1. Fabian Werner
2. Gabriel Monteagudo
3. Guillermo Garat
4. Marcelo Pereira
5. Pablo Alfano
6. Roger Rodriguez
7. Sergio Israel
8. Walter Pernas

Stage 2 – Latin America
9. Andres D’Alessandro
10. Carola Fuentes
11. Carlos Eduardo Huertas
12. Daniel Lizarraga
13. David Gonzalez
14. Doris Gómora
15. Eduardo Mendoza
16. Fabiola Torres
17. Gabriel Labrador
18. Ginna Morelo
19. Gonzalo Guillen
20. Guilherme Amado
21. Guilherme Canela
22. Gustavo Gorriti
23. Hugo Coya
24. Juan Raul Olmos
25. Luis Buron
26. Matias Longoni
27. Mauri Konig
28. Monica Almeida
29. Oscar Castilla
30. Oscar Libon
31. Pedro Salinas
32. Ricardo Uceda
33. Rodis Recalt
34. Walter Pernas
35. Vinicius Sassine

Stage 3 – Australia and the world
36. Amanda Gearing (Australia)
37. Ben-Hur Demeneck (Brazil)
38. Brigitte Alfter (Denmark)
39. Charles Lewis (United States)
40. Gerard Ryle (United States)
41. Hamish McDonald (Australia)
42. Michael Carey (Australia)
43. Stefan Candea (Romania)
44. Vivien Altman (Australia)
Fabián Werner

Fabian Werner is an investigative journalist with more than 20 years’ experience in long narratives and in-depth journalism.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RpQw4e-SBk&t=49s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: What surprised you at the Latin American congress of investigative journalism in Mexico 2012?

Fabian Werner: Many things surprised me. I confirmed that Uruguay is still a kind of island in Latin America, because for example, we are lucky that journalists are not killed here.

This is quite common and almost a daily thing in places like Mexico, Colombia, even Brazil or Argentina.

Yesterday for example I interviewed a Mexican journalist who participated in a talk during the 30 years anniversary of Brecha weekly, and she was saying that in the last ten years eighty five journalists were killed in Mexico.
I know Mexican journalists who are under threat. They told me how a bomb exploded two hundred metres away from their office. Or that they had a workmate who appeared dismembered in a burlap bag…

When they tell you those things, you really value the things that don’t happen in Uruguay. But it also surprised me the way and the conviction of those journalists to continue doing investigative journalism, and how they find ways to not give up, and investigate the people who could get them killed in any moment.

And that also inevitably makes me compare with the situation in Uruguay and think that when people in Uruguay argue they don’t investigate because they don’t have resources or because the company doesn’t give them enough time, or because there’s nothing to investigate in Uruguay —something I’ve also heard from people who have chosen to believe that in Uruguay there’s almost no corruption. [They would say] “if we compare with other countries you’ll realise that”.

It’s like an exercise to convince themselves that investigative journalism is not necessary in Uruguay.

The same way, I’ve heard from prestigious and experienced journalists who claim investigative journalism doesn’t exist; that is journalism or it isn’t journalism. And there’s a whole school of thought in Uruguay that supports that view.

That kind of congresses – like the one we attended [in Mexico] allow you to learn lots of things, generate contacts, networks, opportunities to help colleagues when it’s possible –very rarely- or the chance to make contacts with journalists from other countries when you need information of stories that have connections with Uruguay but that would be impossible for a media like Sudestada to go to Panama to investigate companies of Uruguayans who have companies there, or as it happened with our investigation on the Barcena’s money laundering scheme, go to the United States or to Canada to find out if the owner of the mining company was actually the person who was sitting in the company.
I’m in contact with a colleague from Panama and we have access to some databases that allows you to fact check some basic data.

In reality, even though this sounds unreal, it’s more the information we can get today in Panama about Panamanian companies, than the one we can get today –through formal channels- about Uruguayan companies. It’s incredible, but that’s the way it is.

We do have information about Uruguayan companies, but through sources, who are themselves at risk as they are risking their jobs to give us that information.

But if we ask for the information through the formal channels, the information we get is almost nothing.

That’s why this kind of congresses is interesting to generate collaboration networks that sooner or later will be useful. You find both in Paraguay and Uruguay –not even to mention Argentina and Brazil that are much bigger countries- that if you start to investigate a corruption case that involves a lot of money, drug and human trafficking and/or money laundering, inevitably you’ll have to make friends with a colleague overseas. Otherwise it’s impossible to progress in an investigation, unless you are a very big media with lots of economic resources that is willing to support investigative journalism.

In mid-May I was in Parana, Argentina, attending a talk for the 25 anniversary of “Análisis” magazine, that’s a magazine that does investigative journalism in Argentina, in the countryside, not in the capital city. And Hugo Alconda from La Nacion newspaper attended as well.

He shared some anecdotes of investigations he participated in, and he spent a month travelling around Europe collecting information.

Obviously the results of those investigations are amazing, but it’s also amazing the investment.
Florencia Melgar: What does Latin American journalism need?

Fabian Werner: I think what we need in Latin America is training in many areas. It’s difficult to do investigative journalism. It’s difficult to understand that you find some information but you have to keep it maybe for months… you need to realize when a piece of information deserves an investigation and when it doesn’t.

You need methodological tools to do an investigation. You need sources, you need patience. You need the will to take time away from your friends, your family, your rest time, and your holidays, to be able to investigate.

Florencia Melgar: Would you use Interpol’s data exchange techniques?

Fabian Werner: I think that everything that helps to investigate better, in a more efficient way, with less resources and quicker, it helps.

I believe the platform developed by Wikileaks to filter documents is a good example that there are ways of distributing information to journalists that works well.

The case of the investigation that was done through the network of journalists that uncovered the HSBC bank files, it was also done through a data exchange network. And it worked. There are examples of groups of journalists who have developed effective communication channels.

I can’t see why there could be any resistance to that kind of exchange; it’s quite the opposite. There should be a reliable platform that works. I think today Latin America is able to develop something like that. For example, the congress we attended last year in Mexico: it’s a meeting of investigative journalists that could build a network of that kind. But I guess you need to find the financial support, you have to find the web developers and the will to exchange information.

And I’m not sure if we have this yet… at least at a level that enables building a network. And you need to agree on basic rules, right?
Florencia Melgar: Some journalists say they prefer to investigate alone.

Fabian Werner: I have an essential discrepancy with that statement. I think it’s exactly the opposite: investigative journalism is team work. To investigate alone is an invitation to fail. Maybe I say this from a place and a media NGO that has a workflow based on team work. We’ve known each other for more than 20 years now and there isn’t any trust issue. But before Sudestada I worked in investigations with other teams, and if we hadn’t been done by a team, the investigation wouldn’t have existed.

Due to time constraints, resources, access to sources … you multiply your chances to access information if you work in a team. Working by yourself I think it’s wasting opportunities and means you think you can do more than you actually can.

I’m not talking about a conflict, but disagreements give birth to the best content. I can make a mistake –I make mistakes every day- and in a complex investigation the chances of making a mistake are much bigger. And if another person reads my work –with intellectual honesty, trust and professional rigor- the product will be much better.

Florencia Melgar: Are there journalists in Uruguay prepared to work in regional investigations?

Fabian Werner: I think there are very good journalists in Uruguay; I don’t know if they are willing to dedicate to investigative journalism, and to exchange information with journalists from other countries. Also, Uruguay as a society is still very provincial and journalistic investigations and international topics in general don’t have the rating they should have. For example, when we did the Barcenas investigation I feel it didn’t have the impact it should have had.

There are many things that happened with that particular case. In the first place, we became publically known as a media outlet through this investigation. Even though everyone knew us and what we did, as well as our background, I think it was a bit of an impact in the sense that... if these guys start like this, if this is the first thing they publish and we amplify their publication, how is it going to end?
‘We are feeding a monster that we don’t know how far it will get’ …

Another thing is that such a dense investigation – this is a self-critic because after publishing we realised it was so dense – was difficult to pick up by other media, like a TV channel.

If we compare with the investigation that had the biggest impact so far – the houses of [FIFA’s Eugenio] Figueredo – it was very easy for other media to pick up and re-publish.

And we thought about this as an objective as well… Let’s do it in a way that’s easy to read and if other media wants to use it, that’s fine, but it needed to be easy, so they don’t have to spend one hour just to read a difficult text, and from there summarise what could be of interest for their audience.

Uruguayan’s media also has a kind of rejection to give credit to those colleagues when they do a good job.

There’s a much bigger disposition to criticise when someone makes a mistake, than to highlight when someone does a good job.

I think that Uruguay’s journalism still doesn’t have an ‘esprit de corps’ that understands that when a journalist makes a mistake, the profession is discredited. That sense of being part of the same collective doesn’t exist here. There are journalists who enjoy when a colleague makes a mistake.

Florenzia Melgar: And what about the University as a platform to do investigative journalism?

Fabian Werner: An experience that is starting to show some results is Sala de Redacción (The Newsroom) within the public College of Communications. They’ve just published a report on the quality of the water that hadn’t been published by any professional media before.

I know of the case in Guatemala of Plaza Pública that is a great investigative media outlet. Not only they have an office, they also have ongoing financial support. It started as a
university project. It consolidated when the students finished the career and they stayed there, and continued working, and they’ve received international awards.

It’s a model that works successfully in other countries; I can’t see why it couldn’t work here.

**Florencia Melgar:** What do you think about creating a method/protocol to facilitate transnational investigative journalism?

**Fabian Werner:** I’m not against the existence of a protocol. I’m not sure if it’s applicable. Maybe I’d call it ‘Decalogue’, something very basic… My experience working with colleagues in investigative journalism is that incredibly similar both in Latin America and Europe - Spain to be more accurate. You start talking and after 15 minutes you realise you are talking about the same thing.

There are things that have been invented already and are the same everywhere. What might need an agreement is the publication date.

For example, in the Barcenas investigation it was clear that after the work we did together there were things for [the Spanish journalist] that were more interesting for a Spanish audience, and there were other interesting aspects of the investigation for us in Uruguay.

Basically that was the main decision: if you think this is more interesting for Spain, you publish it. This is more interesting for Uruguay, we publish it. When do we publish? A week before or after…

I think we shouldn’t have something that’s too strict… of following certain steps… When you say ‘protocol’ it sounds like something very closed…

**Florencia Melgar:** What do you think about Unesco’s investigative journalism manual?

**Fabian Werner:** I think it’s a very useful book as a reference manual. Not only for beginners but also for the ones who have been investigating for a while now.
You’ll always find new things. And I think that having a manual that’s also done based on specific cases helps at least to give a general framework to investigative journalism.

On top of this, of course there are all the investigations done on a national level, but I think the manual is good. I think we also need to discuss other topics like ethical issues…

There are also ethical disagreements when you are doing journalism in general and in investigations in particular, that sometimes raise some rather complicated issues. It’s good to have these texts on ethics as a reference. And I think we should have education not only in the university classroom, but also within the newsrooms. It would be good to have mentors.

I’m quite critical of the concept of citizen journalism. I haven’t been able to understand how someone can do journalism without having any training in journalism. There isn’t a citizen doctor, there isn’t a citizen architect. Therefore, there isn’t a citizen journalist. It’s a name assigned to a practice that is very correct, and I think we should stimulate people who are committed to their reality and tries to generate supply information. But that’s not journalism.

Turning on the camera on a phone and recording a car accident is not journalism. Especially if you don’t have the opportunity to do all the work that comes after you record: what happened, who the protagonists are, and many more things I’m not going to explain now.

But that’s not journalism. It’s the registration of an event that can be done by anyone. The difference is that if you are already a journalist, you have a better tool that didn’t exist before.

For example in Brazil who have the Media Ninja, that is a group of young journalists who do journalism with their mobile phones. They became famous when the protests against the World Cup started in Brazil in 2013, the first ones in Rio and San Pablo after the bus fare price increased. Those protests started growing and growing. They protested after the World Cup and then the Confederation Cup … It got to a point that the media campaign against the demonstrations was such that the protesters decided to not allow commercial media to film the protests. When this happened, the Police started to repress them wildly, and there was nobody recording what was happening. So these young journalists went into the protests as if
they were attendants, recorded the police repression and they published it. And because they were the only ones who had those images, which were taken with a journalistic angle … the rest of the media had to use their pictures and they became very famous. And today they are a reference in journalism. But this is not citizen journalism, it is journalism. Full stop.

With investigative reports is a similar thing. Not all the journalists are able to do an investigation. You need to learn and to practice, to make mistakes. Journalists don’t like making mistakes, but we all make mistakes. And when you investigate the risk is higher; that’s why it’s important to have investigative teams. There are media that have investigative units with several journalists.

In Uruguay this is a utopia that will never happen. With Pablo [Alfano] and Walter [Pernas] we used to work in a paper that tried to have an investigative unit and I think it must have last around two weeks because it meant investing human and financial resources to investigate a topic that you don’t know if you’ll have a specific result.

When you investigate you don’t know if you’ll have something to publish. That’s another disadvantage of investigative journalism; you need to accept that sometimes you’ll investigate for a month or even for a year, and you won’t have anything to publish, about that topic at least. Maybe it opens to other investigations.

Sometimes it is very frustrating. So you need to have a special approach to the management of information to assume all those risks and challenges.
Gabriel Monteagudo

Gabriel Monteagudo is an experienced investigative journalist, who works for public radio while he directs the weekly *El Eco* paper, which is distributed in Colonia, Carmelo and Nueva Helvecia cities in Uruguay.

Interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4_8RFhLR-c&t=35s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f4_8RFhLR-c&t=35s)
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: Which are the most important investigations in your career?

Gabriel Monteagudo: All of them, I can generally say all of them. I love what we do and all the investigations we do are good stories to tell. We are proud of our work; sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less. Sometimes it has a different result, or more impact than expected. Some could be ignored.

One of them was the Mengele’s case in 2000. We didn’t discover that Mengele had been living in Uruguay – that was already known. In this joint investigation, Carlos Pelaez obtained some information about the potential existence of documents that proved Mengele’s stay in Uruguay, more precisely in Nueva Helvecia, as well as his marriage there. So we looked for them. I went to find those documents because I was living in the area, and the person who had the documents was an interesting character, someone who had been keeping them for many years, because he had previously looked for them.
We went through all the process of managing the source to build a relationship of trust that was necessary to make him share the documents with us.

These were diplomatic documents that were exchanged between the Uruguayan Embassy in Germany and Uruguay, to allow Mengele get married. These included his divorce from his wife who stayed in Germany after the war; and the documents that proved his brother had died, so he could marry his wife.

Those documents, aside of verifying the presence of former Nazi doctor Josef Mengele in Uruguay, and his marriage with his brother’s widow, I think the most interesting part of the story is that they [are evidence of Uruguay’s government responsibility because] the documents were issued by the Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Those documents show that in 1958, long after the war had finished, long after the Nuremberg trials in 1945, when the world was after the Nazis who were responsible for the horrors of the war, there were diplomatic channels between Uruguay and Germany that allowed him to obtain these documents. It was clear that there had been a permissiveness of the Uruguayan government so they could access those documents and Mengele could get married. The Uruguayan Ministry of Foreign Affairs still owes an explanation about its involvement in the exchange of documents; their role remains unknown.

[The story] had local impact with the people of Nueva Helvecia city. We even received a letter of repudiation of the Association of journalists of the east Colonia province.

This investigation ended up being key for another investigation two years later.

We could source in the city of Nueva Helvecia, the black lists [of citizens] who ended up being sent to jail [during the dictatorship]. These lists were put together by other citizens of the same city. They were used by the security forces of the dictatorship to jail activists and left-wing militants. Nueva Helvecia was the only place in the country where lists were typed/written by the civil society spying on their neighbours so the police during the dictatorship could follow the listed names. There are recognised historians who were detained and went to jail because someone included them in a list and gave it to the police.
Florencia Melgar: Could you have broadened the investigations had you had more resources?

Gabriel Monteagudo: Yes, I believe so. We would have wanted to follow the Argentinean lead, we would have wanted to investigate further the connections with Foreign Affairs, how it started; what kind of relations they had. It’s evident Uruguay was connected with the Nazis that allowed this to happen. The story had a broad impact on international media. It was picked up by CNN, it was picked up by the big media networks. But in our investigations there are always leads we never follow because we don’t have the resources.

Florencia Melgar: Is there room to work collaboratively with colleagues of the region and the world?

Gabriel Monteagudo: No doubt there is, because we have [regional] problems in common. There are some challenges like potential conflicts of interests, the professional vocation, how much you want to go deep in the investigation, and if you really want to do investigative journalism -without this meaning going against the legislation of the countries involved- and if you can receive collaborations to find more information. I think this is basic.

I try to be in permanent contact with as many foreign journalists as possible. And I’m always asking for information or suggesting a topic. Sometimes I receive an answer, sometimes I don’t. But I’m always trying to be connected, and I use the available networks, which is good. I think we have problems in common and if we agree on investigating together, there are many things we can do. You cross Uruguay’s border and you can find all these problems we have in common with the rest of Latin America: drug trafficking; money laundering; capital going overseas; crime; domestic violence; human trafficking.

We do have a common agenda, including environmental issues like the massive production of soy or the use of agro toxics. Today in Paraguay there are Uruguayans planting 4 million hectares of soy. This represents the 25% of the agriculture land in Uruguay. This 25% is now being exploited by Uruguayans in Paraguay.
The investigation about money laundering between Uruguay and Argentina was done during the economic crisis. Because we need to be honest here: the best opportunity for a journalist to get stories is during a crisis. This is when journalists have more access to information because some communication channels open that wouldn’t be open in other circumstances.

What happened in Argentina, with the capital going overseas and money laundering, we realised it was happening in Uruguay as well. This allowed us to progress in an investigation on money laundering, and we found local personalities and other people. It was a phenomenon that was occurring in our town; we were asking ourselves why is this happening… And this is connected to regional movements; it’s all interconnected.

**Florencia Melgar:** Can we create a methodology, a minimum standard for transnational investigative journalism?

Gabriel Monteagudo: I think that journalists have to seduce to obtain information. As we are not the police, we cannot interrogate. Our tool is seduction; through our words we try to convince the others to give us the information. Each country has its rules and legal framework. But there are things in common that can be done. There are minimum standards that can be agreed on. The interconnections are fundamental, the networks. Making a call in 2000 was horrible, very expensive. For a small media outlet, making calls overseas was terrible, and nowadays you do it for free. Then, not taking more risks than the ones allowed by the law in each country.

There is an old discussion of who is a better journalist: if the one who never had to face a court, or the one that has ten open causes in the judicial system for defamation, etc. If the courts never prosecuted you… I think a good journalist needs to have faced a court sometime during his/ her career. I’m not suggesting journalists should face spending ten years in jail, but a good journalist at some stage [of his/her career] needs to face a court because it means he/ she touched a group in power. The first weapon to put pressure on journalists is taking them to court.

In 2002 we were working from a garage as an office when the investments of magnate Gaith Pharaon arrived in Carmelo city. We published many stories about it in our weekly paper...
that’s distributed in the cities of Carmelo, Nueva Palmira and Colonia, but not [the capital city] Montevideo, so nobody knew what we were doing. We didn’t even have a fax. Once we even had to pick up a fax from Antel’s office (the telecommunication company) because the BCCI bank in Paris was asking for any information we could have of Ghaith Pharaon. BCCI was the international bank Ghaith Pharaon had plundered. The bank sent us a fax asking us to call them to Paris if we had any information. We couldn’t make a call to Buenos Aires because of the cost, how were we going to call Paris? We were taken to Court for this story as well; these are the risks you take in this profession, and you need to know how far you can go.

**Florencia Melgar: Are there independent journalists in Uruguay to work in transnational investigations?**

Gabriel Monteagudo: Yes, I think there are many getting trained. I think Uruguay is not going to lead in investigative journalism. Uruguayan journalists haven’t moved from the comfort zone for too long and big media companies got used to have an agenda that follows press releases, on top of the provincial mentality where knowing each other prevails over professional standards. The new generations of young journalists are promising; the colleagues of “Sudestada” are doing great investigations.

In the public University, there is an investigative unit called “Sala de Redacción Raul Castro” that has just published the documents that reveal that potable water in Uruguay contains certain bacteria. There are very capable young journalists who will have to work harder than us because they need to know about data bases and find information in a way we never did. But I am convinced that we are on our way.

“Old journalists,” we have a big problem: our sources were part of the traditional opposition. Most of the information came from them. Now most of them are in the government and even though they used to facilitate us a lot of information, it’s not that easy anymore. Young journalists aren’t part of this dynamic so they have more chances to obtain information.

Beyond the benefits of online networking and having good relations between journalists, I think it’s important to remember that journalism needs to be done on the ground.
Guillermo Garat

Guillermo Garat is a Uruguayan investigative journalist. He has reported for the Deutsche Welle and Al Jazeera.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=00B_2tV6-Vc&t=477s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: Which of your investigations you’d like to highlight as relevant?

Guillermo Garat: When I worked for newspaper La Diaria I investigated human rights violations in the Rio de la Plata region; there were many cases of Uruguayans who had disappeared and I tried to follow these cases in both countries: Uruguay and Argentina. I travelled as many times as I could. I also tried to talk to all the relevant people who came from Argentina to Uruguay. In those years I also started going to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ archives, that’s a great source of information.

I’ve also found leads to stories through government sources who knew the cases that were being investigated by the Courts in both countries: Argentina and Uruguay. Around three years ago I started investigating drug policies in Latin America. I’ve investigated them quite
in depth in Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Colombia. And now I’m working in a project to go to Paraguay.

**Florence Melgar: Is there potential in Latin America to do cross-border investigations?**

Guillermo Garat: Yes, I think there is potential and any colleague you ask will say “yes”. The issue is… how do you make it happen? That’s the missing part. I don’t think there are many routes, but there are some. Most media companies are going through an economic crisis and so it will be quite difficult to do it there, except for a few exceptions, and some free-lance journalists in Latin America. I’m thinking of the website Dromonamos in Mexico and Spain who travelled around the continent, following the narco-trafficker track. And they could support it by selling stories as free lancers. They rented a car and travelled around the continent. Initiatives of this kind can work.

Other option is getting financial support but there isn’t much funding available for investigative journalism in Latin America. I think transnational investigative journalism relies on the will of the journalists involved and I think freelance journalists have advantages over full time journalists because of the dynamic.

**Florence Melgar: Do you think a method/standard can be created for transnational investigations?**

Guillermo Garat: I’d like to see it. Please send me material so I look into it. One of the vices in journalism is that we tend to work alone. I think most journalists -not editors or directors- are used to working by themselves and putting their signature to their investigations, or articles in general. It’s probably not the best way to go but I’m not sure what the alternative is. I think a big investigation with funding, provided it is well coordinated, it’s easier to arrive to agreements between the journalists involved because the guidelines come from the top, from the direction of the project; you accept them or you don’t. I think that would be a good way of approaching it, but I haven’t experienced it.
Florencia Melgar: How are you financing your last investigation?

Guillermo Garat: I’m doing it alone, so I don’t have a lot to talk about collaboration. But the people who have the will to invest in investigations need a regular flow of information of what you are doing. Being accountable [for the progress of your investigation] is part of the deal. I’m not working with any methodology in particular; I haven’t found one either for this project. It’s more like… week 1 this was done; week 2 we’ll do… So we have a number of objectives to fulfil in the three weeks I have to do the investigation.

But in journalism, reality changes and so does the planning at any moment in time. That happens a lot to me; I have an idea but things are -luckily- different. So the financing bodies should understand the peculiarities of journalism. At the same time, journalists should understand the distinctiveness of the funding bodies, that don’t necessarily know about journalism. In this case I’ll deliver a product that’s a policy brief, more with an academic approach, but I have all the rest of the data for my investigative reporting. It’s like an exchange.

Florencia Melgar: Would you use Interpol methods if they were useful for the investigation?

Guillermo Garat: Well… if we had to investigate Montevideo’s transport system with that tool, I wouldn’t have an issue, but I had to investigate drug-trafficking, I’d say I wouldn’t use it.

Florencia Melgar: Why?

Guillermo Garat: Because you want to keep the confidentiality of your sources to be able to carry out the investigation with the least risk possible. And nothing guarantees me that software is… Is it clear? I’m not an expert in software or programming because I don’t need them. In principle I’d say “no” if it’s something that could potentially compromise an investigation. I’d have to evaluate, but it kind of bothers me, I’d say “no”. It’s not necessary.
Florencia Melgar: It’s very interesting the development of data journalism in Latin America…

Guillermo Garat: Yes, I think that’s the way to go in the near future. Considering the increasing expansion of multimedia content the audience reach on all platforms, including the phone, it’s such a rich source. The fact that audio-visual content is more relevant –even though it sadly means people read less- I think data journalism and multimedia journalism have a lot to offer. There’s an issue with media companies, as they are not willing to invest what’s needed to achieve this. And in Uruguay there isn’t a solid know-how.

In Uruguay we haven’t got too many programmers and they are busy; the same happens with web designers, so data journalism should seduce not only the public, but firstly the people who are responsible to produce a good product. If you are going to go down this route, you need to come out with a high quality product. I think some products produced by a number of newspapers and the website “Sudestada” are interesting, as new ways of reaching the public. We want to increase the audience, while giving the journalist more freedom to express through multimedia tools. If you put all of these elements together, it needs to work.

I’m not sure if it would work in commercial terms. In countries like Uruguay - and I think it’s similar in all Latin America- a new product of this kind is a commercial challenge that probably not all media organisations are willing to accept because the advertising quota is assigned beforehand.

Florencia Melgar: What do you think about having an investigative team in public media?

Guillermo Garat: I belong to the group of people who think that journalism has a clear problem of financial support. This is an economic problem we face as a society because information is a good for society, so access to information becomes a political issue. I believe that as a society somehow we need to assume that we have a problem about how we finance the information we consume. We got used to not paying for information because it’s all there on Internet, but information has a cost that media companies are able to cover only partially. So the state somehow should take care of this failure of the market economy. So whether it’s
for investigative journalism, data journalism or just journalism, it would be interesting that society assumes this responsibility, and that there is an honest approach to it.

As a society, we seem to be very dissatisfied with media coverage; there are two or three cases on the spotlight every month of criticism of how media covers a story, the lack of investigation of some topics, etc. This happens mainly because of the limited budgets. So if information isn’t a profitable business because there isn’t a market -information shouldn’t be a business anyway- I can’t see who else can work this out, if it’s not the state, not to determine what to cover or how, but to protect information and journalism as public goods.

The role of the state is not to decide about the contents the channel should air, but to take responsibility over the problems generated by the absence of adequate financial support.

I think the public sphere is the ideal ground to experiment with journalism of this kind. I see this very far in time; it’s not part of the agenda. [Uruguay’s public TV and radio] still depend on the political power in the government. So the guidelines change every five years if they had planned them before getting to the government, which isn’t normally the case. Each new government makes their own assessment of the state of public media and discover realities they had no idea about… It’s very difficult for public media to advance until they are independent from the government: operational and management independence as well as independence in the recruitment of journalists and staff.

**Florencia Melgar: Is there a future for transnational investigations in Latin America?**

Guillermo Garat: There’s very little investigation about how transnational companies operate in Latin America. As far as I remember, there’s nothing about it. Everyone is concerned about Monsanto -which is a legitimate concern as the transgenic soy is polluting the water- but I haven’t seen a single investigation about the disasters of transgenic soy plantations from Rio Bravo to the Patagonia.

All the investigations about environment are country-based, as if they were islands; and you never get the story with a global view. In a continent like Latin America it shouldn’t be that difficult. There’s also something about Latin America media criteria to pick up the important
stories of the countries in the region. There isn’t a media pool except for the GDA, Newspaper Group of the Americas, able to report on these issues. Some NGOs try to do it, but there isn’t a framework to explore, for example, what’s happening with the mining industry in all Latin America.
Marcelo Pereira has a long history of leading teams of professional journalists, including investigative reporters. He is founder and director of newspaper *La Diaria*.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_gNvvxf_A&t=519s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

**Florencia Melgar:** What’s investigative journalism like in Uruguay and what do you think about not having time to investigate?

**Marcelo Pereira:** Everything goes much slower. And unfortunately this is accepted and feels “natural” now. You don’t even consider it as an unexpected problem. You already know in a Uruguayan scale that you’ll carry out the investigation at the speed you are able to.

And that sometimes the access to some data will depend on personal contacts with journalists of different countries ... situations of that kind... which are spontaneous collaborations and not something the media company can pay for.
Florencia Melgar: Do you think there is future for collaborative investigations in Latin America?

Marcelo Pereira: Well, there is a complicated issue here. Because I think the development of investigative journalism at an international level, is conceptually framed in a way that might not really match the kind of work we do in Latin America.

The approach in the investigations I’ve read about focuses on the legality -or not- of an issue. I have the impression that the capacity for suspicion is linked to a theoretical thought about society. And this is something to consider when discussing a lingua franca between journalists. Or the investigations that are financially supported by s, it happens that the suspicion in structural terms seems to disappear.

For example, I was reading the materials you sent me. And there was an interesting job about an investigation on how the health system behaved in relation to premature babies and if the doctors’ behaviour was influencing those factors.

There are additional questions [that weren’t asked] which are fundamental from my point of view. For example, to start questioning why is the goal to help babies be born more premature? What medical knowledge allows this to happen, and what’s the role of doctors in society. Instead of an approach that considers the norm as the starting point and just discuss if the norm is being respected or violated, question what’s happening in terms of the system…

Investigative journalism in Latin America –at least the kind of journalism I’m interested in- is linked to a vision of society that goes beyond this, and that involves taking a position. There’s a rebellious impulse that is political –but non-partisan- in its view of society. This political view makes the field of suspicion different from the more Anglo approach: whether the official is moving within the limits he is allowed to or not.

There’s still a lot to investigate within this [Anglo] approach. But I think the typical Latin American investigative journalist has another scale of motivations that are behind his will to investigate.
I think there’s potential to coordinate investigations between Latin Americans only if there is a previous stage of “elective affinities”: not only you are learning how your colleague works but also why he does it, why he wants to investigate. And there might be affinity or not. And that determines if there is a chance to collaborate. It’s more important to consider this.

Other parts of the world with more financial resources have developed a different conceptual framework that assumes the limits of the profession are clearly defined and they’re obvious and natural.

They have different ways of understanding what needs to be evaluated, what needs to be fought for, or what needs to be changed in the world, in comparison to the Latin American experience I know. They evaluate as “good” more than what we think is “good”.

So this is a problem… to agree on protocols. All the experiences I know of Latin America investigative journalism –I’m not saying I know all of it- is based on certain assumptions that are very complicated to validate if we used the kind of criteria used in academia to validate scientific works.

The issue of protecting the sources, which is crucial in the type of work that Latin American journalists tend to do… it’s very difficult for me to imagine [in a collaborative investigation across borders] unless you work “blind”. For example, a Brazilian journalist tells me that a certain source is confirmed by two more and the three of them are confidential. I tick the box that it’s been checked but from Berlin it is very difficult to know if it’s validated or not.

What you need to validate, sometimes is unknown even to the editor. So it’s much more complex when this is part of an international network.

I think that methodologically there are interesting contributions; there is progress in defining a protocol, resources, that’s all good. But [it’s difficult] in this other area of the conceptual framework, as well as how to manage the adventure, risk and uncertainty side of investigative journalism. The risk is sometimes undertaken as an individual decision because there is no

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19 The journalist means “from the other side of the world”, as Berlin is very far from Uruguay. The example is not about this city specifically.
way to share the risk reasonably; you cannot ask other people to put their safety at risk. Many times the fundamentals of that bet cannot be put in a spreadsheet so others can evaluate if they agree to share the risks. Putting your safety, your prestige and your future credibility at risk is a personal bet.

It doesn’t mean we can’t progress in many aspects. I suppose the same happens in other countries. Investigating in Africa must have a number of singularities and different difficulties as well as areas where they might have strengths we are not even close to.

I’d be very interested in knowing how journalists are working in the Arab countries, in Africa, in a number of places we don’t have access to what’s being produced, the same way they don’t access to what we are doing. But to harmonise them I think it’s necessary to go beyond the methodological aspect. There are other things we should harmonise and I’m not sure if they can be harmonised.

When there is financial support involved, that’s another problem. A colleague might trust blindly in another colleague. But it’s more difficult that the funding body trusts you blindly.

**Florencia Melgar: Should public media finance investigative journalism?**

Marcelo Pereira: I think we are many kilometres away from a situation in which a demand of this kind would make any sense to even raise it. In Latin America, beyond the financial challenges, that is always the first reason when you analyse why there isn’t more investigative journalism, there are also problems of consistency, independence and competition.

In relation to the independence, Latin American investigative journalists tend to be an unwanted character for the status quo, and in particular for the governments; in the Latin America governments are not as differentiated from the state as they should be. Uruguay is not the worst example; maybe in some aspects it’s better than the average. But when I think of the political decision of assigning resources to investigative journalism, I think it’s so obvious the first thing politicians will think is: we are going to be funding them to investigate our government and they’d think we are all crazy. The conversation finishes there.
Florencia Melgar: What do you think about using Interpol methods to exchange information?

Marcelo Pereira: In his last novel, “Number zero,” [Umberto] Eco says that dossiers produced by Intelligence agencies are basically press clippings. They are systematised, interpreted, and include other elements for the recipients of the dossiers who didn’t have time to follow the news in the media. So maybe the similarity of the jobs goes both ways… The exchange is actually already taking place the other way around.

I think one thing is to consider protocols; using software is a different thing, unless I have a team of people I trust who can check the software. If it’s software of encrypted data, it’s encrypted for everyone except for the developer who gave it to me. I prefer to develop our own software.

Florencia Melgar: Why Latin American investigations don’t transcend the region?

Marcelo Pereira: I think the problem starts before then. What do we mean by “transcend” because there are a huge number of investigations, even produced in rich countries, that don’t transcend either. In fact, in this UNESCO’s handbook, I’m not sure if the two or three cases used as examples are known to Uruguay’s most informed investigative journalists. I suspect they don’t know about them.

The problem is also that we are used to thinking that transcending internationally is to be in the headlines of the media in those countries (United States, United Kingdom). I think there’s an issue of the “demand”, and the public’s understanding, which is a complicated issue.

I was in Spain in 2009; Mujica had high chances to be elected as the president of Uruguay but he wasn’t an international figure yet. Everyone I talked to – from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, to El Pais de Madrid or El Diario Publico newspapers… whether they were state or non-states, for all of them the framing of Latin American was a very rough generalisation of the politics of a continent that could be summarised in three silly phrases: “in America Latina you have the leftists like Chavez, Evo Morales and Correa who are the
populists, and then you have the serious ones like Bachelet and Tabare Vazquez. So Mujica, where does he sit?” And that was all.

From a Uruguayan perspective we had to explain that the image they had in Spain of some of these [so called] “populists” was built –amongst other elements- by a Spanish powerful media group that lost the extremely lucrative business of textbooks in those countries and they became enemies with those presidents.

When I explained this, “Really?” [answered the Spanish colleagues]. “That’s something you should know.” [I answered]

In Spain Evo Morales said once to a journalist from “El Pais”: “I want you to know that you were sent to ask this question because this is what happened in Bolivia…; it was Prisa the company that used to do the textbooks”, and the journalist turned green [of embarrassment].

There are many things to investigate. Today I saw in the news the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) talking about countries that are considered tax havens for soccer players’ transactions. And Uruguay is one of them. This is published in a Uruguayan news website but it’s something everyone knows here.

It happens that a Brazilian international soccer player was formally transferred from a Brazilian club to a second division club in Uruguay that sold him to a powerful European club. That’s all documented. And of course this player never came to Uruguay or used the club’s shirt. Maybe the player doesn’t even know that he was part of this small Uruguay team. What happens is that tax regulations are more beneficial in Uruguay, so they do the triangulation.

This is not a secret in Uruguay and it’s a topic that should be of interest of the European clubs and the people who are part of the soccer players market in Europe, especially now that corruption in football is a hot topic. But I don’t know any serious investigations in Uruguay about this.
The problem is the lack of editorial independence. The people making profit with the soccer business are very close to the investors that support sport journalism, together with Uruguay’s appalling bank secrecy. It’s the skeleton in the closet, and it’s not a secret either.

And I think it is very difficult for the American or European public to understand that Latin America is not a global society with a number of common characteristics. If we don’t start there, we are still very far away from being able to understand what is interesting to investigate, for example, in Argentina, because the correspondent in Argentina is Argentinean, not a European journalist who doesn’t know the society.

Normally correspondents have been living in the country for many years; they are like locals. And it’s their job that has less and less relevance. Foreign correspondents have spent many years providing their employers with a summary of the local news.

This was before the Internet era. They were robbing the money. They had almost no exclusive stories. But the correspondent knows the stories. His perception of the society leads him to produce stories that reinforce the stereotype. Anything different might need too much explanation or the audience might not understand—the correspondent thinks.

It’s like selling a story to a Catholic newspaper. He won’t sell them a story about corruption and child abuse in the Catholic Church. He doesn’t even offer this story. It’s self-censorship because he wants to sell the article and he knows they are not going to buy it. So he produces what he knows will be accepted. He is not doing journalism.
Pablo Alfano

Pablo Alfano is one of the directors of Sudestada, Uruguay’s first portal of investigative journalism. Pablo has more than 25 years’ experience in journalism.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AdZEqmBIHDE
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florecia Melgar: What are the most relevant investigations of your career?

Pablo Alfano: One of the most relevant investigations was about the state-run casinos in 2006-2007. It took almost two years. That was a corruption case in the state-run casinos. We discovered it was the first casino in the world that gave losses – and made the news overseas as well. The managers were stealing the money. It ended up with the imprisonment of five people: four managers and a businessman. We did the story in Brecha weekly, with Walter Pernas and Fabian Werner. We had the impression there were more officials to be made accountable for the loss but that’s what the judge decided.

Our report triggered the judicial investigation that started half way during our coverage. Closer in time, in Sudestada Portal, that is [an NGO self-managed by] a group of journalists,
we try to do investigative journalism… we investigated the Bárcenas case\textsuperscript{20}; Bárcenas used to be the treasurer of the People’s Party (PP) in Spain. Our investigation explained the triangulation and found out that part of Bárcenas’ money had gone through Uruguay and the connection of that money with Uruguayan ghost companies, or with land and properties that he had bought in Uruguay through figureheads.

Very recently we finished a rather long investigation about all the properties owned by Eugenio Figueredo, who was detained in Zurich. We published this investigation as the FIFA scandal unfolded. He had bought these properties in California using his name, or his wife’s, or other family members’ names. He also owned an offshore ghost company in Panama, which had no reason to exist unless it was used for spurious purposes. The formal description of the company is so broad that basically enables the business to sell or buy anything.

**Florencia Melgar:** Why does Uruguayan mainstream media doesn’t pick up independent investigations?

**Pablo Alfano:** My opinion is that media organisations are afraid. I think it’s much cheaper for a TV channel – both in economic terms and risk taking – to pick up a story from a smaller media outlet and quote the original source – and in this way you don’t have a legal responsibility. There are also important investigations done here that were totally ignored, and I’m not talking just about our investigations, but produced by other colleagues as well who were ignored by the big media outlets. They were public and had a lot of detail, but they never make it to the newspapers front page or the evening news. Maybe a radio program quotes an investigation in a micro news report or as a side comment during a morning or afternoon show. I think it’s fear. It can also be fear of investigating someone who is friends with a friend of… in a small country… everyone knows everyone… and it does affect the investigation.

\textsuperscript{20} The Bárcenas case – also known as the Bárcenas Affair – is a corruption scandal in Spain that affects the People’s Party (PP) after it was revealed that about 48 million euros in Swiss bank account of party treasurer and Senator Luis Bárcenas and handwritten accounts, were published. It was the evidence that the PP for many years kept a parallel bookkeeping system that recorded illegal cash donations.
Doing investigative journalism in country towns is much more complicated because [imagine a situation where] the journalist is denouncing the police commissioner… he could live across the road; or that the local governor is corrupt and he lives two blocks away and you regularly see him in the bakery. [In Uruguay] these dynamics operate like they do in a small town because everyone knows each other, even though it’s the capital city.

Florencia Melgar: But there is a movement of journalists in the country…

Pablo Alfano: Yes, definitely. And there are very good investigations.

Florencia Melgar: Have you done an investigation that didn’t continue because of lack of resources?

Pablo Alfano: Yes, resources and no time. And to have time you need resources. We are trapped in the dynamic of multi employment. In my case, for example, I work in Sudestada Portal, where we do investigative journalism, but it’s almost honorary work. Not almost, it’s honorary. I work in a radio and I work as a teacher. Imagine how much time I have left to investigate. Fortunately we are a team and we take turns. Sometimes I do most of the work and in other investigations I’m just a side contributor. It’s case by case, it depends on the time availability of each of us. With more financial resources, and with more time, I’m sure we can produce many more investigations and more in depth ones. What I’m not sure about is if the big media organisations will pick them up and amplify them. I’m not sure what would happen. In one year and a half that Sudestada has been online, we published two big investigations, that somehow were picked up by the established media but there were other investigations that were ignored.

I’m not bringing this up because we produced the stories, but because they were good. The one about Figueredo was a good story, very documented, with photos, transaction records, property valuation, localisation… all the details. So with all this evidence, the big media organisations surrendered and most of them published it.

[It also happened] because the FIFA story was making noise at an international level. Figueredo was making noise as well in Uruguay. We also published it thinking about this
context. We took advantage of this context to finish the production of a story we had been producing for a while. We didn’t have the production capacity to finish it [before].

Florencia Melgar: Is there potential for more collaborative investigations in Latin America?

Pablo Alfano: Yes, I think so. With more financial resources, then you have time to investigate and you don’t have to be running behind other jobs. As a person dedicated to this job, I’d invest a hundred per cent [of my time/energy]. The problem now is that I invest 10%, 15%, 5%, 20%, I never even make it to 50%, because I have other activities that pay the bills. If I could be 100% dedicated to investigate, I have no doubt that yes (we’ll produce more).

Florencia Melgar: And what about public media funding investigative journalism?

Pablo Alfano: Yes, the BBC has done something. There are cases; I’m not sure if the state in Uruguay would be open minded to do this. In Uruguay, investigating corruption is investigating corruption within the state. That’s people’s imaginary: [the state] more than private companies. I don’t think the Uruguayan state would allocate the resources for this. I don’t think so.

[It’s different from the case] I was telling you about before, the Figueredo case, who bought and sold properties using a ghost company. And this is a private person; he is a public person but he is not a politician and he hasn’t got a relationship with the state.

When I talk about the state, I include all political parties, of all the colours. In fact, I think the trend is to keep the communication of each government’s policies in the hands of each government agency. This is, that each ministry, each public body tries to make its own press campaign, its own publicity, its own way of communicating. Even though they pay for publicity in the media, they don’t trust the media. So I can’t imagine the state financing one or more media to investigate when the journalists could be investigating the state in itself. That would be the maximum level of transparency. If as a member of the government you are sure you don’t have anything to hide, of course you finance [investigations]. But you have to be sure you are clean and that your team is clean as well. I think it’s utopic. That this happens
in other countries? Maybe it happens in more developed countries or with a more advanced mentality.

In Uruguay I think we are very far from that. Uruguayan journalism has denounced other colleagues when they engaged in bad practices. As journalists, I think many of us are ready for this. But the state and some colleagues wouldn´t receive it in a positive way. In fact, we are constantly discussing the type of Argentine journalism that is very invasive of people´s privacy. And now you can only report about the private life of certain personalities. But there is still a taboo that journalists can´t get into people´s private life. It is correct to preserve the privacy of victims (for example) but if you are a suspect or you are accused or arrested for a scam or for a white collar crime, why can´t I investigate your past life? What prevents me? especially if you are a public servant who spent my money (as a tax payer). In our imaginary journalists believe we can go as far as the private life of a politician, a minister, a senator, an MP, a local governor, and of course the president. Up to that point we can address some private life issues, but not all of it. We know about things but they are off the record and not published. So we know but we don´t tell the audience. Why? Because this is our idiosyncrasy. What you suggest in the sumum of transparency but I don´t think Uruguayan journalists would accept it, and I think the state wouldn´t approve such a Project. Only now the state is beginning to do good journalism on public radio and TV. Not investigative journalism, just good journalism. It started around three, four, five years ago… maybe a little more. It´s starting. Historically both the state channel and the state broadcasters did favours to the government. I believe the process can take the state 15, 20, 30 years more to be able to finance the media that could eventually end up investigating the state.

Florença Melgar: Would you use a method/protocol to investigate with colleagues overseas?

Pablo Alfano: Maybe not a protocol, but I would agree on a method. We´ve done some things with some colleagues; with Fabian we have. Obviously via Internet. And we´ve attended several seminars here and overseas, with colleagues that on the same boat who produce similar content, sometimes they do it with better quality, because they have more resources and people, sometimes they work in similar conditions.
We’ve been exchanging opinions with colleagues of Mexico, Ecuador, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia… We’ve never worked together yet, but in our conversations in seminars, we seem to think in very similar ways once you have the story, the way you conduct it. In fact in the Barcenas case, Fabian was in contact with a Spanish journalist and we exchanged information. He found useful information we sent him that was relevant in Spain, and he gave us information that helped us to find out more. There was a data exchange; it wasn’t key, but it helped.

**Florencia Melgar:** Latin America also has the advantage of sharing the language.

**Pablo Alfano:** Even in some parts of the United States, you can communicate in Spanish. And I insist, when we talk about journalism, I think there’s a common language. We didn’t invent a methodology. We applied methods that others tested and worked. Maybe we created our own methodology for a particular case, because each case (is different). I wouldn’t do a protocol.

**Florencia Melgar:** What would you do?

**Pablo Alfano:** I would do a kind of manual, of what has to be done and what shouldn’t. I think you can work collaboratively. But of course it depends on each person’s characteristics.

**Florencia Melgar:** Marcelo Pereira suggests the Anglo framework of suspicion is more about legal/illegal issues whilst the Latin American includes ethical/non-ethical.

**Pablo Alfano:** I think it’s a good (approach). But for example, environment topics… For example, an aerial fumigation as it recently happened here, that contaminated a rural primary school in the middle of the countryside. The teacher and I don’t know how many kids ended up with breathing issues. The person who was denounced was fined but didn’t go to prison. This was made public firstly because the teacher and the parents reported it to the police, what did the journalists do? Just go to the place and publish the story. The investigation was done already. It involved arriving to the place, collecting the testimonies and the evidence. You didn’t need much to do it. And it was done.
Now it’s illegal to fumigate in that area, as a consequence of a small investigation. Of course it wasn’t illegal to fumigate; it was legal. But now it is illegal in that area. Maybe we don’t think so much if it’s legal or illegal, but you consider ethical aspects. It’s happened to us; we developed an app that’s called “who pays?” that puts together all the donations received by the political parties in the 2009 campaign; (you can see) how much each party received, each faction and each candidate, broken down by the different regions within the country, including the name of the donor –if he is a company or a private person- and who the donor is. And then we found anonymous donations; we found 87 or 89 of a higher value than the allowed for anonymous donations. All right, those were illegal. But we also found a number of situations that were not illegal but they were unmoral, not immoral… unmoral.

The informed reader realises it’s not a crime, but it’s not right. The political system laughs at the Uruguayan electoral laws because the electoral court does not police it. And why not? Because it hasn’t got staff, resources or time. We are talking about a law that all the parties voted a short time ago; it’s a new law.

We approve laws but we don’t comply. I’m not sure if there are illegalities, but here are irregularities which should be subject to economic sanctions, but it doesn’t happen. That also discourages investigative journalism, because your findings have no consequences. It’s not only that other media don’t pick up your story, or that your work is not amplified, or had no impact…

**Florencia Melgar: Would you use Interpol’s methods to exchange –not obtain- information?**

Pablo Alfano: I’m open to any option, I wouldn’t mind. If you tell me there is a software, a way or a methodology similar to the one used by Interpol, or the Burundian police –I don’t care who- that guarantees that all the information goes from here to the UK and it’s not intercepted in the way, great, it doesn’t bother me.

What I would never do is to apply investigation methods similar to the ones used by an intelligence official. Because I’d be bastardising the profession as a journalist. I can’t break
into a house or tap a phone; there are things I’d love to do but I can’t. Perhaps the work mentality is similar in that you put data together and you are persistent…

Florence Melgar: Do you use security measures to exchange digital information?

Pablo Alfano: In fact, the security measures we have in place are quite elemental. And then precautions like using postal mail rather than phone calls. We take more precautions when we are crafting the story, when you are doing the field work. But on a digital level, there are very few precautions. You left me thinking now; very few…
Roger Rodríguez


Specialised in the subject of human rights, he made contributions to the Argentine and Uruguayan judicial cases on the Condor Plan where, after the location of the Simón Riquelo, he denounced the so-called “Second Flight” of Orletti (2002) that confirmed the transfer to their countries of origin of political prisoners, illegally arrested, who remain disappeared.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RB-3XaMF-Xo
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florencia Melgar: One of the reasons argued by many journalists to not do investigative journalism is the lack of financial support. What do you think?

Roger Rodriguez: It is true, but first you do need to know what you want to investigate, before asking for financial support. I do not think investigative journalism is as a kind of noble tile; as if being an investigative journalist was ‘how horrible’ or ‘how cool.’ I think that in journalism you investigative, or it’s not journalism. There is a lot of communication, but not always a lot of journalism. Informing, communicating, refrying information or news is as healthy as anything else and you are working as a communicator.
Journalism requires sources. To do journalism you need to get sources and you need to find news and to find news you need to talk to people, and read, and find documents; look layer after layer to find if “there is a crab underneath the stone.” The issue is how much you dig to find it. Sometimes you need financial support, but you don’t need money to think. You do not need money to define the hypothesis of the project, the angle of the journalistic topic. It is free to investigate, without money we’ve have done many things.

**Florencia Melgar: What investigations could not have been done without the support of colleagues overseas?**

Roger Rodriguez: When I went overseas, in all the cases the colleagues have supported me in one way or another. In each of the investigations in Buenos Aires, you had to make regular contacts, especially when working in human right topics, when the people or the topics you are investigating can unwillingly inform an agent or an agency, I mean the intelligence agencies knew what we were doing. (Senator) Rafael Michelini and I investigated in 2000-2001 a document where an alleged federal policeman had been following Zelmar Michelini before his murder in 1976 and to confirm this we had to go to Buenos Aires, follow dead-end clues and wrong clues we were given, manipulations, fake information and the only way we had to keep the information safe was to have a trusted colleague informed of everything we were doing.

This was the referent person we gave the information to avoid carrying it everywhere with us: you can simply be robbed, and all the documents you’ve been collecting for so long disappear. To find the person who had “x” surname, we went through the 350 people in the white pages with the same name only in Argentina, and started calling the 350, one by one, until we found find him. In this case it was the call 348 and the number corresponded to the mother of the person. When we found the mother, the guy reacted and agreed to meet us. That is the beginning to find an informant but we had to make 340 calls; it’s a simple task, not more difficult than pushing some buttons. Investigating means getting inside the books and read the whole library until you find the hidden paragraph; you need to be able to deduce, find the rope to pull, talk to people in the most unusual places; find clues; find documents; find property information; discover who is who; and then call 350 times until you find it. It’s not harder than that.
Florencia Melgar: So you need passion and conviction, aside of money.

Roger Rodriguez: Patience, perseverance and methodology. Once I said that in journalism, you need 80% of work, 20% of luck, and 10% talent. As it adds up to 110% get rid of the talent.

Florencia Melgar: You said earlier it is very important to trust the colleagues overseas, who give you a hand; when do you know you can trust him?

Roger Rodriguez: It depends on how many bottles you have shared with him, because the brotherhood is born there. You’ll find journalists who are similar to you who find their sources in the pub. When you are talking with military or police sources, what you need to know as a journalist is to drink more than the other one. Because the one who needs to get drunk is the other one, so you can take the information. If you get drunk, you are in trouble. So, you need to have a drinking culture. I’m not encouraging alcoholism, even though one can be – but you need to have some resistance. If you are drinking water, and coffee it’s a difficult to soften up the source. You have to work much more to soften up a person, and sometimes alcohol -maybe today it is pot – helps to soften up and make them trust you, that’s the whole issue with the informant because you have the power to make the guy go to jail, or to be killed or to be considered a traitor… so how do you convince him to believe in you? How do you find the right way to convince your source? Does he play tennis? Does he play bridge? What does he know about? What topic is of his interest that can work as a conversation starter? How can you loosen his resistances and give himself to you?

Florencia Melgar: What is your method? Have you got a method?

Florencia Melgar: Do you think the state can finance – maybe in Teve Ciudad or National TV – a team of investigative journalists?

Roger Rodriguez: The state could do it. The problem is we still have a policy of political commitments between the state and public media outlets. Unless we have a substantial change in terms of the defense of freedom of expression; the right to inform and be informed and the people demanding to be informed, we will continue to have a communication where all the public media depends on their editorial line which follows politics or economic interests. You look at all the media, and the ones providing good information normally have ads but they will not advertise in media where the information could ‘harm’ them. Not all the companies are bad or should be investigated, but if you analyse how the ads are scheduled in some media and you ask yourself, can Ford sell a Cherokee with an ad in “X” radio program? And the answer is “no” then you realise that ad is a message.

And it’s different from the financial model of [the ONG in investigative journalism] Ciper in Chile. That’s what we should be trying to achieve. They manage to get ten transnational or important companies financially support two years of the investigation, without interfering in the investigation or with the editorial line at all, and financially committing to support the project for a minimum period of time. If they want to pull out, they have to notify in advance to allow the journalists to find another supporter. [With a model like this] then you can do some things because if you can have funding you probably have more freedom and capacity to investigate.

Florencia Melgar: And [can investigations be done] in the Universities?

Roger Rodriguez: It would be very interesting if universities could do it as well. Many American universities have best investigated some stories. Some of the best investigations about Latin American human rights, sexuality, equality, environment etc., are done in foreign universities with financially supported projects. They aren’t always a success, because it also depends on the views of the researchers.

I’m responsible for the office of Transparency of Montevideo’s local government and we are working on the right of access to information and in the last three years nobody in Uruguay
has paid me to write. I went to Panama [to attend an event on transparency and access to information] and I discovered a myriad of potential investigations. There was a person who presented a project of how to demand corporate social responsibility to construction companies that are building motorways in the Colombian rainforest. Why? Because when you bring 2000 construction workers, truck drivers to a population of 500-600 people, the first thing that happens is child sexual exploitation. It is not just about how to feed 2000 people, but all the issues around them and the corporate social responsibility through education so that the terrible levels of child sexual exploitation do not increase. It is so bad to the point that poor people go around exhibiting their children because they need the money. So, when you face these realities, there is so much to do, and you do not need that much money to investigate, nor do you need too much Google, or Wikipedia; you need field work.

**Stories to investigate in Uruguay**

Roger Rodriguez: About the recent past – that I call present past because it is still present – you cannot forget what you do not know. Hence, you cannot remember until we know the truth. The first thing is to follow the money; what is the origin of JR trucks owned by Colonel Aguerre? What buildings were built by Valparaiso real estate? What are the stolen or blackmailed properties? I know Colonel Bolentini owned 85 properties; he was a lawyer and a notary. Who were the businessmen of the dictatorship? Which was the illicit enrichment of the dictatorships supporters? What is the real origin of the economic power in Uruguay? About the disappeared people: the only answer will come from the soldiers who dug the graves; they know where they are. It won’t come from the officials, the “unpunished” and their accomplices: soldiers, policemen, judicial and diplomatic servants, etc.

[If we] identify them and cross the information, you will find family groups and very specific sectors of power. Who are Uruguay’s richest families? Many years ago part of the history of this country could be written only through funeral news, as well as news of the high society. You realise what society you live in: the funeral news includes the whole family, and the news about the social events, you discover who married who. By investigating this news you can identify the 500 more powerful families in Uruguay. What happened with the Bafisud’s accounts (South American Financial Bank)? Who paid the bills of the Commercial bank that went out of business three times? And the finances of religions and sects?
Florencia Melgar: That is a perfect case of a transnational investigation. Go to “18 de Julio Street” and find out how much that church costs.

Roger Rodriguez: [So many topics to investigate]
Who really owns Uruguayan media? They should be Uruguayan but there are front men of international corporations. The SAFIs (offshore companies) and their crimes. The anonymous societies created by “Ignacio Posadas y vecinos”. Who has really benefitted from the forestry industry? Who are the actual owners of the soy plantations? Who owns Uruguay’s cold storage companies? What happened to the pirate fishing and the black hake scandal? What is the net product of the country; how much stays and how much leaves? How is money laundry still happening in Uruguay? Foreign Affairs: Army official’s escapees; the impunity of Uruguay’s diplomats; The Argentinean – Brazilian business lobby in Punta del Este. Who are the rich foreigners in Uruguay. Professional gamblers in Maldonado’s Casino. American soldiers with war records who are protected by Uruguay. Who is in Interpol’s list of Uruguayan criminals and for what reasons. Who is included in that list and who isn’t. The “red” suburbs; the hypothesis of conflict of the “Metropolitan” guard. State intelligence and the role it plays. The profits of private education. The graft of Uruguayan laboratories. Technology traffickers in the health sector. The soccer and the basketball mafias. Children trafficking in sports. The D.E.A and drugs in Uruguay; what are its businesses. Smugglers in Uruguay; past and present. The Korean and Chinese mafia operating in Uruguay. Nazis in Uruguay who are still active and they might be linked to the murders of transgender people. The truth about vigilante justice. The traffic of diamonds and precious stones in Montevideo’s old city. The criminal groups called “polibandas”; what’s their background and the connections with high profile politicians. Security companies: what are they securing?
Sergio Israel is a Uruguayan investigative journalist, specialised in cold cases, political crimes related to the Uruguayan and Latin American dictatorships.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D84f1odCTEs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D84f1odCTEs)
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

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Florence Melgar: What are the most important investigations of your career?

Sergio Israel: It’s an investigation I did in 2001 that I broadened in 2009. It’s about the Uruguay of the 1970s and the case of the murder of [Colonel Ramon] Trabal. In the first edition of the book I was quite cautious because it involves the Intelligence services and there are files that are closed and many interests involved. In 2009 when I was offered the opportunity of broadening the investigation, I felt more secure. The contacts I had overseas were very useful as well. So even though the challenges were still there, the support from overseas helped me. In the first version of the book [the support] was from colleagues. Not in the second one; I worked directly with sources who had access to information.

Florence Melgar: How did the exchange with other journalists work?

Sergio Israel: In this particular case, it was very specific and we spoke the same language. When you are asking for help, you can’t expect the other to dedicate a hundred per cent. You
give a hand when you are asked, and when you ask for support, you carry the load of the work. It is different when you agree to investigate together. In another case I was following I went overseas to investigate the [Eugenio] Berrios case. I received a lot of support from two Chilean journalists. They had investigated the story before so I returned with a trolley this high of documents *raises hand up to chest* which helped me a lot. The Chilean colleagues gave me all the papers but it wasn’t an investigation we did together. Even though I tried to reciprocate, I was the one with the main interest, because we were like in different moments.

**Florencia Melgar: Is there potential to investigate topics in common in Latin America?**

Sergio Israel: There is no doubt there are topics in common. With the technology available, things are much quicker; you don’t need to wait to meet face to face. Going back to the Trabal case, I also consulted colleagues from United States who had investigated Latin America topics. It needs to be clear when you are working together, or when one is doing an investigation, the other one helps you within his limitations. No doubt there are topics in common; technology makes communication easier cutting down the time required. What I find difficult is to find a college who trusts you.

**Florencia Melgar: What do you think about an agreed method to investigate?**

Sergio Israel: I work quite a bit like an artisan. The issue around financing investigations and the protocols, etc., in general terms, I’m a bit suspicious about it. I prefer to work in a different way. For example, when you go to another country and –in this case I went to Chile- you don’t know how to move so you consult the people you trust and meet the colleagues who are supposed to be the equivalent of what you are in your country.

When you are talking about a project, and particularly related to financing, I think it’s more complicated. Maybe it’s my prejudice, but I feel that to keep the independence, I focus on the trust and credibility of the journalist than anything else.
Florence Melgar: Are there Uruguayan journalists able to work systematically in regional projects?

Sergio Israel: Of course, Uruguay has people, yes. I think journalists face the same problems everyone in the world deals with, and in Uruguay it’s a bit worse because of the size of the country. Going against any kind of power is complex. This problem is more accentuated in Uruguay because everyone knows each other and the rules can be unclear. So, I think it is a bit more difficult. Yes, there is potential, but it’s always like paddling against the current.

Florence Melgar: Could public media finance investigative journalism?

Sergio Israel: Yes, yes, I think it is possible. You can have a reasonable level of expectation to do investigative journalism in some areas and in other areas you have to use other media; there are things you won’t achieve. The fact that investigative journalism exists is a good thing, even if the investigation is about “birds.”

Florence Melgar: Are there investigations you couldn’t finish due to a lack of resources?

Sergio Israel: Lots of them… many… It’s common to start an investigation, but then life takes you somewhere else, and you arrive to the conclusion that you won’t convince anyone to pay for your plane ticket or support you financially and you are not always willing to follow the story, and in the meantime, you start following another story, So there are stories left in the process because you lose interest, or it’s just not relevant any more, or the story looks so complicated, it is lost in the process.

You can’t pretend either to do all the big investigations you are interested in. Maybe what you need to do is to narrow them down. Generally, you are limited by time pressure.
Walter Pernas is a Uruguay journalist specialized in investigative journalism; he’s also a teacher and a writer. He is one of the co-directors and founders of the website “Sudestada”.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SNhv4rDxkYo&t=40s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation (Montevideo, June 2015)

Florencia Melgar: What are the most relevant investigations in your career?

Walter Pernas: One of the investigations we did in Brecha weekly was the one that found Nelson Bardesio a former member of the death squad, who had been hiding for thirty six years. I think it was important for the resolution of the case of Castagneto, who disappeared in 1971.

Maybe that’s the best example in terms of investigations on human rights. There are others that have to do with international corruption, and Uruguay’s connection with United States and the Virgin islands…
Florencia Melgar: Investigations that didn’t have enough resources

Walter Pernas: This one I’m going to talk about I’m not sure if we didn’t continue only due to lack of resources… We discovered the money connection of this Spanish man with Uruguay, going through the Virgin islands… investing with a Canadian gold tycoon living in United States. We discovered that the owners of the company used to channel Barcena’s money most of them were Argentineans and some Uruguayans. We didn’t have money to continue the investigation. We are a poor independent media. We investigate without being paid for it and with the help we can get. We could still do it with some help from a colleague in Spain and lots of intelligence online and lots of cross checking data. The case was well received in Spain as it was added to the Court case, as well as in Uruguay. In Argentina it had little impact even though the companies in the core of the transactions were Argentinean. And in the United States and the Virgin Islands it had very little impact. It wasn’t picked up all that much by other Uruguay media. But that’s a Uruguayan’s media attitude of ignoring small media’s reporting, that will continue existing until something else changes. But we would have wanted to travel to confirm some information about more properties, but it was impossible. It’s information we have there but we find it difficult to confirm. There are some place where we know there are some companies and properties. We presume they are strongly related, we have serious evidence this is the case, and it’s impossible to confirm it online. There are things that can be confirmed in public records. And there are things that can’t and you need to travel, talk to people and find documents on the ground.

Florencia Melgar: What lessons have you learned in international investigations?

Walter Pernas: There’s much more information in public records than the one we suspect. This is something I always suggest to my students… When you start doing an investigation you think everyone is conspiring against you and hiding information that you have to unravel in a very complex way. But sometimes it is not like that. There are investigations of that kind, that’s true but there are also many investigations where you can go to public records and the information is there waiting for someone to find it. What happens is that journalists don’t go to get the information. And journalists don’t know these public records exist. That’s a lesson we need to learn. Lately we have used those public records, the ones in Panama, in United States. The American ones allowed us to do the investigation about Eugenio Figueredo,
former FIFA vice president. Looking at the public records of California, we found some of the properties Figueredo owned in Los Angeles, valued 5 million dollars. Nobody was hiding that information; it was available for anyone to get it. We did, and of course the records didn’t say “Eugenio Figueredo” in all of them. So we had to build his family network to discover the properties that he actually owned. We did it through a lot of field work done from Uruguay using networks and some confirmations of another kind.

**Florenica Melgar: Is there potential for transnational investigative journalism in Latin America?**

Walter Pernas: It’s not easy to know who you can trust. That’s a problem investigative methods largely between journalists, and maybe pressing a button in the wrong moment, can disarticulate a whole investigation. We have a fundamental problem; journalists in the region should know each other much better to exchange ideas; there’s nothing better than meeting face to face. Even though the network is phenomenal, we need to exchange works, methods, ideas… analyse the coincidences that allow us to work together, and then try it. I think it’s essential to have a network of this kind. When we talk about trust… we say: “In Uruguay we are few people and we all know each other”. So we are always very careful who we share information with because there’s always “a cousin of…” or “a friend of…” And the world is much bigger than Uruguay but these things can still happen. Power operates in unexpected ways. That’s why we need to be sure the journalist is willing to do that kind of things… or if in a certain moment the investigation slashes the media company he works for, how is the journalist going to behave? In my case, I’ve worked for a number of companies –luckily not any more.

When we discuss these issues with the students we explain journalists don’t own the information, nor do media organisations. A journalist doesn’t work for a media company, but within it. So if the information is not going to be published by your media company –aside of the journalist right to quit the job, etc.- the information needs to be passed on to another journalist who can publish it. That’s the way I behave and the way we do things in Sudestada even though it doesn’t happen there because we are a co-op and we self-manage and we don’t have relations of power with anyone. But if it happened in any way, we would follow our ethical mandate of getting the story out somehow.
Florence Melgar: What do you think about arriving to an agreement before starting to investigate collaboratively?

Walter Pernas: In Uruguay we need to do something else before. This is to educate the new generations about what investigative journalism really is. There’s an old dilemma – I think it isn’t a dilemma anymore- that exists in Uruguay. There are two schools that discuss if all journalism is investigative journalism, or not. I think that debate should be done by now, because investigative journalism is not conventional journalism.

Are the tools used in investigative used by conventional journalism? Yes, like checking the information. But investigative journalism has guidelines that need to be respected; originality of the story; checking the sources, the service of giving information of this kind that someone somewhere might want to hide. That it’s useful to society: to change laws, to eventually generate judicial decisions… only to name some basics of investigative journalism. But this is not clear in Uruguay’s journalism. So when we agree with the new generations that investigative journalism is necessary, then we can establish [an agreement] with very basic criteria, because each investigation has its profile.

Florence Melgar: Unesco released a manual a few years ago… What’s your opinion?

Walter Pernas: It’s a very basic manual. I’d almost say it’s a good introduction for students in the last year of journalism so that they know how it works. It’s didactic. But when you contrast the theory with reality … when you try to use the manual … to investigate certain cases and you find a closed door, and you need to find a way to open it, and the manual doesn’t explain it: this is also experience.

The richness of exchanging experiences between journalists helps to find solutions for certain cases. You can apply what another journalist did in other part of the world to open a door, and that’s great.
Florencia Melgar: Your opinion about publishing a story in another country to avoid legal risks?

Walter Pernas: Investigative journalism implies risks and we all know it. I go back to the beginning... You need to be aware that the information belongs to the people, not the journalist or the media. In this sense you have to exhaust the resources to publish the information. There could be legal limitations and no one expects a journalist to face jail because of the country’s legislation. But you can find mechanisms to filter the information to avoid going to prison. In a case of that kind you’d need to make an international scandal.

We’ve realised there are people in the world willing to investigate. Even though we might have criteria differences, we are very advanced and we feel the same passion for the information and the truth. Investigative journalists have a deep commitment with the truth. That’s basic. A non-committed journalist isn’t an investigative journalist. He’s not going to care about the story. When you start investigating and you discover there’s something wrong, that’s something is unfair that feeling of fairness experienced by the investigative journalist is the engine that makes him work to find the best possible information to publish.

Florencia Melgar: What’s Latin American potential for collaborative journalism?

Walter Pernas: Now we are much more communicated than in the past. I think that social media and the opportunity to communicate through networks has allowed us to know many more stories than we used to. You can see there’s a kind of common language, at least in relation to the shared feeling of fairness. In some conferences we feel there is an understanding but that’s just the beginning. It’s good; then we need to see if that coordination can happen. We need to start somewhere.

In fact, there are networks and it has started already. And there are heaps of topics to investigate... that sense I think Latin America is setting an example and there are many countries that are much more advanced than Uruguay. I feel bewildered about what’s happening with investigative journalism.
Florencia Melgar: What’s Sudestada experience in data journalism?

Walter Pernas: With Sudestada we received two awards last year with relatively simple investigations. That’s what we can afford… but even though they were simple, they were relevant for Uruguay.

The first one was to make a data base with all the donations received by the political parties during the electoral campaigns. It was a data base of 2009 that could put together in 2014. It only includes public records. It took long because the format of the Electoral Court data was not re-usable. They were .pdf files and sometimes they were even hand-written. We took all of them and put them in a data base and the readers could access the data base (called “Who pays? The route of the money in the electoral campaign) and select per party, per donor, per amounts, and discover who donated who. Based on this data base, we wrote a number of stories, because this information is relevant to the audience if it includes certain quality information that helps them search… what am I looking for… what do I want to find? We discovered cases of corruption –still unsolved- in which companies that couldn’t donate, still did it. These companies were not allowed to donate because they were concessionaire of public works. There’s still no sanction but at least we could tell the people what they’ve done that was wrong. There were also some illegal donations because they were anonymous and it’s only allowed up to a certain amount. They were recorded as anonymous but they exceeded the limit the law establishes for this kind of donations. This experience that was relatively simple was like planting a seed for data journalism.

We’ve just received another prize, that has to do with Parliamentary transparency, and we’ll try to create a data base through which the civil society can communicate whit the MPs and understand how certain bills are progressing. So they know about the legislation before it’s approved. What happens today? The Parliament passes bills and we start complaining after they are discussed and approved. This project aims to create a link between the civil society and the PMs so the questions can be made before the bills are approved. It’s a transparency platform so that citizens are able to know the steps of the legislation process. This application provides another service that is to know when an MP travels how much they spent, how much it was reimbursed, which trips were chosen, what they did in the trips, how many days
were absent, which projects they voted and which ones they didn’t. How many times they went to the Parliament and how many they didn’t.

**Florencia Melgar: Would you use Interpol’s software or similar?**

Walter Pernas: If I find Interpol’s software, I use it, yes. That’s different from negotiating with Interpol so they find information for me. Let’s set an example… if the software allows me to hack people’s emails, then I wouldn’t use it because there are ethical considerations that I’ll have to respect. I wouldn’t do it. If there’s some information that Interpol found through hacking an email, and I access, I don’t say I won’t read it. I’d probably read it. I didn’t do the operation. If I access the information…where is the crime, in accessing or in revealing it?

[There are techniques that] are very advanced, that’s true. I know some of them, not all. But it’s also true that many times the techniques used by Interpol come from the civil society. So it’s the other way around. Are there lots of people thinking for Interpol? It’s true. There are many people in the civil society working for third parties, for themselves, or for fun who generate very important tools.

And I think that journalism is accessing –not sure if quicker than Interpol- is accessing the mechanisms without having to go through Interpol. It’s very important that journalists start learning more about technology, and how the software works so we can have a career in investigative journalism. Data analysis software allows us to produce better investigations that would be impossible to do otherwise.

**Florencia Melgar: Are there journalists in Uruguay to be part of transnational investigations?**

Walter Pernas: In general, those journalists work in independent media, or they work as freelancers. And there are other journalists who work in media companies that aren’t interested in this kind of journalism, they play a role in that company, sometimes it’s a matter of years. As we say in Uruguay, the journalist who has the investigative bug, he’ll publish somewhere. He’ll start with simpler stories, and within the limits permitted by the company, but if he
really likes it, he’ll do it independently, or supported by third parties –which is becoming a common modality. There are foundations that support investigative journalism. In Uruguay’s scale, there are some outstanding journalists, and there are young people –not many- with strong commitment with whom we should work much more.

**Florencia Melgar: Thanks very much.**

Walter Pernas: Thank you.
Andrés D’Alessandro is the executive director of the Argentinean press group “Foro de Periodismo Argentino” (FOPEA).

Access the video interview: https://youtu.be/nSzkcqXsxDQ
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Andres D’Alessandro: I’m the executive director of the Association of Argentinean journalistic entities. I’ve studied journalism; I have a bachelor in Communications. And I worked for many years in the Argentine journalism Forum (FOPEA) which is an organisation of journalists.

One of the global trends we identified at FOPEA in terms of collaborative investigative journalism is the need to build networks, build working relationships and trust-based relationships between journalists of different regions or countries, to work together in topics in common.

That’s one of the trends linked to what the donors are after, like the experience of Connectas in Central America… that I suppose you’ve heard about.

And we do many activities of this kind.
One of the activities of course is training with professional journalists, as well as promoting investigative journalism within media units, that had a “boom” in Argentina in the 80s and 90s.

In the 80s they were more related to human rights issues and the crimes perpetrated between 1976 and 1983. And in the 90s they were more related to corruption crimes. Then, there was a funding decline of investigative teams, which are expensive.

Quality investigative journalism requires investment and sustainability in time. And there’s been a decline in the practice. FOPEA -created in 2002-2003- began to encourage the use of investigative journalism tools, and the creation of teams.

When we realised we weren’t lucky with the creation of teams (even though the training had been good) we looked for our own resources to support investigative units, away from the media’s logic and using digital platforms to push them out.

We did a number of investigations with international support. In a first stage, they were linked to environment topics. And then, in a second stage, in the last two years, we’ve been investigating quite a lot about organised crime and drug trafficking, people trafficking, drug gangs, etc. These are some of the initiatives I’ve been related to.

**Florencia Melgar: What do you think about agreeing on a methodology that could help journalists manage resources more effectively when we work with colleagues from different countries? Sometimes the challenge is not only [finding] financial support but other issues like time management, or standards, or even deadlines. It challenges the view of journalists who say investigative journalism can’t follow any methodology because everyone has their own way. What do you think?**

Andres D’Alessandro: I think we can find standards in terms of professional training, that are more or less common, that in principle have to do with journalism quality. And I include ethics within quality.
Those professional standards exist; infinity of ethics codes have been written by universities, public media, journalists associations, unions, professional associations… There are many and I think it would be important to consolidate these kind of standards as a first step, or at least share a similar logic. And I’m saying this to apply to global and regional levels, as well as at a national level.

In my country, that is quite big, I wouldn’t say there are different schools of investigative journalism because it’s not true, but there are different modalities and practices and perhaps they don’t always know about the standards that are used, for example, in the big cities. Sometimes they [can be] too relaxed, which is not good for the quality of the information, or for the audience.

In practical terms, you can look for certain standards, that are more or less similar, but there’s a permanent evolution.

The new technologies are constantly changing the logic of investigative journalism: collaborative journalism; data journalism; coordination between journalists; programmers; designers, anything that has to do with scrapping -which also allows citizens to collaborate through search platforms to identify large volumes of information.

I mean, the tools change, and then it’s more difficult to systematise it. It’s important to have meetings like the one we are going to attend now in Lima, and like those in Colombia, Brazil, in Argentina, where we are promoting investigative journalism and digital journalism. I mean… sharing the practices and the logic behind an investigation with other colleagues so we can learn.

And then perhaps it’s beneficial to systematise those practices. For example, who were the winners of the Latin American investigative journalism award last year? Well, are there common patterns in the topics, in the methodologies, in ethics…? There are common patterns or not.

Also the agendas are different but without any doubt the jury could certainly learn a lot from other awards, how to choose a winner.
I mention this because recently we had the investigative journalism award in Argentina… and what’s the criteria… [There are many elements] You have the criterion of impact, or the methodology, or the use of sources or the ethics behind the investigation.

In my view, the most important thing is the methodology, and the origin of the information. I’m not saying this is a central element, but the origin is related to the trust and the credibility of the journalist.

In recent years in Argentina there has been a lot of what we call “throwing folders”, right? [information that comes from] the intelligence services, or mafia-kind of groups, that produce information that’s not necessarily real. Or the content is partially real, and suddenly appears on a journalist’s desk, or an email, or a leak.

Then it’s necessary to check if that information is published as such or if the journalist worked to elaborate it, review it and if he has disclosed [the source of the information] to his readers. This is an element of professional quality: that the reader knows all the characteristics of the investigation and the [production] process behind it.

Florencia Melgar: That’s why data journalism is being so welcomed as the reader can see the process…

Andres D’Alessandro: He can see the process, he can collaborate, he can disaggregate data, he can draw his own conclusions, or use some of the data to arrive to conclusions.

And another trend we’ve identified in Argentina -that I’m not sure if it’s included in your research- is that many stories become investigative journalism books. In this format, journalists feel the maximum freedom they could have, not only because of the space to write -both in print and digital- but also because it’s the platform with less editorial restrictions.

This doesn’t mean the ethical codes aren’t respected, or quality norms are broken. It means you have much more freedom, because you’re your own boss, aside of the editor.
But what happens? The publisher wants to sell so he allows you to have that freedom that sometimes doesn’t happen in media organisations, that’s limited within mainstream and other media outlets.

It’s a phenomenon that has been happening in Argentina for a while now. And it has allowed some topics -that are only briefly covered by media or discussed by the public opinion- survive and have a bigger impact, when the investigation is published in a book. I’m not sure if this was your focus…

**Florencia Melgar:** It’s very interesting because investigative journalism books are a worldwide phenomenon. I’m not sure how many people read them. If they are scandalous, or if they have a good title, good press…

**Andres D’Alessandro:** Look, publishers ask for them. And I know many colleagues who start publishing a story in a newspaper and they immediately receive a call from a publisher asking them to deep dive into the investigation. And it happens with diverse political views. We’ve had publications that are close to the government and others that are very critical, very hard against it.

**Florencia Melgar:** Latin American investigative stories -which are many and very good- are almost unknown overseas. And the coverage of Latin America is scarce and superficial, many times portraying a Latin America of thirty or forty years ago.

**Andres D’Alessandro:** In my experience working for international media -I used to be a contributor for “Los Angeles Times” in Buenos Aires between 2002 and 2008… I can say there is an issue of global agendas -especially after 2001- that limits the presence of information from regions like Latin America or countries like ours.

The dominant agendas are around the Middle East, the Maghreb, China, India, Russia, and that’s it. Not even Europe, except when there are problems like the ones we are experiencing now.
There is a structural problem that has to do with the attention paid to different regions based on a basic criterion of what’s newsworthy in your own country.

If you compare the impact of Syria or Iran versus Colombia, Bolivia, Uruguay or Argentina, then there is a clear problem there. Maybe it also depends on the efforts of the autochthon journalists to show the geopolitical or geostrategic importance of the things that happen in our countries.

From the office of “The Angeles Times” we used to fight to be assigned a space… You had to look for topics that had a high level impact; maybe the more emotional stories worked but that also involved some kind of North American presence.

Also, in which way an event in China or India, for example, impacted geopolitically in our region. We tried to find a way to report on the local impact of this [global] agenda. But that has to do more with current affairs, not so much about in-depth or investigative journalism.

Any event, like the Argentinean elections that we cover, it’s about how we cover it.

**Florencia Melgar: It’s the same story you get in the wires, the same thing is repeated all over the world. Can’t we go a bit beyond that?**

**Andres D’Alessandro:** I think it depends on the interests. For example, the Argentinean elections we are going through now, I’m closely following the Spanish press, and they are doing a very precise coverage; sometimes richer than the local one. But of course, there are economic interests there are historical relations between the countries.

**Florencia Melgar: We speak the same language**

**Andres D’Alessandro:** … we speak the same language… it’s something you mentioned and I hadn’t thought about it… but I think language is an important barrier. But in journalism the newsworthiness is measured by the impact, with emotional stories, that can surprise and move the reader at the same time. Maybe we have to find a way through thinking of these criteria.
Perhaps the very important investigations about corruption, about violation of human rights, about environment issues - that have had a big impact in the region in the last years- maybe we should have thought how to re-write them or subedit so that they have an impact in other countries.

You were thinking about the standardisation. But sometimes the different ways of receiving the information also modifies the content.

**Florencia Melgar:** I’m thinking of the standardisation of the process, not the product. With the same material, journalists from different countries will write different headlines.

You are moderating a panel today about how we do investigative journalism today. What is it going to be about?

Andres D’Alessandro: The idea is to look for those patterns that in the last years in the region have led to investigations that have an impact and are robust in the long term. Sometimes a Court investigation can overthrow the main hypothesis that supported some investigations.

And [we are also looking for] some methodological standards. That’s what they asked me to do. Let’s see what comes out of this meeting. And it’s only the beginning. Surely there will be a road to follow in the coming congresses. The idea is to take advantage of the presence of colleagues from the region and other areas of the world to discuss methodologies, processes.

We hope we can help you as well.

**Florencia Melgar:** Thanks very much.
Carola Fuentes was born in Santiago, Chile and earned a bachelor’s degree in journalism and communication from the Universidad Católica in Chile. Carola was nominated for an International Emmy in 2005 for an investigation into Paul Shaefer, a fugitive and the most wanted criminal in Chile, who lived in impunity in Argentina for eight years.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQjdskXRlQo&t=18s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: In general terms, do journalists from different countries investigating together need an initial agreement?

Carola Fuentes: In my experiences, both local and international, I’ve noted that collaboration increases the efficiency of the work, compared with [the experiences of] working alone. I have very positive memories of one of Colpin’s first meetings – I think it was in Buenos Aires- probably in 2004.

I met some Argentinean colleagues, we became friends and we exchanged emails. After that, I was investigating the whereabouts of Paul Schaefer, a very known Chilean fugitive. He had been on the run for more than ten years. He had been in charge of [the illegal detention
centre] “Colonia Dignidad”, he was accused of horrible crimes, and I was looking for him in Argentina.

I remember writing to one of these journalists, I asked him for help and very quickly he passed on the car plate number to the police and they confirmed the address where the car was registered. That was one of the clues that one year afterwards allowed us to find Paul Schaefer.

What am I trying to say with this? Collaboration, whether it is through formal agreements or it’s informal, just through the knowledge we have amongst us in different countries, it always has results.

I’m not sure if an entity, or an institution or even documents are needed; it’s enough if you know the people so it’s a fruitful relationship.

Florencia Melgar: The information exchange is not always systematised but eventually this needs to be done, which takes more time, or not all the journalists invest the same amount of time, or have the same timeline... [In terms of an agreement] some journalists argue [it can’t be done because] we all have different workflows. And I think that’s precisely why making agreements is a way of making a more efficient use of the resources, because time is what we never have.

Carola Fuentes: Your question is quite complicated, and I’m closer to answer that’s difficult to coordinate not only because of the different ways of working, but also due to the diverse needs of the media organisations [involved]. I think that even though we face very similar problems in all Latin America, and the behaviour patterns are repeated in different countries, or companies, or the same people committing crimes in more than one country, the realities or our media outlets are different in terms of resources, and the culture.

So I think that trying to arrive to a very strict formalisation that tries to unify the investigative methods that could have a praiseworthy objective, for some journalists it could be an entanglement or a loss of freedom, that’s also important in this job. I see it as a bit of a complex thing.
Florencia Melgar: Maybe it should be more like a practical guideline that you can use – or not. Ultimately it’s an optional resource. I’ve never had issues with egos within a team, but this was mentioned here by quite a few colleagues.

Carola Fuentes: I’ve had the same good experience you’ve had, so fortunately I never had problems with egos. In fact, I’ve always been amazed by the collaborations both within my country and overseas.

But thinking in “good practices” I do think it’s fundamental to have role descriptions from the start. For example, roles and responsibilities, the definition of objectives in a kind of journalistic Gantt chart.

We all know that sources don’t normally behave the way we want them to, but at least there [should be] certain objectives and stages that can be planned, as we all work in media organisations and they all have deadlines. Sometimes time pressure isn’t related to the publication date, but the topic itself, and it’s important to not delay the investigation too much.

I think another good practice is to share databases, now that you can upload anything to the cloud, even though that information [security] can be quite uncertain. If we are talking about FOI, I think we can share databases saved in the cloud amongst the teams working together.

Now technology allows this in an adequate way and you can save lots of time if you share those databases. What I do think is missing is a place, a platform, where we can consolidate the information we are collecting. Like a mapping of what’s happening in Latin America, with easy access and visualisation. I could be investigating something in my country or with other countries and we don’t even suspect that a big part of this investigation is advanced in a regional country.

I think it would be great if we could create a kind of mapping that I think could be of free public access. I’m not afraid of public access. [I think] that when information is made public it is more fertile than being very encrypted or secured. So as I’m always after collaboration
instead of competing, I’m not afraid of the possibility of someone finding some information to reveal, or having the scoop.

I’ve been trying for many years to avoid working for the journalistic scoop and instead work to serve our audience, our public. Whether is one team or another one, it’s important the information is published.

**Florencia Melgar: How do you build the trust with another journalist you don’t know?**

**Is it a necessary condition to know the journalist to be able to work together?**

Carola Fuentes: I think that depends more on each one’s personality –or personal experiences- rather than a recipe. I try to trust more than distrust. I think the information protects us rather than threaten us.

I think that overcoming distrust we could advance in this era of information and take more advantage of the information as we share it with higher levels of trust between us. A good example of how public works was mentioned by our Brazilian colleagues and how the Attorney’s office made all the information available to the public, every time they closed a stage of the investigation.

I’m sure that making that information public was a protection shield to stop the people affected from silencing the investigation. I think that the more public the information is, the more protected we all are.

**Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.**
Carlos Eduardo Huertas is the Director of CONNECTAS and also directs the Investigative Reporting Initiative in the Americas, a project of the International Centre for Journalists (ICFJ).

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gjTngZIFO0
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: Connectas is a non for profit journalistic initiative and the main objective is to facilitate information exchange around key development topics in the Americas.

If we were going to make a hypothetical mapping of the things that happen in the region, you’ll see a high activity in political and integration initiatives, and multilateral initiatives that starts with the Organisation of American States (OAS) in 1946, then Aladi, the Andes Parliament, Mercoursr, ALBA, the Pacific Alliance, Unasur…

Independently from the ideological differences, there is evidence that things are moving: there are spaces where decisions are made and as journalists we tend to distrust them, but there are things happening in that space.
In the business world, there are many things happening as well.

The so called “Multi Latin” companies, that are those corporations that are created in Latin America and have their main operation in the region, they have an increasing presence in the international rankings, and you can find them in the Forbes list or the Boston Consulting Group, not to mention the cases of businessmen like Carlos Slim, or other Latin Americans who are in a leading places in these lists.

The reflection here is… what out of all this means real changes in the quality of Latin American’s lives.

In this sense, there is a deficit. The levels of poverty and inequity in the region are very high. There’s an additional variable, that’s the culture of illegality, which is widespread in the region.

The organised crime understood the transnational dimension long ago, and has worked integrated from Rio Grande to the Patagonia.

Latin America has the advantage of similar languages and traditions; the divisions are mainly political.

Our challenge is to transform the camaraderie environment in a productivity environment. In this universe there are many transnational stories, the media is far below the levels of the rest [of the actors]. It’s just by chance that sometimes media addresses some of these topics, but not in a systematic way. Connecta’s challenge is to elevate that level and tell those stories regularly and permanently of what’s happening in this universe and improve the understanding of the continent.

**Florencia Melgar: How do you connect media organisations?**

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: We have several strategies of journalistic production that are linked to the platform’s sustainability model. Connectas is a journalistic platform which uses a
strategy to support colleagues in various areas; it’s the way to be sustainable. What any Latin American revolutionary group would call “the combination of all the fighting strategies.”

In the production area we are developing a strategy that we call “Connectas Hub” that has enabled us to identify new talent within a program that we have together with the ICFJ called “Initiative for Investigative Journalism in the Americas”. This program has enabled us to work in eight countries and Connectas has been developing stories in other four countries. There you have a group of people we’ve been working with and establishing the basic variables needed in a collaborative work.

The first one is trust. If you don’t trust your counterpart, it will be very difficult to start any of these adventures, in all senses. The topics are usually sensitive, and you need to feel confident that the information you are told they have found is within the classic standards of journalism, that it’s been checked, and they’ve done their best to have precise information.

The other variable is the clarity in the coordination, which is fundamental. Even though journalists have this kind of apostolate around democratic values, when developing stories, it is necessary to make it very clear each one’s role so that things can evolve in an appropriate way. When you have four, five, six people you can’t be agreeing on where a comma goes in the edition of a text, for example. Or which word to use, or even the approach…

The third element is clear communications. We call these the three “c”: trust, coordination and communication [confianza, coordinación y comunicación, in Spanish]. These are the baseline to start building a collaborative work and a relationship that it’s in essence a relationship of camaraderie and complicity, to do in in-depth stories using investigative journalism techniques.

**Florencia Melgar: Do you have –or recommend- a team coordinator or does Connectas play the coordinator’s role?**

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: We articulate most of the works; we lead the productions, and we are at least the investigation’s co-directors.
It’s the hallmark of what we have been building, combining traditional platforms, like El Mercurio in Chile and also articulated with a Colombian non for profit, or with “Agenda Propia” or Peruvian websites. It’s a model that works.

**Florenca Melgar: What are the lessons learned in this process?**

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: Latin American journalists tend to be relaxed. Because we have this social approach in the personal interactions, we don’t like verbalising some things. And it’s important to define who will do what in each role, clearly define the communication rules.

Why? Starting from the very basics, if you are working in a team with a number of people, and you agree to have a meeting using Skype—or any other video call service- at a certain hour, and one of the team members doesn’t attend, the harmony of the team is affected because everyone is investing time to meet with the team.

If the information that was supposed to be shared in the meeting isn’t available, then it starts failing.

There are some key issues… like the management of the information has pushed us to elevate the standards of digital communications to keep them clean. When we are working on a sensitive story we discuss how we avoid leaks of our communications…

**Florenca Melgar: Do you use encrypted emails?**

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: Yes, we use encrypted technology, using the multiple platforms available, from video calls to emails.

There are four pillars to work on a collaborative transnational or individual publication.

The first one is the agenda setting: what’s the origin of the story. In collaborative works, it’s very important to be aware that these are efforts that involve a lot of energy, so you can’t apply them to anything.
The role of the articulator is to make agreements amongst different views, and understanding the differences with other media partners, and bringing people together. If you don’t have clarity about what the story is about and what you are planning to do, it’s not worth wearing out that mechanism.

It consumes too much energy to invest in processes that won’t have an outcome. [We need to] identify stories that are really worth [the effort].

The second element is how we look for information. The universe there is a giant: from the traditional source consultation, to FOI requests, to big data base management, to leaks, citizens’ involvement…

The third key element can be controversial in collaborative works – and the leadership here is crucial- and I’m referring to the definition of the approach. A good story is like a vein of gold at a certain depth. And we are on the surface trying to identify what’s the best way to get to it. If you deviate one degree on the surface it’s likely that you won’t reach the gold.

That’s one of the leadership and articulation. Sometimes journalists neglect the scarcest resource we have, that is time. In collaborative work, it’s not only your personal time, but everyone’s time.

**Florencia Melgar: When do you do the feasibility analysis? What is the best moment to do it?**

Carlos Eduardo Huertas: I think you need to know from the beginning what’s the minimum story you can expect.

As journalists we are all very enthusiastic and we want to change the world with our stories and it’s likely some of them could affect the reality, but you also have to be aware of what’s the least we can achieve with this effort, define clear timelines. Both the methodology and the planning are necessary for any process.
In Connectas we’ve developed a matrix for investigative journalism, that we call “the brain” of the investigative journalist, that involves collecting the step by step mental process journalists normally follow when they approach an issue, and mapping it in a way that helps planning the investigation.

In essence, the matrix has the same steps that you have included in this methodological proposal.

There are many ways to collaborate. The basic one is when a big media outlet asks a stringer or a correspondent, and you ask them for some information for a particular story you are producing.

It’s part of the rules to define. There isn’t only one way to do it. The most complex model is to work like equal partners. One of the variables to consider is to understand the limitations and conditions of the partners. This is like the girl who gets married hoping that her husband will change after they are married. I mean, that’s not going to happen. If I accept to partner with a media outlet that I know has a certain editorial line, that editorial won’t change because they are partnering with me. Or if I know they have certain interests, because that’s the reality. Whether I accept them or I don’t partner with them, that’s part of the pragmatic assessment to be done for each topic.

The other important component is to establish a win – win relationship with the partners and be clear about this in the agreement. It’s something interesting to explore further. We are working with platforms that include volunteer translators. Some stories that have been produced in the frame of these exchanges we are getting them translated to Polynesian languages, English, Portuguese, French…

We need to continue improving these mechanisms. It’s like a muscle, the more you exercise it, the muscle starts having shape and tone, but you have to persevere.

**Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.**

**Carlos Eduardo Huertas: Thank you.**
Daniel Lizárraga

Reporter since 1993. He was a correspondent in Morelos; then worked for newspapers Reforma, El Universal and Proceso, until in 2004 he founded the portal Animal Político, one of the few media organisations in the world who have the code of ethics published and easily accessible to the readers.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnRnK_H1QIQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnRnK_H1QIQ)
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Daniel Lizárraga: We discovered that the former president Enrique Peña Nieto and his wife Angelica Rivera owned a hidden mansion valued in 7 million American dollars in an expensive suburb in Mexico City. It was financed and built by a contractor who worked for the government when Peña Nieto was the governor. During that period, the contractor received millions in public contracts and they had planned the tender allocation for Mexico’s first fast train, valued at USD 3,600 million.

Florencia Melgar: What was the legal impact of this investigation?

Daniel Lizárraga: Some people say the problem is that there was impact on the president. The Presidency is armoured all around and even if we could prove irregular actions, the president can only be tried for treason, whatever that is.
However, I believe there were consequences: the wife had to return the house and the train bidding was cancelled. So they ended up with no house or train.
Florencia Melgar: Methodologically, how did the investigation start; what steps did you take and what was the team work like?

Daniel Lizarraga: It started with a colleague who found an interview in “Hola” magazine, where Angelica Rivera was giving the first interview as the president’s wife. As he was following these interviews, he realised that the photos of the first lady –a soap opera actress- were different from previous ones and that the house was spectacular. He reads the story and finds a quote of the first lady who says “that’s now the family home” they’ll return to after the Presidency.

That’s the element that triggered the idea of the report and the investigation started at this point. It’s a complex investigation because not only we needed patience and time, and we had to face many obstacles, in terms of the method, the important part was developing hypothesis after hypothesis and refuting them as we went.

We constantly asked ourselves if this was the most important part of the story or if there was something else. And then [we had to line up] all the strategies to put the information in order.

Florencia Melgar: Which were those strategies?

Daniel Lizárraga: We worked in concentric circles. Until we finish one stage, we don’t go into the following one.

We did this because we had to cross check the ownership of the property. One address takes you to a house, and the house leads you to a name, and the name leads you to 30 companies, and more houses. And those houses to more companies and those companies to more names… it’s crazy.

We also built a family tree including grandparents and close friends. So we started crossing the company’s registration data with the family tree names. What also helped us a lot were the “simultaneous timelines”; I call them this way.
Florencia Melgar: Did you invent them? [The simultaneous timelines]

Daniel Lizárraga: Yes, I did. There’s something called “time lines”, that we all use. Personally I learnt it from Monica Gonzales, from CIPER, Chile. She worked on two timelines: one is chronological, and the other one, how the money moved. And then she crossed them.

I realised that in this particular case there were too many timelines. If I did it in one only, it would have been “too long”. And I also realised there were many stories within one. So what I tried to do was building four time lines. Then I crossed the dates of all those timelines.

Florencia Melgar: How long did it take you?

Daniel Lizárraga: One year and eight months.

Florencia Melgar: How many people participated?

Daniel Lizárraga: Four journalists but overall 6 or 7 people, including Carmen Aristegui.

Florencia Melgar: If you had to work with journalists from other countries, what are the main things you would need to agree on?

Daniel Lizárraga: the first thing is the heart of the project, how are we going to nail the story we want to tell. This requires a first stage of a lot of research to arrive to an agreement. The second important aspect is how you create the investigation plan, how you are going to present it, but before you start investigating. Like the time lines or the family tree, a place where we can have some order and we know where each piece of information fits.

What I’ve learned is that when you put the information in order you understand what happened. So I think that if you don’t understand how something happened, how can you explain it properly? And one way of understanding is by putting the information in order.
Florence Melgar: Some colleagues suggested having a leader or a coordinator. Others prefer to avoid it. But you still need someone to consolidate the information. What’s your team work experience like?

Daniel Lizárraga: I think there should be someone, but not see him as a boss, but someone who coordinates. It’s not a matter of hierarchy because he knows more… but someone who knows what everyone is doing and who can provide an overview of the story. It can be more than one person.

In our case, each of us was investigating a part of it; we needed a way to bring all the spheres together.

Firstly, you work on each of them and then you put them together. You propose a general scheme that is agreed by all the parts. Someone has to do it.

Florence Melgar: Did the hypothesis change along with the investigation?

Daniel Lizárraga: We had an initial hypothesis, but that’s just a guide. So what we’ve learnt is to challenge it all the time. “It’s fine; it’s wrong; it’s fine…” and the more you question it, the stronger it is. Every punch you resist from your own team means you’re doing well. Now that we have the proposal of working with Connectas, I’ve realised that one of the problems in common is about fact-checking, as you said before. There isn’t enough rigor. We don’t have the habit of American journalists –in general, not all of them- of constantly questioning yourself how well the investigation is done, and verify the data. Especially in our countries in Latin America I’d put the emphasis in the fact-checking process.

Florence Melgar: When many countries are involved, we should allow more time for fact checking.

Daniel Lizárraga: That’s exactly what I mean; we have to give much more relevance [to this process]. After the fact-checking, organise how the story will be distributed. And have a strategy.
Florencia Melgar: Exactly, this is here as “strategic promotion”.

Daniel Lizárraga: Yes, I saw it. What’s the best way to communicate the message? Who can we partner with to publish the story at the same time? This is important because you make people aware and be informed.

Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.

Daniel Lizarraga: Thank you.
David Gonzalez

Head of the Research Unit of El Nacional, a Venezuelan newspaper where he also coordinated the Sunday supplement Siete Días and the section of events and regional information.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UQ4qPrA5le4
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florencia Melgar: What’s your opinion about a methodology for transnational investigations?

David Gonzalez: I think it’s right. This year I had an experience of transnational journalism and it’s certainly not a bad idea to have a protocol that allows some agreements because these are different countries, different cultures, different journalistic traditions and cultures… It started with the initiative of some Brazilian journalists who did a review of a project supported financially by a Brazilian institution called the National Social Development Bank (Bandes) that was managed by [former Brazilian president] Lula.
It used to be a financing plan to internationalise Brazilian companies in Latin America. This was implemented in six countries, I think… Panama, Bolivia, Peru. And my job was to develop the Venezuelan chapter. So I had to work for a few months with a Brazilian editor and the interpretation of the Venezuelan reality, their editorial requirements… was a communion process that was very interesting and very enriching.

What I’ve learned is that we don’t always share the same journalistic schools and traditions. You come to a Congress and you listen how other investigations are done, but when you start doing it, you realise there are procedures, ways of doing things that are different in each country, within the same journalism. I found that interesting.

Maybe the most complicated part is the language barrier. Even though the Brazilian editor spoke very good Spanish, there were always some doubts to resolve when we were correcting the texts [to publish].

So I explained… “this” was interpreted this way but it actually meant “this other thing”. There was a very strict process of correction of the texts. They were published in Spanish, Portuguese and English. The revision in each language was a very demanding process.

**Florencia Melgar:** **If you were going to agree on a protocol/method, after your recent experience, which would be the most relevant 3 to 5 things to include?**

David Gonzalez: I think it’s very important to have a clear expectation of the degree of involvement in the project, which I think it was achieved in this case. This means, the reach, the time, and the data exchange protocols both with the editor and with the rest of the reporters.

The methodology needs to be clearly defined, long before starting. I think in this case it was accomplished. A series of conversation need to take place to agree who is in charge of the photos, who is the responsible editor, we’ll have meetings every “x” time and they will work in this way… Having a pre-agreement is essential, I’ve learned after my experience.
I also think the levels of consultation need to be more “open”. With a journalist of your country you already know, you can have less dialogue, etc. in the process of putting together the story.

Maybe in this case it’d be good if there is a standard that is clearly defined, that could go beyond editorial standards, as you are not only trying to solve the editorial issue itself, but also the cultural distance. As I said, journalistic traditions and schools aren’t exactly the same everywhere.

The other thing I would improve after this experience is to sort out the translations with a much bigger time frame, particularly if they are experiences of transnational journalism involving people who speak several languages. And if we are intended to publish in several languages – which is essential in a transnational investigation- you need to allow lots of time for the translations, ahead of the publication.

Florenzia Melgar: Do you think the best way is to produce the story in one language and then translate it to the others? Or have parallel production processes?

David Gonzalez: I think you need to have a language that works as the matrix, and then you translate from there. But even after that, the revision of the translation needs a good timeframe considering all the journalists involved.

For example, it was difficult to explain that the Prosecutor’s office is a Public Ministry. Our colleagues thought they were an Audit Office, but it’s different. It takes time to explain the institution we are referring to is this one, not that one…

And I’m talking about very practical aspects of it, because in relation to the editorial process, I would follow investigate journalism itself, which has its manuals, and there are certain agreements of how it’s done.

You put the limits [to the investigation] you investigate the way [Argentinean journalist Hugo] Alconada was explaining earlier today: you investigate from the outside to the inside of the topic. You research from the peripheral sources to the sources that are in the heart of...
the subject that you’re going to develop. Those same methodologies I think should be the same ones established in investigative journalism.

**Florencia Melgar: In a methodology or agreement you need someone who is the leader or the coordinator…**

David Gonzalez: I absolutely agree. When I was talking about a pre-agreement I think that’s it: a definition in advance of the roles, times and minimal procedures. That means: we are going to talk twice a week; in the audiovisual, photographic, multiplatform aspect, this is the manager; this is the web manager; this is the editorial manager… but yes, having a project leader is clear that’s very very important.

In the experience I was part of, there was definitely a project leader.

**Florencia Melgar: Did it work all right?**

David Gonzalez: In that aspect I think it did very well. He was a person who assumed his role, his leadership; we also assumed we were going to be conducted by him.

Maybe –depending on the case and the size of the investigation- maybe it’s healthy for the process and it would help the investigation if the centralised conduction kept all the participants informed about how the investigation is going in the rest of the countries involved, for example.

If it’s an investigation about human trafficking that involves five countries, it’s relevant to have a notion of what’s happening and the progress in each country. Not that the global vision is only managed by the project leader, but that the project leader also shares the global vision of what’s happening; that’d be interesting.

**Florencia Melgar: Some journalists are reluctant to apply a methodology. I’m not sure why…**

David Gonzalez: I have a natural inclination –such is my training and my way of seeing the world- to support the existence of such methodology. I think many journalists apply a
methodology but they have internalised it in such a way that it just flows. So a methodology could be seen as an imposition.

But they are still applying it nevertheless, even though they might not be aware of it. But what happens? When you follow an internalised methodology, it’s not transparent for the rest of the team members, and it doesn’t anticipate good results… and there may be fractures along her process, etc. I think a minimal methodology is useful.

I guess that a team of five journalists in five countries that continues working together, after five investigations, I guess the fifth one will become second nature, like in a soccer team. The coach gives the concept and the team just flows…

But I don’t think this is what happens in most experiences, when the teams are set up for big projects, they do the story and then return to their every day jobs.

**Florencia Melgar: There are so many topics/themes that belong to a Latin American agenda. Which of them are still waiting to be investigated?**

David Gonzalez: Well, I would respond case by case; I believe the topics are inexhaustible; the issues are dynamic, constantly changing… I have a clear interest in topics that are related to corruption and follow the money routes, etc.

I think it’s very important, for example in the Venezuelan case, there has been a great waste of the revenues from last decade’s oil boom and now we are in trouble; we can’t find the basic products in the shops.

Where did all that money go? Possibly [it went to] some houses with pools in Florida, possibly to some bank accounts in Switzerland, etc. So I think in the Venezuelan case… the Venezuelan corruption and the deterioration process of the living standards, I think it’s a topic of Latin American interest but topics like human trafficking can still be investigated further.
Even violent phenomena and the kind of crimes seem to migrate… for example, a very specific way of kidnapping or extortion starts in one part of Latin America and it spreads. These are topics that can be part of an agenda.

I think there are corruption issues that cross us… that agenda is inexhaustible.

**Florencia Melgar: Sadly inexhaustible.**

David Gonzalez: Exactly, they’re sadly inexhaustible.

**Florencia Melgar: Have we tried to “sell” our investigations to Europe, to showcase what we do, while we generate a deeper understanding of Latin America…**

David Gonzalez: I think it’s quite possible we have a quote of responsibility. Because of my career path I have been very much involved in local stories and trying to find a Latin American projection of the local stories. It’s something I’ve been interested in during the last years of my career. And maybe Colpin’s invitations are a reflection of this interest.

People like you are in a privileged position to have that vision. Surely we have some debts in this sense. And I’m going to give an example that might help me to explain this that I don’t think it’s always a good example of journalism, but it covered a need and that’s Telesur. Telesur is a TV station financed by the Venezuelan government, among others, in Latin America, that tried to fill in the narrative gap of a Latin American discourse for the rest of the world.

I think that this example accounts for a need; I’m not sure if Telesur fulfilled it correctly or not, and in my view it’s not well done, but it’s an example of the need to generate vehicles, channels… that provides a more internationalised narrative of Latin American affairs.

**Florencia Melgar: So we tell the story instead of our stories being told by others.**

David Gonzalez: I totally agree. In this sense, [we’d be] totally sovereign. For example, with the Latin American edition of “El Pais”, which is quite recent… the Spanish “El Pais” is a
newspaper with the ambition of a Spanish paper but with a global vocation and they have a specific edition for Latin America.

Newspaper “Clarín” also has… there are media that have a more of a Latin America vocation. But yes, it’s possible that we still have to tell the stories of our continent, and make it more attractive from an editorial point of view; I agree with that.

**Florencia Melgar: What would you improve in your next transnational investigation?**

David Gonzalez: The translations I think it could be an important aspect. This means that the production timeline should include the discussions of the translations when the publication is in more than one language.

**Florencia Melgar: Did you have professional translators or did you do it?**

David Gonzalez: I think there were professional translators but I don’t know who they were. And in general I didn’t interact with them. That’s something to improve. That would be my only concern. Aside of that, the rest of the way we worked together it flowed nicely and it was interesting; I thought it was a very good experience.

What I wouldn’t repeat… maybe the short time we had to produce the story in different languages because there might be big mistakes… especially in realities like the one I’m coming from, where a misunderstanding might represent a permanent threat… they might accuse you of any little thing that other countries would be more flexible about.

In the Venezuelan reality –maybe the Ecuadorian as well- a small mistake can end in a very serious process. So maybe next time I would ask about the timeline to finish the story in all the languages.
Florence Melgar: Beyond Latin America, with which other countries Venezuela could explore to do transnational investigations with? We don’t need to go into the detail of the topics but can we at least identify the countries?

David Gonzalez: Clearly United States and Florida in particular. Switzerland, countries identified as tax heavens… like the Virgin Islands, etc. I would look a lot into Panama in relation to Venezuela…
In terms of European countries, Spain… there is a strong migration of Venezuelans there because of the large numbers who are leaving Venezuela. So… maybe Spain, United States, Panama… That’s a first approach, but that’s a good question.

Florence Melgar: And the Middle East?

David Gonzalez: The Middle East would be very interesting… It’s good that you mention it. Definitely yes, the Middle East would be an important one for Venezuela. We even produced a series about Iran and the cooperation with new partners that were not traditional for Venezuela.

In 2012 we did a series of stories about projects carried out in Venezuela by Iranian contractors. That’s an example, but the Middle East definitely…

Florence Melgar: And in that case, did you have any contact with Iranian journalists?

David Gonzalez: No, we did it from Venezuela, looking into what they did locally but it’s very interesting. In Venezuela there are Belarusian contractors… With Russia it would be very interesting… the market of arms from Russia to Venezuela.
These international stories are very interesting…
Doris Gómora

Doris Gómora is a reporter for the newspaper El Universal in Mexico. With 30 years of experience in journalism, she has also worked in “El Financiero” and “Reforma” newspapers.

Complete interview: 

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: What did you discover and what is the origin of this investigation?

Doris Gómora: In the case of the secret war of the DEA (United States’ Drug Enforcement Administration) in Mexico, the biggest finding was that the US’s agents from the Department of Justice and the Department of Home Affairs that are involved in investigating narco traffic (like the DEA and the Immigration Customs Office/Service) were having secret meetings with the leaders of the narco cartels in Mexico.

Not only were these secret meetings, they were also doing them within Mexican borders. This is illegal because the agents can [only] operate if there is a bilateral agreement between Mexico and the United States.
The biggest revelation was that they were working for both sides: while they were having meetings with the leaders of the narco traffickers (they did business, they used to combat other cartels and created a conflict between the cartels) they would also meet with another cartel.

The same way, they would meet with the Mexican government and promise they will help them combat that Cartel, when they were not doing it.

**Florencia Melgar: What was the investigation process like?**

Doris Gomora: The process started in 2011. There were two very strange cases in those times. In my view, these were the red alarms of what was happening in Mexico. Firstly, there was a big increase of violence. Secondly, a plane had crashed and it was a CIA plane, which used to be used to transport suspects of terrorism to clandestine jails.

It fell in the Yucatan peninsula. Through the plane’s number I had already tracked that it had belonged to the CIA and used to be assigned to this kind of flights between Washington and Guantanamo.

That plane was then sold to a private person and it was bought by El Chapo Guzman. When it fell it had 4 tons of cocaine and very soon after it fell, DEA agents arrived. I thought that was too strange.

**Florencia Melgar: Because they arrived too early?**

Doris Gomora: They were insisting so much to be able to get to the area [where the plane had crashed].

The pilot of the plane was arrested and I could never find him in any jail. That really caught my attention.

The second red light was that in a highway in the centre of Mexico an American Customs official was driving his car and he was attacked apparently directly by the Zetas Cartel.
The questions were… What were they doing crossing Mexico without guards escorting them crossing Mexico. What were they doing with arms? And why were they attacked? The cartels attack if they feel there is some kind of danger or if they want to send some kind of message. If they want them as messengers, they would have left them wounded. One of them was so hurt he died shortly after the attack.

In 2012 I started digging deeper into this story when I said to myself… “This is not possible, there has to be more to it”. A quite delicate incident happened in the south of Mexico City: an armoured van with diplomatic plates from the Embassy in the United States, with two CIA identified agents, who were accompanied by a member of the Mexican Secretariat of the Navy, were attacked by the federal police. And the van was in such bad condition it wasn’t usable anymore; it was not just a persecution, because they managed to defeat the armour. It turns out that the police had received the order of one of the chiefs who had also received an order from the Zetas cartel.

The question was why were all these situations occurring, something I had never seen in Mexico before. That finally made me think that after many years I knew that the only way that something like this could happen is if they had protection of some kind.

That’s why I began to investigate... even people in prison started to tell me that what was happening was there were people coming in and out of the DEA and the CIA. They were offering witness protection programs but at the time of making the negotiation, the agreements weren’t recognised, and they started to give me information.

I requested documents from the United States Courts and it was then that I started to put the case together.

**Florencia Melgar: What were the DEA’s and CIA’s interests?**

Doris Gomora: It is a strategy that they haven’t applied in Mexico only. It is a strategy that is applied in practically all the areas where there are high levels of drug trafficking. They call it “divide and conquer”.

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The Anti-Mafia Prosecutor applied this for a while in Italy. But these kinds of strategies are very successful when the institutions of Justice are solid, not in institutions where there are many corruption problems.

What does it imply? Well, they put all the drug trafficking groups to fight each other to end up eliminating themselves.

But that wasn’t really the problem. The problem was they destroyed one group but strengthened another one and they started attacking another group the DEA had nothing to do with. So the DEA’s strategy to finish those groups ended up increasing the violence and creating new drug trafficking cells.

**Florence Melgar: One also wonders why the DEA has the right to intervene in another country...**

Doris Gomora: Well, in reality there is a very big strategy that is precisely one of the reasons why I have always said that when we investigate drug trafficking we need to know the legislation and regulations in the United States, particularly in terms of hemispheric security.

After September 11 [2001], a series of laws were approved in the United States that allow the collaboration with other governments. The United States government has divided the country in commands (both strategic and military). In the case of Mexico, it is integrated into what is the northern command and that whole area has agreements with the Army, the Navy as well as federal forces. That authorises United States’ agencies to operate with greater freedom within Mexico.

**Florence Melgar: So if it is legal, the question is whether it is legitimate.**

Doris Gomora: It was legally permitted, but the techniques [they were using] were not. That was the difference.

But why did all this happen? In 2008, half of the United States Drug Enforcement agency withdrew, they retired. Those who remained, a good part of them had never done operational
activities. They were at the desks and they started doing activities of this type, making contacts, and these were their first contacts. They were experimenting...

**Florence Melgar: So there was a training issue as well. And what is the interest of the CIA?**

(…) In the case of the CIA, part of the rendition flights [to Guantanamo] went through Mexico and one of the ways to cover their traces was by selling the aircrafts to the organised crime. They eliminated an issue that was very delicate [the planes] that later on was made public as those flights were transporting suspects of terrorism.

Additionally Mexico has always been a priority for the CIA. In terms of national security, Mexico is considered one of the key points. Terrorists can enter here, and because lots of spies from different parts of the world are not able to stay in the United States, they are based in Mexico.

In the case of drug trafficking they started making a lot of noise. One of the things the CIA doesn’t want is to make any noise around them –or their operations.

[They CIA] for example said to the Sinaloa cartel… “help me to identify if terrorists come in the United States and [the cartel] started giving tips to the CIA about where to find [terrorist suspects] in Latin America or Central America, people who came from Syria, one of the countries that United States has in the alert list, or any other “people of interest,” as they call them.

Then they began to give information about how they were entering the continent. That was one of the [collaborations] but that part I did not investigate further because I really did not have enough elements to prove it.

But it’s not the first time. The CIA in the Colombian case was even involved in drug trafficking to financially support other operations or even pay for covert operations.
In the case of Mexico my starting point was: what are the chiefs of the CIA doing in Mexico? Well, they’re working on Intelligence. Particularly in Mexico, the Secretary of the Navy is the one that agreed to receive agents from the DEA, the CIA and the FBI in their facilities, which the Mexican Army did not allow.

That is why it is largely the Secretary of the Navy the one in charge now of hunting [drug lord] “El Chapo [Guzman]”, because they have very strong agreements [with United States].

All this has largely to do with the fact that we a key subject of the national security for United States, from the border to Punta Arenas.

**Florencia Melgar: So did you work in this story by yourself or with the help of colleagues?**

Doris Gomora: No, I did it alone. I only informed my editor, so that he knew where I was, what I was doing and how I was progressing. But I did not inform anyone else within the newspaper. Unfortunately we had some incidents ... we were sent some audios of conversations [between my editor and I]. So we decided not to use the facilities of the newspaper to discuss the investigation.

That was our highest safety measure: that nobody knew except for us. But in the last period of the investigation, we already knew that they already knew what it was about.

As a personal rule, when I do an investigation, I don’t tell anyone, except for my editor but nobody else, not even a comment to my family or friends. That is the greatest protection I have.

**Florencia Melgar: In other words, collaborative works for these topics seems very complicated.**

Doris Gomora: For this particular topic it was very risky. I was under a lot of pressure. I even had panic attacks because of the level of pressure I was dealing with.
There were even people of the DEA asking me not to publish, even agents who had been my sources for more than twenty years were very upset and stopped talking to me. They started putting pressure on me.

One of the heaviest things I faced was having my bank account hacked. I could not access, or take money out of it. I even requested a loan to purchase a vehicle and the same bank told me they did not understand why they could not process it, enter my name, my data, I did not exist in the system.

With my phone account, my account could not be emitted or the bill coming out was very high. There were too many things happening and I realised they were cornering me. I started asking for help from sources who I knew were supporting me with the case.

**Florencia Melgar: Did you have any kind of personal security or support?**

Doris Gomora: I didn’t have any personal security. I knew there were sources who were checking what I was doing, who were following where I was going and what I was doing...

I took forty thousand precautions. Many years ago a former source gave me personal security courses. There is nothing infallible but it helps a lot: leaving home and never taking the same route, changing emails, etc.

(…) What did fascinate me was that when the investigation was completed, the editors got involved and even went to the office on days they were not rostered to work on the text. We made corrections cross checking paragraph by paragraph, with documents, interviews and everything, to have everything checked.

The designers also went to work on non-rostered days and the people of the Internet helped me manage the editing... “Don’t worry; what cannot be published in the print version, we are going to show it here.”

That was very good and when the newspaper won the prize for this investigation the first thing I said was that the award was for the whole team because at the end we all took risks.
The investigation was published and fortunately it had an impact: the Congress of the United States modified the regulations of how the government agencies can use confidential sources. That was an extra gift, my boss would say. It was a very good outcome.

One of the things that worried the team was the investigation was touching interests of people we did not know. People who were in covert operations or black operations and could cause us problems of all kinds. Some of us started to get knocked but we put up with it.

**Florencia Melgar: What do you mean by “knocked”?**

Doris Gomora: Well, they started to try to discredit us. Rumours began to circulate about our journalistic capacity, about personal matters, like partners, etc. Fortunately in all cases we were fine, but some colleagues would come to us and say… “I heard this but I see you are fine with your partner…”

These attempts to discredit us went so far that even sources in the United States told us... “It has already started to circulate that your boss is gay, that you are lesbians and that you do not get along…” It was a wave of rumours that was quite strong, and there were people who believed in them, but not in our close circles.

[In terms of collaborative journalism] there are other stories of drug trafficking that I have worked collectively.

**Florencia Melgar: What have you learnt from the experiences of investigating with other colleagues: what is good, what is bad, what must be learned, what should be done better.**

Doris Gomora: One of the greatest experiences of working with colleagues was about the FARC [Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia], the finances of the FARC and their involvement in drug trafficking.

For this job I had to travel to the United States, Colombia and Mexico; we supported each other with the colleagues. Here, as in everything in life, trust has a crucial role, especially...
with drug trafficking stories. You cannot come and say... “I just met you and I’m going to work with you on this topic”. No, because there is a big problem: most of the drug cartels have infiltrated people in the media who are paid and you don’t know who they are.

Fortunately, I was working with colleagues I trusted from the United States and we were exchanging information. So we shared what each other had and started to analyse what was happening with people close to the FARC who were deployed in Colombian embassies around the world.

Colombia’s government were angry with the FARC but it turned out that in all the Colombian embassies in the world there were relatives of FARC members. It was something that we said ... how is this happening to have relatives in strategic places and Colombia complains at the same time? It was not logical.

**Florencia Melgar: Were they in diplomatic positions?**

Doris Gomora: In diplomatic positions and the situation even allowed FARC leaders to move from one place to another ... and the worst thing is that they were doing illicit activities.

Then my two colleagues from the United States began to verify with the State Department if they knew who they were, what profile they had of them, if they had ever been given a visa, what checks United States was doing of this people. In my case I also began to check in the Embassies in Mexico.

There was an additional element. We found that part of the family of one of the leaders was in Canada but had previously been in the Colombian Embassy in Mexico. Then I contacted another colleague who I have known for a long time and he helped us integrate the information from Canada and the Colombian mates did the same following Foreign Affairs information.

Then we made a roadmap standard document where we established who were our oral sources. We made three lines: the embassies, the drug trafficking and the political repercussions of the connection.
The part of the Embassies we worked with oral sources and documents; we exchanged information between us, and we didn’t use Skype for security reasons. So we talked on the phone.

**Florencia Melgar:** It’s interesting that other colleagues told me they don’t talk on the phone and they only use Skype for security reasons.

Doris Gomora: And [the calls] are the most intercepted communications. In the United States, a month ago or so, one of the strictest laws was approved, even more than the Patriotic Act: the Patriot Act is a law that was established after September 11 and that authorises the United States government to intercept any type of communication without a court order. US agencies began to complain. Maybe they cannot do it legally but they still do it. But this law gives them access to any server of any company that crosses their communications with any company within the United States.

**Florencia Melgar:** This means all of them…

Doris Gomora: Exactly. So that is one of the challenges. We always talk to each other personally.

**Florencia Melgar:** That’s why transnational investigations present an additional challenge.

We started to use [code] names like the “Acapulco case” and things like that, but there was a moment when it was no longer possible to speak in code.

We used encrypted emails all the time. Now there is even a new system called silent circle that is encrypted for cell phones for communications via Skype. It is more accessible because you don’t need to buy a phone of about USD 60,000 to be able to talk.

In the case of the FARC investigation we exchanged the information even with mobile sources, with USBs. When we knew that someone was going to Colombia or Mexico, we gave them the USB to take to our colleagues.
Since the idea was that we should all be able to defend ourselves legally, we all had a copy of all the documents. We checked them against the originals because in the newspaper where I work there was a very serious problem: a colleague was given a copy of a check that was modified. In other words, they took a copy of the original document, they modified it and made a copy of the altered document and gave it to my workmate. That was a serious problem.

So we decided to check all the documents against the originals. We all have the documents, we all have the transcripts of the interviews, we all have the information requests that were made, and we have the audios, etc. We had a very good back up and at the end of the process an editor helped us integrate the parts...

**Florencia Melgar:** many colleagues have said that a leader is needed, a coordinator. Otherwise, someone will assume the role anyway.

I believe it is necessary. I’ve been...

**Florencia Melgar:** Defamation charges for example?

Doris Gomora: That’s the least because there could be criminal offenses as well...

**Florencia Melgar:** Sure, defamation tends to be a civil charge

Doris Gomora: If they want to sue a reporter for moral damage or for whatever they want, that’s easy because the moral damage is quantified by the person who feels affected; but when you are sued for a criminal offense, that’s more serious.

That’s why in the investigation about the FARC we did not want to use a single anonymous source.

At that time, a colleague of ours who published a story on drug trafficking in the United States was asked by a court to give the name of the anonymous sources and she said “I’m not going to give the source” so the judge told her ... “ok, perfect, as you believe you are above...
the law, you are going to spend two months in jail to see what you think”. The sentence for not revealing a source was three years. Fortunately the source spoke and said “I am the source”.

So those are the implications that the legal advisors can help with. (…)

**Florencia Melgar: What did you learned in this teamwork, and what would you avoid in future collaborative investigations?**

One of the things we learned was that in multinational investigations we must first have a clear knowledge of the laws of each country because they are different. What in one place is a crime, it’s not in another country. For example, drug trafficking in some countries is the maximum penalty, but in others it is not.

Having a timeline was very important; we all agreed this investigation could not take us more than a year, even considering personal times. And we had established the delivery dates of information. It was clear to us from the beginning that we had to have an editor.

And the part of the methodology ... the filling of the road maps, the ones that we exchanged the information. Every time we made an update we changed the date and time of the last update at the top of the document. That helped us a lot, tremendously...

I believe that another thing we learned is that we needed training in investigative journalism techniques which finally converges in what is the method of scientific research, observation, etc. If we did not do it at the journalistic level, we were going to have an investigation in which we were going to lose time, money and it was going to be a failure.

(...) Then we all took training and we exchanged the courses to know how to improve our capacities. That is something that I recommend 100%. I have seen workmates who say... I do it in my own time, I do not like to be pressured, etc., but actually, it’s not that they press you; it’s that you have to have a framework, to be able to move forward. If you don’t have a plan, you’ll get to a point where you can get lost amongst all the information.
(...) In the case of the FARC there were notes from all of us about the FARC that I don’t even remember but the hypothesis was built by all of us collectively.

We recorded the oral sources, and divided them between the ones that are of decision making and those who were being affected.

And above all it was very useful to talk with the secretaries, the private ones. They were the ones with crucial the information.

**Florencia Melgar: And do the secretaries talk?**

Doris Gomora: Yes, they talk, particularly if they were dating the boss and now they are angry with them.

And the documents were recorded with a lot of detail. Each document was listed in the section of documentary sources but the documents were kept in a separate place.

[The legal advice that you put at the end in the methodology you suggest] I would do it at the beginning, not because I they will censor you, but because you know what you can do… if you can go to a court hearing in the United States, maybe you can attend narco traffickers trial, or a business man’s trial. [In the Court] you see the people who are with him, who accompanying him, who the lawyers are.

Also, knowing the legal framework that each country has is wonderful because it can open thousands of doors.

The road maps were very good. We even had a section in which everyone had to include their sources.
Florence Melgar: It would be the equivalent of this contact record in the methodology I’m suggesting.

Doris Gomora: We had the contact emails too. The sources that could not be fully identified were referenced differently, because if you are called to attend a Court in the United States you are forced to take these documents, like the road map. So some officials of very high level we did not even mention them in the road map.

One of the things that we must not lose sight of is that an independent investigative journalist can do more transnational work than a journalist who is working for a media organisation. Why? For example, the ethical frameworks of Mexican media are strict. If they have a correspondent they trust him more than someone who could be part of the research team [in another media].

(In Mexico there was a boom of research units but nowadays investigations are more personal initiatives. And here is something that I criticise a lot and that is when someone asks for information through the laws to access information, and then presents the outcome as an investigation. Unfortunately, as this access to information in Mexico is very new, that is being presented as investigations).

Mexican media is very fussy to [work collaboratively with other media]. Newspapers like the ones I’ve worked for - Reforma Financiera or El Universal- are very reluctant to work with another media organisations because they fear “if it is published there I have to answer for the other’s publication”.

(...) For example [Mexican editors think] if [they work with a] journalist in China [who] says something that is inappropriate for the newspaper’s code of conduct, it will bring the editor and the newspaper problems because they don’t know the journalist, etc.
Eduardo Mendoza

Eduardo Mendoza is an experienced political journalist from Panama. He has worked in several investigations for La Prensa. These are some of his stories: http://www.prensa.com/eduardo_mendoza/

Mendoza was part -together with Luis Buron- of the team of La Prensa newspaper that unveiled the espionage system created and supported by former president Ricardo Martinelli.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6r0kdt67KpU
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Eduardo Mendoza: I work in “La Prensa” newspaper in Panama. I have around 12 years of experience in journalism. I work in the Politics section where we do some investigations.

We are here because of a story about phone calls interceptions during the government of President Ricardo Martinelli.

Florence Melgar: What were the consequences of this investigation?

Eduardo Mendoza: Interesting consequences because a Court case started against the former president who is in Miami now.
And now there are charges against him because of infringing privacy laws. They invaded the privacy of politicians, journalists, union leaders, and even friends of him.

**Florencia Melgar: Have these people presented charges against him?**

Eduardo Mendoza: Yes, that’s correct. Many of them had made millionaire claims.

**Florencia Melgar: And has the newspaper suffered any negative impact, like threats…?**

Eduardo Mendoza: Not very much because we’ve had a government transition already. The president now is Juan Carlos Varela, who has led the auditing processes of the anomalies of the previous government.

The investigations led to imprison some ministers.

**Florencia Melgar: How do you feel about this achievement? Is it common to have this impact in Panama?**

Eduardo Mendoza: When we were investigating during the government of former president Ricardo Martinelli… they rejected us, they left us aside and it was difficult to get the information, so we needed other sources for your report.

Most of the times there is someone who talks, who collaborates and denounces. And that’s the part of the job we did in this story.

**Florencia Melgar: Have you worked in collaboration with other journalists?**

Eduardo Mendoza: During the election campaign, we were a team of ten journalists in the Politics section. There were journalists of different nationalities working with us as well. It’s been a very positive experience because everything is based on the coordination and the follow up of the tasks assigned to each journalist.
Each time you are part of a group, the first thing is to understand the interactions between the members and know each other… because you aren’t likely to trust someone you don’t know… you don’t know what stories he’s done or how he conducts himself.

The first thing is choosing the team, a good coordination, and the follow up. And as we were discussing before, you need a person to be in charge of this. And then you can do it.

Florencia Melgar: There are things that can be an obstacle: language, culture, the ways to see or analyse things in each one’s country, compared to the others’.

Eduardo Mendoza: In my experience, journalists suggest different angles of a story, and that’s when the editors step in and analyse all the options and we choose one. And then the one that has more support is chosen.

Florencia Melgar: How do you deal with secure data exchange?

Eduardo Mendoza: For example... it’s good to have a support tech person, a specialist in technology. In Panama, we have a person whose job is to download information, produce reports, and gives us the information and we can make stories based on the data and we use it a lot.

It’s difficult for a journalist to organise, for example, a chart with the names of the MPs who receive double salary, out of a list of 10,000 public servants. He’s in charge of doing that structural and technical job.

That helps a lot and we use this in our reporting. I think that with good coordination and a [working] structure, it can be done, it can be done. And in relation to language and cultural differences, when you are working with people from other countries, you can evaluate the profiles, you can ask for references of who will integrate the team and who has the profile to do the job.
Florencia Melgar: Some journalists don’t want to follow a methodology. Why do you think they reject a method, and follow a process?

Eduardo Mendoza: In all the industries there are always people who are afraid of change. They are used to the same methodology, the same way of doing things. But I feel that if there is an opportunity to apply a methodology, a formula that works, and it’s quicker and gets better results, I think the reaction will be positive.

Florencia Melgar: Many thanks.
Fabiola Torres is a Peruvian investigative journalist, who belongs to the leading team of data journalism in the South American country. Experienced in transnational investigations and cross-border collaborations, Fabiola is a strong supporter of open data and transparency with the audience of the raw data sources. She is one of the founders and editor of the website “Ojo Publico”. [https://ojo-publico.com/](https://ojo-publico.com/)

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKz2rVqSqik&t=26s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKz2rVqSqik&t=26s)

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: Do you think a methodology is necessary and/or useful in transnational investigative journalism?

Fabiola Torres: That’s a big debate amongst journalists. Some say that there is no methodology to conduct a journalistic investigation. But I think experience and discipline in our work is what finally generates better results.

So yes, I opt in to work with a methodology; that is to organise and systematise many things we’ve done without having initially thought “I’ll do it like this”.

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If we’re going to be honest, journalists never work initially with a methodology. But the experience in the job obliges us to have one. Even more when we work with piles of information in data bases, with software to assist us in the analysis of digitised information, and there are many more challenges that make us be more disciplined in what we do.

So… I think a methodology should exist; I don’t think there’s only one way of starting an investigation, there might be plenty of ways depending on the circumstances and depending on the topic you are going to investigate.

**Florencia Melgar: Have you ever worked with journalists from overseas?**

Fabiola Torres: Yes, I’ve worked with journalists from overseas. I’m the editor and founder of “Ojo Público”, a digital website of investigative journalism. Before, I worked in “El Comercio” newspaper for eight years, in Lima, Peru. In many cases, in order to write some stories of my city –but also about realities that were happening in Colombia and Chile I had the chance to coordinate with journalists of the “American newspapers Group”, which meant agreeing on a topic in common as Latin America has an agenda in common.

Reporters emailed or called each other to produce a story together, for example about topics like migration, human trafficking… as we share borders with Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, we had lots to investigate and to connect.

The big question is: how we include the regional approach in each country’s reporting.

So I’ve experienced this, and now in “Ojo Público” we’ve done our first transnational investigation about the routes of gold, but it has taken us to try a different workflow.

Three reporters from “Ojo Público” had to travel to a number of Latin American countries to collect the data on site that was in the gold mining camps. Then we got together after collecting and analysing the data, following agreed guidelines. Then we had to think… what’s the Latin American approach to the story? How are the countries of the Amazonas dealing with illegal gold mining?
We got in touch with colleagues of the countries involved to explain this is a topic that needs a regional approach and asked if we can publish together. This is a topic of their daily agenda, a local story, but that needs to have a regional approach.

**Florecnia Melgar: What kind of answers did you get?**

Fabiola Torres: Normally they are very interested because many media outlets are hungry for ready-to-publish reports, or stories that are already in production. But in some cases, there are some challenges: if it’s not part of the newspapers’ agenda they are not willing to publish transnational stories, even when the story is happening in that country as well. But these are the least cases. In fact, most of the regional media is starting to realise that stories with a global or regional approach have a bigger impact.

And I’d like to mention the workflow of the Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ).

Marina Walker and Gerard Ryle always say about their work: if as an investigative journalist you publish a big impact story with a local or even international impact, someone could stop you if you are investigating and publishing by yourself. But it’s impossible to stop an investigation that is published in 25 or 40 countries at the same time, because you do the agenda setting.

Now this collaborative journalism, which is the way the ICIJ works, it’s generating a new agenda setting, like the tax havens. We didn’t use to talk about these topics, but there was a big investigation that took some time to produce, called “Offshore leaks” in which more than 120 journalists from 65 countries participated.

This means a big coordination effort, but the impact was really big.

**Florecnia Melgar: How do you agree on standards when working collaboratively?**

Quality standards, data checking, sources management…

Fabiola Torres: To do this kind of work a key element is trust. Without trust, who will share the findings with a colleague from another country who also needs to be aware of the overall
investigation? Trust is vital. I’m not going to fact-check the colleague’s topic or report. That’s not the way. Even though there is rigor in our procedures, there is also a very important element of trust.

**Florencia Melgar: What elements should a methodology include in transnational journalism?**

Fabiola Torres: The first thing you need is contacts in the places where the story you want to investigate happens. These journalists need to have an affinity. You need to have a good network of journalists, so you can choose who the right person for the job is. Then you have to contact the person.

It’s not that simple. For example, to start a regional investigation on drug trafficking you need specialised people, the most suitable people in the place of the facts, to start investigating.

You don’t find these people very quickly. And the way you build the team in a transnational story will impact significantly in the result. Also, many times journalists don’t work following a hypothesis. Sometimes we have a topic but we don’t have a previous hypothesis; for example, we regularly cover extractive industries topics, or health topics, we know –based on the information we have- it has many points in common with other countries. The same companies operate in these countries; there are behavioural patterns. But how do you know there are elements that will make a successful investigation?

There are topics like “migration”, that are easy to find the [regional] approach. But the topics of your own agenda, we need to explore the approach, how do we make a local story, an investigation of global interest?

And if I don’t’ have a hypothesis about it or I build the topic, I can also formulate questions to guide the investigation I want to do. Not long ago, an important report –that won the 2015 Global Shinning Awards”- titled “Ash empire”, is a transnational story that started being produced by five Latin American journalists. They started exploring the topic after a Colombian journalist investigated how tobacco smuggling works.
It’s difficult to investigate a topic like this with the colleagues of the region as you need perseverance. Some journalists published a more modest report, or with a small reach… because it’s difficult to coordinate. Many times it’s like a marathon: we all start running and some abandon in the way because of diverse reasons. The point is the investigation about tobacco smuggling in Latin America had a much bigger impact as it went from being a local report in a Colombian newspaper, to be published in five media outlets.

**Florencia Melgar: Why are Latin American investigations unknown in other parts of the world? Is it a language issue?**

Fabiola Torres: I think we need to have a level of self-criticism as journalists of our own investigations. Sometimes we don’t know how to approach the topic to give it the global approach it deserves. Many times we are focused on the local agenda, even though the topic has international impact. The other challenge is language. Even though we now have the opportunity of publishing in a digital platform and make it viral through Internet, we have language barriers, like English.

In “Ojo Publico” when we publish stories we think that have many elements of global interest, we make an important effort to translate and make it available in all the online network platforms, so that it reaches the right people. But this doesn’t happen normally in more traditional media. It doesn’t work like this. The approach is still very local.

That’s a big effort we have to make on our side, to broaden our horizon, because they are big topics we are approaching with a very narrow view.

Topics like drugs, health, extractive industries, human rights, we tend to think it’s important locally but it’s not. It has a regional reach, and we are not approaching it this way. I think in Latin America are starting to investigate transnational topics, if we compare us with United States or Europe, we have a huge potential, we have a common agenda, we are intertwined by our problems.
Florencia Melgar: And you share the language; in Europe it’s fragmented.

Fabiola Torres: Yes.

**Florencia Melgar: What kind of resistance do you think a methodology will face?**

Fabiola Torres: It’s difficult to have a corset. If you want to fit a topic to a formula, there isn’t a perfect formula. So I think the contribution of a methodology is as a referent, a guide that helps you and stops you from getting lost in the investigation process. As you don’t have an exact formula, at least it’s a guide.

This methodology you are proposing –and others proposed by other journalists are contributions based on the systematisation of the accumulated experience.

That’s very valuable, because there are things we intuitively do sometimes, that are a number of things that worked and we never stopped to think that in all these actions, there is a methodology based on the experience.

I believe that as journalists we tend to reject methods, but as I was saying at the beginning, we need to be more disciplined, and why not having a guide? I think the word “methodology” scares a bit. Journalists don’t tend to see their work within an academic or scientific framework. But yes, our work could be submitted to the rigor of the scientific method to prove what we are saying.

I think the world we live in, that is flooded with information and data, obliges us to have more methodology to be able to filter the information we are going to communicate. It implies working in order, knowing what to choose, from the initial question I ask myself to the way I’m going to find my sources and how I’ll prove what I want to prove. Arriving to the proof implies a methodology.

One of the things I like the most about working with data bases, is not only that it allows you to systematically prove what the issue is in the topic you’re addressing but also you are transparent and you are showing the public how you arrived to the conclusions through my
analysis, through the data base analysis (as well as checking information on the ground, doing interviews) that there is this problem or identify certain patrons of behaviour. When you work with a data base, the process requires that you show what the origin of the data base is and how you used it. This is almost a convention now.

And something I like a lot about working with data, is that you open the source to the public. Through journalistic applications you can put online a search engine so the public can do their investigation and personalise the findings.

Not only it increases the commitment of the readers –as you make them part of the investigation- it’s also a more credible report because you make the investigation process transparent to the audience.

They know where you took it from. They have access to the raw data and they can make use of the information themselves. We are in times of increased transparency in journalism. I really like it; I think it’s a progress.

Nowadays, who are doing transnational investigative journalism? It’s groups of journalists connected through networks and associations like “Connectas” in Central America, which brings together journalists from the Caribbean and the Latin American regions. There’s also a European platform called “Investigative Dashboard”, and I’ve realised they work together not only around an agenda, but also sharing sources. For example, from Peru I want to find an arm trafficker who is hiding in the Middle East.

How do I do it? There are online platforms to enable you to contact someone who knows him, who knows how to look in public databases, with local sources, and there are referents to consult. These platforms –like Connectas and Investigative Dashboard- allow journalists to meet and find information to follow a transnational investigation.
Florencia Melgar: How are journalists dealing with security issues when exchanging digital data?

Fabiola Torres: That’s a big challenge right now. We need to be ready to manage encrypted emails, keep your sources safe… because many times you have to contact colleagues or sources who are in other countries, but when you are talking about your personal security that’s still a big problem because you are vulnerable. But if you are not alone, if you are empowered with a group of colleagues collaborating in a common investigation, it’s less likely for an investigation to be stopped or ignored. Or even that something could happen to us on a personal security level.

I remember the case of Sasha Chavkin, the ICIJ journalist who did the story about the World Bank that showed how the money had been given to companies that ended up displacing millions of vulnerable people.

Sasha travelled to Honduras and Ethiopia –I think she went to three countries- but in Honduras her colleagues said they wanted to help with the transnational investigation but their names couldn’t be included.

The local colleagues faced a different dilemma. They decided to not appear because of security reasons. I think there’s a big potential in Latin America to do transnational investigations. In the last years we’ve had more cases, and examples of successful transnational investigations, but we are just starting.

I also think that the growth of digital media in Latin America doing investigations is enabling to work in this way. This is also interesting.

Florencia Melgar: Thanks very much Fabiola.

Fabiola Torres: Thanks.
Gabriel Labrador

Gabriel works for the online newspaper El Faro.net Between 2004 and 2008 he wrote judicial, political and economic articles, and from June 2008 he was part of the magazine “Septimo sentido” of the newspaper “La Prensa Gráfica”. In 2009 he worked for six months for the “Revista Capital” magazine in Madrid, Spain, as part of the Balboa program for Young Ibero-American Journalists.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojPCYwcPrIM&t=2s

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Gabriel Labrador: “El Faro” in El Salvador investigates Central American topics but using their own human resources. It’s very difficult for the journalists to set up big networks of journalists, mainly because the human resource in other countries, we don’t know how trustworthy it is. This is a difficult thing to say.

We don’t know how they work, their availability… So basically in our newspaper we’ve got used to investigate on our own and travel when needed, thanks to the short distances. We always tend to find support in local teams of journalists in the other countries, but this is very different from working together hand by hand. One thing is to ask for contacts, suggestions, logistic issues, and conversations to understand the context, but that’s it.
The regional investigation dynamic is doing it ourselves. There is a saying... that if you want something well done, do it yourself.

Florence Melgar: What are the key points in an investigation across borders?

Gabriel Labrador: The issue of trust and processing the information with your boss, with the editorial advisor. When there are lots of people involved, there are many opinions, many views and it’s difficult to agree on one single matrix. But when it’s a single reporter who has the trust and is close with the editor, the production flows in a much easier way. So there is an issue around trust, and access all the information. You don’t need to (coordinate).

In the methodology you shared with us there are a number of instances to consolidate data, hypothesis…

I think we can skip them when there are less people involved. When there are long distances and the logistics are challenging because of the complexity of the story, the only option to finish a story is to work slowly with a method like the one you are suggesting.

The other option is do nothing because there are too many barriers. I’ve been looking at the method and I think it’s a slow but safe way to advance.

In Central America the cultural barriers are minimal, compared to the complexities of bringing together two continents... Asia with Africa... Latin America in general from Mexico to Colombia, Venezuela... we usually have the same syntony and understanding of how a collaborative work should be done.

There aren’t religious or cultural differences of how to conceive the production or something as simple as the relation with the source. We all have the same understanding, but there are some barriers: mainly the different agendas.

Each media or each journalist, if they dare to start a collaborative investigation they are doing it by themselves; there aren’t specialised units of journalistic international relations.
Maybe because of the similarities between the newsrooms, it would be very useful, but it’s very common for journalists to have their own topics and agendas and it’s difficult to get them to collaborate [for example] with the investigation of the Mexican oil company.

**Florencia Melgar:** It’s more an issue of time and agenda. Another issue is that we don’t have much presence in the international agenda and when we are, it’s rarely an in depth coverage.

**Gabriel Labrador:** In general, I think Latin America is seen as a sub region in the world where the events that happen here don’t affect the world order. For example, a little war between paramilitary forces and the Colombian Army, how does it affect the world stability?

It’s something very much of the South cone that affects Latin America but I think the way the big world powers look at this part of the world seems to be after anecdotes, surprising, folkloric stories, or the Latin Americanism movement. This perception needs to be updated. I think it’s also a very assistentialist approach that is related to the “support packages” that we receive in Latin America sent by other countries that is fragment in the rhetoric that assumes we are running behind, they need this money to improve basic living conditions.

For example, this is a topic for an investigation. How does the state guarantees the best use of the cooperation funding…? Sometimes countries’ institutionality is so severely damaged that the cooperation funding isn’t managed properly.

It affects not only the country but also the bilateral relations between countries that are part of the financial cooperation. And what else?

It also happens that in Latin America journalists aren’t telling regional stories of what’s going on. Latin American journalists produce stories looking to their country, instead of seeing themselves as part of a reality with similar discourses, phenomena, and situations that can be told to the world through stories that explain the region.

The Latin American and Central American region is packed with surprising stories of underdevelopment: lack of institutionality or adherence to the basic laws, disrespect of
human rights, political intolerance, polarization, racial division, class division, and all of that together is a fascinating breeding ground for stories.

The problem is that we don’t see, not even as journalists, the implications of the stories beyond the transgression itself. We don’t see the relevance of these stories in relation to our own history, how it can catapult us to be a different society. So… it’s the story of the banker who stole 10 million… and it doesn’t go beyond that case. There isn’t a deeper coverage, involving what laws were violated, that enabled the lack of law enforcement, which approved the legislation.

Besides the obvious lack of understanding of why we need to tell these stories to the world and say: “this is our situation”.

There are important topics, like health and transnational investigations can be done. I’m currently doing an investigation with colleagues from Mexico and Guatemala. We’ve identified a pharmaceutical company operating in the three countries that has dubious contracts with the state in all the cases. The direction is north to south, from Mexico to Central America and there are lots of documents involved, such as contracts, etc. but we are still in the middle of the investigation; it’s been a disorganised process… These are topics that affect peoples’ lives.

When the state fails to manage these contracts leads to the death of people that is the real painful face of corruption. And when we can’t explain that corruption isn’t this… I mean, when we’re able to explain that corruption affects your daily life, then we’re producing the stories that are really worth telling. But it’s often complicated to make these connections. Making people understand that corruption isn’t something ethereal in the air done by men in suits, but that’s something that affects your everyday life.

Corruption is very tolerated in our societies. And I think this is one of the reasons why the powerful countries have this approach to us, these countries realise that our own people aren’t outraged by the levels of corruption. Then, they aren’t either.
People tolerate, people in Latin America are used to tolerating corruption. In the public imaginary there isn’t a single politician who isn’t corrupt. The most popular saying of the century is… “whoever didn’t take advantage while in power, is a fool”. That’s like the normalisation of corruption and the big challenges affecting us all. And we let the stories about us to be merely anecdotal and quite superficial. That’s why investigative journalism sometimes is very silent.

For example, the Venezuelan case… Venezuela in the last ten or five years has had an important influence in Central America, through the ALBA agreement. So many of the investigations we were contacted to collaborate with are Venezuelan journalists who have understood the contractual relations of the ALBA agreement in El Salvador,… but the big picture is the geopolitical relations… how a country allows the influence of another one, in its internal politics, even financing campaigns of political parties, and government agendas, how the government in place, the FMLN in El Salvador, has used the ALBA foundation to do what they can’t through the state: it builds schools, equips health clinics thanks to the ALBA foundation.

This goes beyond the anecdote; I think it explains a structural problem that is our own weakness. In that kind of stories you can lose the broader perspective of the story you are really covering to make the stories worth telling.

**Florencia Melgar:** Why do you think some journalists resist so much?

Gabriel Labrador: To follow a method?

**Florencia Melgar:** Yes, agreed between the parts involved.

Gabriel Labrador: I think it is a resistance to sharing secrets or to give away part of their territory and space to allow the media partner also influence what you are publishing. The editorial approaches can be very different, and leads to resist combining with other media’s views.
Why? Because this has already happened before in collaborative projects with other countries.

We produced a phone app and the production process was very harsh because of communication problems, because what one side wanted wasn’t what was understood on the other side. They also thought we should do it differently… It’s a very tiring exercise for the journalist. It’s too much.

The journalist, on top of thinking editorially in his product, he has to think in the production of logistics, and fill in charts, share sources, many things journalists are not used to: a cultural issue… I think there’s a long way to go. When journalists realise that it’s the safest way forward, I think that we’ll realise that…

**Florencia Melgar: In the end you have to do it anyway.**

Gabriel Labrador: And if you don’t it can go wrong. You can be investigating with others from other countries and you’re doing it wrongly, and interrupting the story.

**Florencia Melgar: What about secure digital information exchange?**

Gabriel Labrador: We have been trained to encrypt messages, use secure chat platforms, encrypt emails, encrypt our own computers, but it also involves investing more time in encrypting the messages, prepare a specific dossier to be sent in a certain moment, that will be received by your counterpart… it requires a lot for planning, and many times the daily chaos.

It prevents journalists from being responsible in the information exchange. All of that is part of the resistance to the method.

Many of us are used to manage it as we go; as it unfolds, with the agenda… We don’t’ own our time. Therefore, thinking of a method also means risking failing to follow it.
But all of this has to be clear from begging: we’re going to share information so you send me what you find, and vice versa. It needs an agreement.

In the investigation of the pharmaceutical company, I have a very good communication with the Guatemalan colleagues; we’re sharing information but it’s going very slowly, because we don’t have time. That’s our biggest barrier.

When you need to prioritise times, agendas, resources, to progress in a certain direction, it is very difficult without support.

I think the investigations that require the combination of journalists from different countries, can work when they are looking for the same.

Argentina wouldn’t be investigating someone for a different reason he is investigated in Brazil. It’s very difficult for me to think in an investigation without a hypothesis.

**Florencia Melgar: What transnational investigations would you be interested in doing?**

Gabriel Labrador: The migration issues between Latin America and United States. It’s not only a social issue but also economic. For example, how the money sent back to the country of origin is being invested and through which channels…

It’s an economic approach. Why people have to leave. What are the factors that prevent people from staying in El Salvador, or Central America, and thrive there?

That’s a transnational topic that can be investigated because of the obvious connection between the relatives who stay and the relatives who leave.

**Florencia Melgar: Another potential investigation…**

Gabriel Labrador: Mining in Central America, and migration as a consequence of violence. There’s a lot of displacement in the northern triangle of Central America: families that abandon everything because a gang arrives and tells them they have to go.
“Give us the house…” Why? Because they didn’t pay the extortion, because a family member offended a gang member.

Sometimes they need a house, so people just leave… They go to Nicaragua, they go to Costa Rica, they ask for asylum. But we aren’t reporting about this. I’m trying to start an investigation with a colleague from Costa Rica who has records of asylum application of Salvadorans in Costa Rica, and they are violence related.

Unlike migration for economic reasons, the stories of migration due to violence haven’t been told in their human dimension. It’s complicated because people leave in fear and there’s no way they’d talk to a journalist.

**Florencia Melgar:** Thank you.

**Gabriel Labrador:** Thank you.
Ginna Morelo

Ginna Morelo is the editor for El Tiempo’s Data Unit and a professor of journalism and general coordinator at Consejo de Redacción (CdR), an organisation that promotes investigative journalism in Colombia.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C6d03NTTyuk&t=3s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: Tell us how this investigation came about

Ginna Morelo: It started as it’s happened to all of us that you can’t find medical attention when you need it. It’s also born because every day the news show people complaining while queuing for a doctor. What’s the main question that ties this investigation?

Three years ago I started to develop a matrix that I called “data rakers”, inspired in the American investigative journalists of the “muckraker” era. They tracked muck, we track data. The matrix was born with a main question and lateral questions connected with it. Then we intersect data and think about it all the databases we’ll use or we’ll build to visualise.

It sounds quite easy but it takes quite a lot of time to fill in the entire matrix. And I don’t take a step in the team I’m part of until we have the plan sorted out. It was very difficult at the
beginning, to explain the importance of quantitative and qualitative methods in social research, that are tested.

I think many of us, journalists, use them but we don’t stop to think how to use them systematically. And that became a challenge since I did my Masters’ degree in communication sciences and social research. I put all of that together and adapted it to journalism, with a scientific approach, and would not continue without it.

With the team we then started to think about the reporting. From the beginning in data journalism –that’s it’s nothing else than a technique- the first step of the report is the data bases you look for or you build.

That takes a lot of time; reviewing the data, creating categories, systematising the information, crossing the information, finding analogies and making comparisons. Those are the first levels.

After this you start seeing a reality that guides you so you know where to head to and what I like doing the most in life: talking to people.

Using Facebook we created a social network through which we accumulated a number of cases.

We could see those cases were talking about a reality while the data was also talking about a reality. So we crossed them. And when we crossed them, we started to draw the map of how people are affected by the health system in Colombia.

We also identified some places where the cases where happening the most. So we went back to Facebook and we asked… out of these regions, who has a story to share… We went to the places to meet these nine Colombians who are examples of the different ways the health care service is violated in Colombia.

It took us a long time, because it involved going to the Caribbean, going to the south, going to the rainforest, going to the north, but we made it.
Once we had this, we talked with the designers: what are we going to do with this “monster”? In the data unit I also included the analysis of the publication, something that we used to do in the newspaper after the publication. The user’s analysis of the narrative [in this case] is done before we publish. So we brought in a panel of people from different ages and education levels and we asked them… “Do you understand what we are saying here?”

That “user experience” gives us very important information: do we continue or not? What do we improve? This is not worthy…

In this way the users are like your editors and they can tell you if you are doing it right or wrong. After this we publish. Then we review with other people what kind of impact it is generating.

This is our methodology; it can feel oppressive, but without proper planning, you can’t do good things.

A huge amount of work or finding something very big isn’t that relevant; what’s important is how you did it, so that people finally understand it.

**Florencia Melgar: How do you imagine a methodology [for transnational investigative journalism]?**

Ginna Morelo: We did a transnational investigation together with the data unit of “El Universal” newspaper. In March this year I went to Mexico to report about all the people who have disappeared in that country.

The objective was to cross the cases of forced disappearances in Mexico with the Colombian ones.

I had some data that made me think it was worth doing this investigation. This was that in more than 70 years less people disappeared in Colombia than in Mexico in only 8 years. That was overwhelming.
So I contacted the team from “El Universal” data unit and asked them if we could work together even though we do things differently. We had conversations via Skype. I saw them there once and when I returned here I thought we could work together. We had many talks to discuss how we were going to do it, not what we were going to do.

Because immediately [after we talked] each of us said… I can go to Ayotzinapa, I can go here, I go to Buenaventura… And I said… wait a minute, not “what”, but “how”, how are we going to do it. And that [conversation about the] “how” was very rich because there were designers, engineers, journalists, analysts from Mexico and Colombia. So the sessions were very large with full teams on both sides.

Firstly, we reviewed the whole context of forced disappearances in both countries, and we obliged both teams to study both realities.

Secondly, after we’ve studied the realities, we put together a working timeline adapted to each team.

Because there are different situations: in Colombia a Freedom of Expression request takes between ten and fifteen working days. It takes longer in Mexico. So I couldn’t expect using the same logic, so we had to understand this.

Based on it, we created a work schedule, week by week. To work with the data, we used tools that allowed us to share documents.

We used Google Drive and all the files were saved in a shared folder, and used the same fields and categories of the same Excel sheet, even when the information was from two different countries.

Methodologically, I think it’s great when we manage to break those barriers of the individual only. In this case, all your information is mine, and mine is yours. As if we were in a good marriage.
And by looking at these [shared] documents all the time we realised the holes we had to fill in, we need to improve this part, there’s something missing here. That process was really enriching.

**Florencia Melgar: What did you learn from this experience? the good lessons and the actions to avoid next time.**

Ginna Morelo: Two good things and two bad ones: being in contact permanently is a good one –that’s what new technologies are for- so the process just flows.

The second [positive] is when you thoroughly study and value the cultural differences with the other part; you’ll have much better results. Journalists normally don’t spend too much time on this.

The negatives: not being as rigorous as we could have been during the whole investigation because the two media organisations have different agendas. That’s when we can make mistakes.

We made a couple of mistakes but we could fortunately correct them before the publication.

The other bad thing is when the engineers try to impose their way of showing the data: “mine is prettier”; “no, mine is prettier”. No, we are just talking about how sophisticated the tool is and I kept telling them I don’t mind that aspect, we need to tool to explain [the issue].

We’re not doing this to win an award or to make it look pretty. We are doing this so that people can understand it, because that’s the objective in journalism.

It’s a huge challenge to think like a team when we are so different but at the same time the result “Disappeared, eternal morning” that was published on the same day, with the same number of pages, with the same digital design, in two Latin American newspapers was wonderful.
Florencia Melgar: Why do you think Latin American investigative reporting is unknown overseas?

Ginna Morelo: I think that spaces like this one –Colpin- or the FNPI contest, and others of the kind enable [networking] but we need to showcase it more.

I think a good way of doing it is when we leave the egos behind. I show my work, not to be told how great I am, but to receive honest feedback and suggestions to improve. Someone might say he has a better method that has been proved and gives better results. Showing [our work] with the objective of building on top [of previous knowledge], and show how we constructed the story… not so much what we did and how great we are. It’s very different. So I think we need to do systematic hard work and strengthen the journalists networks. These networks already exist but we need to keep up to date with the generational change. I’ve just met these kids, who have Masters Degrees and manage things we don’t even know about. So I think… how do we do to get together with these people so we can improve what we are doing? We need to explore a bit more…

Florencia Melgar: When I talk about a methodology to work across countries, there’s still a group of people who are reticent. I imagine you’ve gone through something similar in this process. What can we learn from it?

Ginna Morelo: The only thing I did was to smile, invite to participate, to build as a team…I’ve always worked like that. I’m coming from regional Colombian journalism when you work with everything you have available. So when you are used to working very hard, when you start working in an organisation where finally there are many resources, you are like “wow”.
Gonzalo Guillén has been working in journalism since 1975. He started his career in El Tiempo, Bogotá. He was the founder of the news agency Colprensa, a researcher on television news TV-HOY, general editor of La Prensa newspaper in Bogotá, general editor of the newspaper El Universo, in Guayaquil, Ecuador, general editor of El País, Cali, and Journalist for The Miami Herald and El Nuevo Herald of Miami.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IVbM6IIGyS0&t=48s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Gonzalo Guillen: The investigation is nothing more than the observation and examination of narco trafficking in Colombia, what initially was known as the Medellin cartel (with all the characters involved and the transformation it’s gone through). The most amazing thing is that they reach to such high level of power they are able to put a president in office. Alvaro Uribe Velez is son of the members of the Medellin cartel: Alvaro Uribe Sierra.

He owned the big laboratory “Tranquilandia”; this was the biggest hit in history against narco-trafficking and the first time that a Police operation affected the price of drugs in the market.
In terms of the methodology, most of my work is based on sources. I look for sources, lawyers, mainly lawyers because sometimes they take you to talk with their clients, who are the criminals, and when a source talks, they obviously have a hidden interest, you have to contrast with others.

Finally, the worst in these cases are the authorities.

**Florenca Melgar: The ‘worst’ in which sense?**

Gonzalo Guillen: The authorities are more and more corrupt, so the chances of getting good quality information from them aren’t very high. However, court records are very valuable. In Uribe’s case, for example, I have many court records, I haven’t even read all of them, and I’ve taken some of them out of the country.

I’ve examined them quite a lot, and because the information comes from a Court, that’s very useful for a journalist, even if the judicial authorities are corrupt, [the documents] are still very valid in these cases.

**Florenca Melgar: What’s it like to work in Colombia?**

Gonzalo Guillen: It has been very complicated. Now I’m working following the track of a very big criminal, headed by the governor of Guajira province. Due to my investigation, he is in jail now. They have dismantled a good part of the organisation allied with Venezuelan authorities and with Mexico, in which they manage three provinces in Colombia, they are the political authority, winning the elections. Also, Maracaibo in Venezuela, Haiti and Dominican Republic, I say that all these areas are like a new country, in what seems to be an extraordinarily dangerous process.

I had to leave the country many times because of this investigation. I have nine security guards and two armoured cars. In Colombia, the killing of journalists has been so big, that the state has to commit at an international level to protect union leaders, journalists, human rights activists, etc.
Florencia Melgar: What is the cost of this kind of life for your family?

Gonzalo Guillen: It’s terrible but... let’s say… I live by myself. My family is not in Colombia, I’m not going to say where they are.

Florencia Melgar: Logically not. But did they have to leave the country due to their security?

Gonzalo Guillen: Yes.

Florencia Melgar: And will you continue investigating and reporting?

Gonzalo Guillen: Yes, always. It is very difficult to stop [investigating] these topics because each publication brings a lot of new information and sources and it feeds itself. For journalists like me, who has been doing this for more than 40 years, it is not so much a profession, but an aberration.

Florencia Melgar: Thinking of younger journalists, what lessons would you share with them?

Gonzalo Guillen: The main thing to be aware of is that when a source talks, he/she has an interest, you need to have a very clear idea about this interest. Sometimes the source’s motivations are terrible, but it does not mean that the information they shared is not good. Even when you don’t quote them in your story, it is very important to have some sources to cross check other sources. Sometimes it means meeting with lawyers, with criminals, or whatever.

Florencia Melgar: Have you worked in collaboration with journalists from other countries?

Gonzalo Guillen: Yes.
Florencia Melgar: What was that experience like?

Gonzalo Guillen: It has been very good.

Florencia Melgar: What kind of collaboration?

Gonzalo Guillen: We have worked together, mainly with the United States, Ecuador, Venezuela. Aside of that, it often happens when there is a topic, it happened with Argentina, for example. It was a beauty queen who managed models who trafficked cocaine with the Maya Rivera cartel. It was a story for a novel. I received good collaborations from colleagues in Argentina I used to call. I also gave them information as well. I also had help from Argentinean judges; very generous.

Florencia Melgar: In the cases you produced stories together, what did you learn in terms of source management, security…?

Gonzalo Guillen: Each investigation has its own dynamic and sources. I’m not very inclined to have general guidelines, except for the main ones in journalism: 2 or 3 sources for each piece of information, so you can contrast them and somehow know where you are standing. Aside of that, in terms of collaboration, journalists are all the same… it doesn’t matter the country you are form, if you collaborate with a colleague of the same media or from France, or Australia, I think it’s more or less the same.

Florencia Melgar: Thanks very much for your time.

Gonzalo Guillen: I really thank you.
In 2015 Guilherme Amado was working as a reporter for Veja magazine. He worked for five years as an investigative journalist for the newspaper Extra, covering Justice and Politics stories, and as a correspondent from the capital, Brasília. He graduated from the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro. His series of reports “The Narcosur Ambassadors” won the Esso Award and Tim Lopes for best journalistic investigation.

Access the video interview [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BnIlyYt8xw&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BnIlyYt8xw&t=2s)

Florencia Melgar: What’s your last transnational investigative report in Latin America?

Guilherme Amado: The article was written last year and it talks about criminal organisations in four countries: Brazil, Peru, Bolivia and Paraguay. It’s not exactly the countries of Mercosur, and the idea is not to relate it with Mercosur, I just took the name to give the idea that it’s a block. It’s a block of drugs, of drug trafficking. And in 2013, I had to send an idea to Instituto [INAUDIBLE], a project investigating organised crime. And I had a feeling [about it]; I was a reporter for Extra, it’s a Brazilian newspaper, and I was covering every day crimes, that time I covered basically crimes.

I have the perception that criminal organisations have better integration than countries. That year I wrote the project and sent to Ipys asking for support to travel to Bolivia, Paraguay and
Peru and to some cities in the border between Brazil and these countries to understand how this [criminal] cooperation/integration happen. And from January to May 2013 I travelled to 16 cities around the four countries. I interviewed authorities, drug dealers, and different organisations made integrated better than the government. And it’s incredible because my hypothesis was totally correct. They really have a better integration than the official legal institutions of these countries.

**Florence Melgar:** And did you work with other journalists, did you have collaboration of colleagues from these countries?

Guilherme Amado: I had in the first part of the job, which was the beginning of the search because I had never travelled to Paraguay or Peru or Bolivia, so I didn’t have sources in these countries. I didn’t know which places I could go to and which places I couldn’t go to in terms of safety. I didn’t know where I could go safely and where I couldn’t go in the border cities I needed to go to.

At the beginning, other reporters were crucial because they could map it for me. They could say for example in Peru in Lima you can talk to [INAUDIBLE] that is a civil prosecutor that really fights against drug trafficking and she’s a serious woman so you can trust her. Other colleagues put me in contact with secret agents from DEA, the US drug enforcement agency. They really gave me their sources. That’s something journalists don’t use to do. So that was fundamental for my job all the time. Then after gaining the confidence of these people I could go by myself without help. But at the beginning this help was crucial.

**Florence Melgar:** Criminal activities (individuals, states or corporations) are increasingly transnational, so the response of journalism should be transnational as well.

Guilherme Amado: I think that we have two perspectives that are important and they don’t exclude each other. You have a local perspective of the local crime and the impact of transnational crime in a little city or a country. And there is another perspective, which is the transnational crime and how it happens. And I think that in this second perspective journalism is losing the battle. We don’t have this second perspective as we should do. For
example, when I started reporting for these articles I said to my sources, to the people I talked with, I have a hypothesis, it can be true or not. And some people agreed that criminals from these four countries had a better integration than governments, but others felt I was exaggerating.

And when I started searching and finding ways to prove it, I could argue to support my hypothesis. They could say ‘oh no, it isn’t true because of this’ or they could say ‘oh wow, you are right, I have never thought about it or I didn’t know this’. And it’s totally true, if you talk in Brazil to a reporter that every day covers crimes or drug trafficking, if you ask quickly what’s the biggest marijuana or cocaine producer in the region, they probably don’t know.

Maybe they say Paraguay for marijuana because it’s been the biggest producer in the continent for some years, but probably for cocaine they would say it’s Colombia, but it’s not Colombia, it is Peru, second Bolivia, third Colombia. And they don’t know because they don’t think in this transnational perspective. They don’t stop to think that the problem of drugs in Brazil is related to our responsibilities, as well as Peru that also has its responsibility, Bolivia, and Paraguay; we are a block.

**Florence Melgar: Do you think there is a methodological guide?**

Guilherme Amado: I think that in transnational investigative journalism the methodology is very important, because if you are a very experienced journalist and you have an incredible international career and you have sources in many countries, you won’t have the problem that I had.

This is, I don’t have sources, I don’t know anyone in Peru and Bolivia, I don’t know who I can trust, so I had to follow a methodology.

So, the procedure I followed started by doing a very good pre-research, and then I had to create a map of sources with the help of colleagues and other Brazilian sources I trust, who have international contacts that they put me in contact with. And then I had very deep interviews, a group of very deep interviews with these new sources, and only then I planned the trip and went there. So I think that this methodology was crucial, and I think that...
everybody facing the challenge of doing international journalism without being a very experienced journalist needs to face it and use a methodology.

There is another aspect. I had to manage information from four countries plus the US so that’s five countries. In the beginning of the search I thought Colombia was also part of this block, but then I understood that it wasn’t because the drugs produced in Colombia are exported to the US through Mexico. So in the beginning I had to deal with information from six countries, which meant an incredible amount of information. I had to be very organised to deal with it. So I think that you don’t have an option in these kind of job, you have to follow a methodology.

Firstly, a crucial characteristic of organised crime is its transnationalism. But there is another thing that characterises organised crime: that it’s involved in multiple crimes, which happens a lot in Latin America: drug trafficking, people trafficking, illegal mining, all kinds of crime. It is crucial to understand how organised crime is, because it is the same money operating in different levels. Just like any rich person who wants to have a profit and needs to decide where to invest the money. The investor knows that in a legal activity he’ll have a 2% profit, but an illegal one will give him 30%. Of course, if he isn’t driven by good values, he will choose to invest in the illegal profitable one, e.g. drug trafficking 30%, people trafficking 50%, terrorism 60-70%. He’d direct his money according to the profit. And journalists have to know what they are dealing with, that they are covering organised crime that is transnational and multiple. So I think once we know this we can understand better the groups we are investigating.

Florence Melgar: That’s interesting. Thanks very much.

Guilherme Amado: Thank you.
Unesco’s adviser in Communication and Information for MERCOSUR (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) and Chile Communication and Information Sector (CI). Mr. Guilherme Canela holds a degree in International Relations from the University of Brasilia (UNB) and a Masters in Political Science from the University of São Paulo (USP). For eight years he coordinated the Department of Media Studies and Journalism of the Children’s Rights News Agency (ANDI). During this period he was in charge of several studies that evaluated media coverage of the issues related to the universe of children and youth, such as education, violence, health, sexual abuse and exploitation, human and social development, drugs, participatory democracy, corporate social responsibility, among others.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bta8GeyezLk&t=87s

Florence Melgar: What’s the relevance of transnational investigative journalism?

Guilherme Canela: People trafficking, money laundering…all these agendas aren’t national agendas anymore, they are transnational agendas, that involve serious border issues, etc. Defining a common agenda is important for the efficiency of this work.

Of course this is increasingly complex when there are people of different nationalities, with different journalistic schools, not only in the formal sense of academic schools of journalism
–which also have to be considered- but also the different modus operandi of how to do journalism.

That is going to be fundamental and this year with the investigation of the HSCB accounts in Switzerland, we could see the effective dimension and the impact of international cooperation and collaboration between journalists.

**Florencia Melgar: Why do you think that even the most robust Latin American investigations are unknown in other parts of the world?**

Guilherme Canela: I think there are a number of reasons: language is one of them. This problem you are mentioning is not only about journalism, but about everything. There is a lack of knowledge between the different regions in the world in many areas.

The stereotyped visions of Latin America, Africa, Oceania or Asia, and between these regions, are many, and one of the reasons is language but it’s not the only one. There are many other kinds of cultural misunderstandings and so multilingualism is one of the issues that has to be tackled, but there’s also a large agenda of cultural diversity that needs to be deepened to change the lack of transnational knowledge and journalism is included.

In this particular case, what you are trying to do and that you call transnational investigative journalism, etc. is part of the agenda of a transnational effort of journalism that should precisely be that different regions and cultures can know each other.

This is a task of transnational journalism: make transnational issues –that happen in one or more countries- help to know each other, communication professionals but particularly the audiences you reach.

**Florencia Melgar: There journalists who resist [methodologic] agreements.**

Guilherme Canela: That statement surprises me. Because by definition I believe whether it is in journalism or any other discipline, collaborative work requires a working methodology agreement that needs to have certain levels of flexibility.
For example: in the material published by UNESCO “The story based inquiries….” It recommends the use of FOI –Freedom Of Information- available legislation. That can be included in a common guideline, but of course many countries don´t have FOI laws. So it won´t be applied in the countries who don´t have it. But it doesn´t mean that it´s not useful as part of an agreed methodology that needs to be flexible and adapt to each national context.

Florenicia Melgar: How do you see the challenge of trust building between journalists from different countries?

Guilherme Canela: The topic you´re discussing is not specific to journalism. I think it´s a human problem. Any collaborative work requires trust, it will be easier and more efficient [if you know the partner] you are cooperating with, if you share similar values, etc. So all of these aspects: trust, values, have to be part of this.

That is why it scares me the resistance to use a methodology in common because one of the ways to generate trust is to agree on the rules of the game. And working together depends on these common rules, which doesn´t mean everyone has to work the same way, but everyone has to agree with a certain working scheme.

What´s even more interesting about a multinational work is that each one brings his/her greatest strength. There are people who are better at documental research, others are better at doing research interviews, so that kind of collaborative work can be very useful when you bring in everyone´s strengths.

But none of this prevents, but on the contrary, having a common methodology. When we all know the rules of the game in a collaborative work, it will be more efficient.

All the other aspects are not problems of journalism or methodologies. They are problems related to the difficulties human beings have to cooperate amongst journalists, scientists, bakers, or any other profession.
Florencia Melgar: Managing time constraints is seen by journalists as a big challenge.

Guilherme Canela: It is a challenge, but more important than time management is the business model of the companies these journalists work for. Even though they see the opportunity of doing a transnational investigations, there are a number of issues: copyright, and how the information will be circulated. In your case, you work for public media; it’s easier to establish such agreements. But when the media companies involved are private businesses, with different owners and judicial structures, this is a bigger challenge than time management.

When the owners or editors in chief want to do it they find the time. And it’s related to another topic: media’s decreasing investment in investigative units is a problem for investigative journalism at a national level, and of course, it’ll affect other collaborative ways as well.

That’s why I think transnational works will be increasingly coordinated with these new experiences of investigative journalism, that are on line, that are organised as small business structures, that are new business models.

There are many in Latin America, in all the countries of the region, they are very successful in terms of quality, and have more legal freedom in their business model to cooperate amongst them.

The heavy structures of traditional media, etc. need more time for all the processes, because any cooperation strategy isn’t the journalist’s decision, but it involves lawyers, etc. This puzzle involves many elements: time, cultural differences, language…but then you also have…..business model; copyright; who coordinates what, how do you manage the publication of the information in this country or the other… and it starts getting complicated.

When we are talking about media organisations that are born as digital and within a communication platform, like Internet that is transnational by definition, the mental barriers are much smaller than the analogue-born media.
They are framed in a space that is the national space, etc. The existence of these new media organisations is connected to a deeper fact: they are covering stories that traditional media didn’t cover due to interests, political or economic reasons. They didn’t cover –and don’t cover- not because of lack of time or space. They don’t cover them because they intentionally ignore these agendas. They don´t want to assign a space for them. There are human rights declarations, discussions about media’s role in democracy, issues around the economic interests of big media’s advertisers, media organisations that are owned by politicians. These are things the so called “alternative media” are doing and are not in the big media´s interest. Not because they are competing but due to the content they are publishing. And [these topics] aren´t of their interest now, and they weren’t in the past either.

That’s why there was a window of opportunities for these new media outlets together with Internet to produce a kind of journalism that works with topics that aren’t covered by the big media organisations.

My impression is that it has less to do with competition, than with an editorial line of some media of not producing stories about certain themes or topics. Unless it´s a story that media organisations see as a lucrative advantage within their business model –and I’m not making any negative value judgment- as they are also private businesses that have to generate profit. If they see an opportunity, they will take advantage of it. Of course, the lawyers would be involved to discuss financial agreements, how the story will be published /broadcast….etc. But I think that if a small media outlet has a scoop that has a relevant impact within the country and it´s a topic that fits in the editorial line of the big media organisations, they will cover the story to have it as well.
Gustavo Gorriti

Peruvian investigative journalist. One of the most respected professionals in the field in Latin America and worldwide.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjbiIU72QBw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EjbiIU72QBw)

Gustavo Gorriti: Every investigation involves a methodology, but it doesn’t necessarily imply there’s only one methodology that’s applicable to most investigations.

The different topics, circumstances and perspectives of an investigation may entail a series of diverse methodological adjustments.

**Florencia Melgar:** When there are many countries involved, there are diverse working modalities; how do you approach it?

Gustavo Gorriti: There isn’t one unique method to apply in every investigation; sometimes even within one investigation circumstances may arise that require different approaches or solutions to face the problems.
All investigations -and not only journalistic ones- need some basic rules. They are the ones related to the search for the evidence, the identification and the necessary steps to assure the evidence is solid, valid, and verifiable. And the revelation corresponds to the truth of the facts.

So instead of specific methodologies these are requirements that every investigation needs to be successful. One of the characteristics is that it can be audited, it can be reviewed, in terms of the achievement and also in terms of the ways it managed to unveil what it was hidden and convert it into knowledge and also into evidence.

So again, there are requirements that need a rigorous approach. But this varies a lot depending on the investigation.

If you are doing, for example, data journalism, it’s obviously a quantitative approach.

But if you are working with a source who has a unique knowledge that resides in his/her memory, then naturally the way to do it will be totally different from the journalist who is entering data in a database, hoping that later on the algorithms [processed by] the computer will reveal what they are looking for.

**Florencia Melgar: When working in investigations involving many countries, what are the things to consider?**

Gustavo Gorriti: It depends a lot on who you are working with and in which circumstances. If the barriers are not only across national borders, but also linguistic differences, and in some cases even different methodologies, usages and different laws of the different countries, and diverse political realities, then of course you need to do a whole series of adjustments, that match the circumstances each one experiences.

In some cases, for example, security is a very important factor to consider as part of the investigation, while simultaneously in other cases, it’s a subordinate factor in relation to other things that are more important.
So you have to make a series of adjustments and there are no rules. The only rule that works are those related to the solidity, coherence, consistency, veracity and verisimilitude of the investigation.

**Florencia Melgar: How do you choose an overseas partner?**

Gustavo Gorriti: In general terms, especially in Latin America, but also beyond Latin America, you don’t enter an unknown territory. We have an idea, we know who does what.

Or at least who does what that has some relevance in many countries. Many of us belong to international consortiums of journalism and investigative journalism; and many of us belong to more than one. So we know them, we know their work, or we know people who can inform us about them. This way we can have an initial approach.

Then, the chemistry that happens in the course of the investigation -which can often be demanding, that provokes a certain level of tension, stress, that is very difficult to predict. It changes and of course the fact that many of the ones who do this job have -we have- difficult egos and frequently volatile character, makes it not so easy.

**Florencia Melgar: Why are [Latin American] investigations not very known overseas?**

Gustavo Gorriti: In general, the cultural distance and the relation between Latin America and Australia or New Zealand is considerably greater than the kilometres that physically separate them. There’s much more familiarity with the English production from United States, Canada, Europe, than Australia.

I imagine the reasons are more or less clear and known. But of course that’s a space that should be reduced and it’s a mutual ignorance that should become familiarity.

And the other reason, that not even Australians ignore, is that the world’s cultural centre of gravity hasn’t been there. It may be in the future. But it hasn’t been there and it’s not there now.
Florence Melgar: Investigative units in traditional media organisations have been reduced [What’s the future?]

Gustavo Gorriti: The biggest massacres have already been perpetrated all over the world and investigative journalism has survived.

As the Brazilian journalist Rosental Alvez said, after the attacks to kill it, investigative journalism has just managed to survive, and has reinvented itself through independent publications, non-for-profit investigative journalism, for-profit investigative journalism in Internet - even though it never succeeds.

And within these small groups that act with the vision and dynamic of special forces - not so much because they decide to, but because of the circumstances, they have experience, capacity, but not the resources and they are very small newsrooms.

To be able to do broader investigations - aside of the specific ones they normally do and are very good at - they need to consort, both nationally and internationally.

Organisations like the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) that brings together journalists from dozens of countries, have been able to carry out big investigations, by joining forces and a very small newsroom in Washington.

They’ve managed to do investigations that are so massive that are beyond the reach not only of the organisations that are working together, but also beyond the reach of any investigative unit of any traditional media in the present or the past.

The recent investigation about the scandal of the HSBC bank in Switzerland that had a worldwide reach and impact is the kind of investigations that no media could ever have done in the past by itself.

And it didn’t happen now either. Not only it reflects the tremendous strength of a selected group of journalists working together, but also how much advantage traditional media can take, after surviving the crisis of journalism.
The worst moment for investigative journalism has passed. Now a new era is starting, of building from the bases, and we don’t know how much yet, because there aren’t plans or projects.

This is something that builds itself like the migrants moving from the provinces to the cities in the third world: with the imagination and each one’s possibilities. But they will eventually lead to very vibrant communities. Some of them will stop existing; some others will survive, will change, will adapt, and eventually will give a new face to investigative journalism, including new technologies and ways to get to the facts.

But the conclusion is that the serious existential danger faced by investigative journalism that could affect the nature and viability of democracies, I think that danger doesn’t exist anymore.

Florence Melgar: What about state TV and radio? What role can they play in producing investigative journalism?

Gustavo Gorriti: When they are public media, of course they can have a brilliant role -as they used to have and some programs in some media still have- but in Latin America, even though there are some exceptions of good public media, these are the minority.

What needs to happen is to clearly differentiate state media that are like the spokesperson for the government, and public media that belongs to society. They don’t belong to any government, even though they have the obligation to assign them substantial resources.

This is one of the pending tasks in Latin America, and maybe many other parts in the world: to have important public media, vibrant, independent, and free from something very important, that is not talked about much, and it’s the attacks against freedom of information and the development of good journalism perpetrated by private companies.

This mainly happens when there’s concentration of media, cross-ownership, and especially the new economic groups that have differentiated investment portfolios, and have included media as part of the model, so media outlets become one more investment within a
corporation; they are seen as a company that makes profit, but also as an additional way of imposing their interests. This can be as dangerous -or more- than state presence; I think it’s worse because it’s more insidious.

Florencia Melgar: Many thanks

Gustavo Gorriti: Many thanks.
Florencia Melgar: How did this investigation start? It involves World War II, the Nazis, Peru, Cuba…

Hugo Coya: In 2004 I went to Polonia, Czech Republic and Hungary, as a tourist. I had no journalistic intentions. I wanted to know how the three European countries that had a socialist past would transform as they were joining the European Union in 2015.

During this trip I visited the Auschwitz concentration camp and at the end of the tour, to my surprise and horror, I discovered that at least 21 victims were Peruvian. In that moment I thought it was information that was in the public domain that I was the one who didn’t know about.

I decided to return to Peru and make a report because we were close to a World War II anniversary, thinking of the relatives, descendants so they could tell us how they had fallen in the hands of the Nazis.
When I returned to Lima I looked [for information] using all the traditional ways: google, archives, libraries, old newspapers, books, and to my surprise, there wasn’t any previous investigation about the topic.

Maybe [there was] some isolated data about Peruvians in Europe during World War II, but nothing else. And that was the trigger to start an investigation that took me five years. After three years, to be honest, I hadn’t found any relevant information; it was like looking for a needle in a haystack.

I hadn’t found exact names, who they were, why they’d travelled there, how they’d been detained, etc. And I was close to give up to the project.

However, in that moment social networks were starting to operate in Peru, like Facebook, and I decided to ask for collaboration, something very natural in 2015 but then it was unusual.

In that moment, I decided to write a message “My name is Hugo Coya, I’m Peruvian, I’m investigating about Peruvians who died in concentration camps. If you know anything about this, please write to this email… If not, apologies for using your time”.

I also wrote it in English. I asked my contacts to re-send it. In total I sent 1,400 messages in English and Spanish and it went viral, as we say it nowadays.

This viral message allowed me to meet new people in different parts of the world.

They started writing to me and giving me information.

After five years I managed to re build the stories of each of these people, a total of 23 victims, not 21 as it appeared in Auschwitz files: 23 victims and 22 were Jewish. Only one survived and I managed to interview the survivor.

I went a few times to Europe. I went to Greece, England, France, where I found a lot of information about World War II and concluded in a book published in Peru, called “Final Station”, which has been a best seller. It will be its 8th edition in November 2015.
Florencia Melgar: Did overseas journalists collaborate with the investigation?

Hugo Coya: I had a lot... hundreds of people, and I didn’t have any funding. It was carried out with my own resources.

I’m an average journalist; I’m not a millionaire or have any big properties. I live from my job, but also I was so passionate about this story, I got involved quite a lot.

It’s true that this wasn’t the only activity [I was doing], at it’d be impossible. I do other jobs… but the publisher really liked the investigation from the very first moment. Their first edition ran out in three weeks.

It is a strange topic, it happened more than 70 years ago, it’s not that recent… a topic that is also distant for Peruvians, with unknown characters, but apparently, according to my editor, and the critics, I managed to connect with the public, because I’ve always said that you can say very deep things with very simple words.

So I narrate without high literary pretensions, I don’t want to impress; I don’t want to be Vargas Llosa -who I admire and respect. I want the public to receive what I want directly, the same way I communicate as a journalist.

So I use very simple language and I’m very rigorous with the facts. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be journalism and it would become literature.

But this way of narrating I’ve been developing has enabled me to publish five successful books. My first book has been published in Colombia, Argentina and Spain.

A big Hollywood studio has bought the rights of the first book to make a movie, and they are in the pre-production.

I’ve been offered to make my last book of the Peruvian spy in World War II could become a miniseries for the British television.
Florencia Melgar: What’s the story of Elvira?

Hugo Coya: I’m very passionate about Elvira’s story. I fell in love with her even though I never met her. She was a very progressive woman for her time.

She was the daughter of a Peruvian diplomat who lived in Europe between World War I and World War II.

She inherited a big fortune from her grandfather on her father’s side. Her grandparents were from the south of Peru. Her great grandfather was the owner of the biggest silver mine at the end of the Peruvian Viceroyalty.

On her mother’s side, it was a Spanish family who migrated to Cuba to start the tobacco industry, the Cuban cigars. She was a multi-millionaire woman, with great access to the European high class, and the European aristocracy. She was friends with the king of England, and princes.

When the war started her parents sent her to England, where she suffered economic constraints, even though she had financial resources.

The British intelligence services takes advantage of the circumstances and offered her to enrol and integrate the “double x committee”, integrated by only five people, all of them from overseas, none of them were British.

Their task was probably the biggest deceit operation of World War II. The plan was these five people would infiltrate in the Nazi’s secret service to provide false information to the Nazis and persuade them to make tactic mistakes when they were moving troops or any other action.

Why is Elvira relevant? And all of this is documented in the British archives declassified in 1995 and 2012. She saves London from an imminent chemical weapon attack.
The Nazis were planning an attack on London. As they had bombarded Britain but the British didn’t surrender, they decided to use some dissuasive bombs to make the British surrender.

They were thinking of using mustard gas or nervous gas, and other chemical weapons. Elvira (misinformed) [the Nazis] that the British already knew about this plan and they were preparing a counteroffensive to attack Berlin.

The truth is the British didn’t have chemical weapons at this stage of the war and hadn’t even thought about attacking Berlin.

The second -and probably most important action that will put her in the history books- is that she gave false information to the Nazis about the exact place where the allies would disembark in the French coast. The Nazis moved their panzers to a certain place and the allies debarked in another place and successfully changed the trend.

**Florencia Melgar: In this process you must have learned a lot about how to investigate and how to do it in foreign archives, involving other countries. What will you avoid in the future and what was a success?**

Hugo Coya: In my first book, I didn’t have previous experience in investigations of this kind, particularly multinational. Firstly, there is a problem of resources.

Secondly, you don’t know the kind of documents you can find in each country and how to access this information.

It’s very complicated because I’m Peruvian and I didn’t know where to look in France, in Greece, in Turkey… so I wasted a lot of time trying to find the best way to find the information in each place… mistakes I learned from that allowed me to shorten the investigation period in Elvira’s book.

That’s why the first book took me five years; Elvira took one and a half. I knew the ways and I had established something very important: a network of contacts; I think it’s a key part of an investigation involving many countries.
Florencia Melgar: Did you receive support from other journalists?

Hugo Coya: Absolutely. Historians, journalists, and archival centres in different countries. The Israeli documentation centre of World War II; the French Memorial; the Holocaust Museums in Washington and New York.

Relatives, journalists in Israel, Turkey, Greece. Newspapers: Le Monde, Le Figaro: some of their journalists gave me a lot of information. They helped me access their archives, which really helped me.

And I don’t speak French; it was very difficult. And my English is reasonably [clear] but not extraordinary.

One of the problems I want to mention is the different languages. Carrying out a multinational investigation, particularly with European countries, or if you don’t understand the language, is very complicated, because you don’t know the codes. You can write a message or a letter, but then, when you need to have a conversation, like an in interview in a language you don’t know, it can be complicated.

You might be asking for something and the other person understands something different. Or doesn’t understand or simply can’t waste his time, because he’s annoyed by the fact that he can’t understand you.

The other challenge is distance. Being in Latin America makes it more difficult. It’s much easier if it’s an investigation involving countries within Latin America because we help each other, and we understand each other and the relevance [of a topic].

[When] you ask for information to Europe or Australia or any other country, and the perception is that’s all very distant… they aren’t very interested… so you have to persuade them and explain why it’s relevant to know about this story, what you are wishing to achieve.

A very important aspect is having very clear objectives, what’s the hypothesis of your investigation.
Florence Melgar: When the investigation involves a team of journalists working together the rules have to be very clear, with clear agreements and a team coordinator. There should be a series of steps to follow to guarantee some efficiency. Have you worked in a team of this kind in the past?

Hugo Coya: Yes, of course. But normally to work in a team you need to clearly know what you want to do, why you are doing it, and what’s the purpose of doing it. Because if we don’t have this clarity, each one will understand something different, so the outcome will be delayed or won’t get the expected result, and fail.

Florence Melgar: The idea [of a methodology] is to systematise what we are already doing. Some think it’s a great time saver, but others don’t want to be told what to do.

Hugo Coya: When you work with a multinational team you need to look for something that might sound strange… and it’s to find a team who has a homogeneous journalistic training. This doesn’t mean they all need to have the same studies or knowledge, but they need to have a minimum level of training.

If you work with someone with a PhD together with an intern in another country, the distance between both will be too big. The academic training needs to be quite similar to put together a multinational team. The team needs to have a similar trajectory.

The second aspect is that the codes and the ways we investigate vary between countries. The methodology used in Uruguay, Argentina, Chile, Perú, might be different from the one in Brazil or Colombia or Spain or Australia.

There’s always something different. So it’s not just the steps we’ll follow but how we are going to get there. And it’s complicated. If you read a thesis from a Uruguayan university it might be very different from one in Colombia.

None of them is better than the other one. They are just different ways of investigating and approaching the problem.
The relevance of the investigation is as important as the funding; if you have a very good investigation, you’ll find the funding and collaboration because potential sponsors, donor - however you want to call them- will understand the relevance of the investigation.

I’ll exemplify with a case that’s happening now in Peru. It’s not in journalism but it’s a multinational research. A group of Peruvian engineers in a state institute started investigating about cancer cells, to find an alternative to chemotherapy treatment for people who have cancer.

They didn’t have any resources. They were four engineers without much money, but they sent their first findings to a number of American universities and institutions. And the NASA received this information and they sent their experts to Peru and decided to finance the investigation.

A journalistic investigation can be relevant as well. What would happen if you wanted to do a big investigation about the influence of narco traffickers and how their presence affect Latin American governments… and you include a number of countries…

The relevance of something like this would be of interest of anyone concerned about democracy and rights. It could be a project that brings to light the narco influence in Latin American politics.

I think the relevance of a project will determine its success, and the impact of the investigation. We live in a world with limited resources. So anyone who is willing to help thinks about it twice.

If you don’t present the project according to the expected standards, a clear methodology, you are at risk of [not getting funding] as the investor will fund it if there’s a guaranteed outcome.
Florentina Melgar: What elements should be included in a methodology?

Hugo Coya: Clear objectives of the investigation: this is the hypothesis: “I want to demonstrate this”. I think this also helps to reduce the time of the investigation and avoid deviating.

You need to agree on a clear timeline: “In this month we are going to do this, in this other month we’ll do ‘x’ and that’s how we progress… It’s true, they can be just referential but they help to keep you stay organised and be disciplined.

[Time management] can also affect [the investigation] directly because if one team stops working and getting the information/tasks assigned, it will affect the production of the rest of the team so they aren’t progressing together. The team needs to commit to work with a very clear timeline.

Florentina Melgar: This is the draft of the methodology model with 20 steps…

Hugo Coya: I think it’s quite complete.

Florentina Melgar: In the initial version I didn’t include a coordinator or team leader, which is very important…

Hugo Coya: Absolutely, someone needs to lead the team. But it might happen there are many leaders and this might make the investigation fail. Each team follows a different leader and at the end of the day it is chaos.

Florentina Melgar: That’s why it’s important to decide this from the very beginning.

Hugo Coya: The person in charge of the whole investigation is “x” and we all need to follow his guidelines. This person manages and supports the work of all the parts involved. And I think it’s important to have a roles flowchart, the roles of each member of the team need to be very clear.
Even more when the groups are multinational which means different ways of working, different ideologies, different idiosyncrasies…

You need to have a very clear timeline and supervise how this is being done.

**Florencia Melgar: Thanks very much.**

Hugo Coya: Thank you.
Florencia Melgar Hourcade

Juan Raúl Olmos

Mexican multi awarded investigative journalist.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pOyYkCHD2Q&t=31s

Florencia Melgar: How did the transnational story about Mexican art trafficking begin?

Juan Raul Olmos: The origin of that story… it’s definitely a transnational topic because it involved consulting declassified archives in the UK, in the United States, and Freedom of Information requests in Germany.

The investigation was published in 2012 and I presented it in the 2012 or 2013 Colpin (Congress of Latin American investigative journalists) in Guayaquil in Ecuador. The story was about the routes used for art trafficking, art pieces stolen in Europe and brought to America, a document–based investigation.

It involved many Latin American countries: Mexico, Argentina, Venezuela, Chile and obviously the United States. I showed the routes and the people who participated in the trafficking of art pieces that had been stolen by the Nazis in Europe.
Last year, when I was updating the data base of this story, I came across a document that involved a Mexican woman, a public person who has certain prestige. She was requesting her step father’s art pieces, who had been a prisoner in Germany.

Once he was released, he escaped to Mexico where he found refuge. He started a new family and continued growing professionally. And he did it; he was a very successful man in Mexico’s culture; this was Paul Westheim. He was an art critic, someone who knew a lot about culture. He left a legacy in books. When he died, he didn’t know his book collection still existed.

His wife and his children fought to recover what had been stolen, one of the richest collections of German expressionism. It included at least 50 big paintings; and some 3,000 watercolours, drawings, aside of a library that was apparently lost.

**Florencia Melgar: Did you work by yourself or with other colleagues?**

Juan Raul Olmos: I worked by myself. But it’s relevant that the impact of the story led us to work in a transnational story, together with Connectas. We’ve decided to go back to the 2012 story and do it with testimonies of people who are descendants of the people who were looking for the art pieces, and the idea was to assign a journalist in each country to investigate what happened there.

To do this, we put together a very broad data base with the thousands of declassified documents. We processed them to identify which of them were about Latin America. In this way we could identify specific documents per country so it could be assigned to the journalists who would do their own search.
Florencia Melgar: What are you learning in this process? I’m asking because I’ve come across a group of journalists who aren’t in favour of systematising or coordinating as they feel it goes against the nature of investigative journalists [and feel their freedom is threatened.]

Juan Raul Olmos: The recent experiences show the opposite: investigative journalists don’t work alone as they used to; collaborative works with other colleagues are increasing, particularly when we are doing transnational stories. We can’t be isolated when the topics transcend our borders. And if you want your story to have international impact, you have to partner.

This experience has proved it. One or two people wouldn’t have produced a report of this reach. Also, it has much more impact; it doesn’t stay in only one media outlet of one country, but has international impact.

**Florencia Melgar: What are the main lessons you’ve learned so far? Agreeing on the method? The timing? Having a team leader?**

Juan Raul Olmos: A leader is necessary to define the angle of the story, what we’ll look for, what information won’t be included.

The journalists need to work as a team. Individualism doesn’t work here. They need to have a good disposition to discuss. They also need to be open to have their texts subedited.

[Journalists] love their texts and we don’t want others to touch them, but in this process it’s necessary, so the story has one shared editorial.

**Florencia Melgar: The Teleton investigation, does it have a regional dimension?**

Juan Raul Olmos: I’m surprised about how much interest people showed here in Colpin, trying to replicate my investigation in other countries.
I think it could have been done as a big investigative report as it has a very important presence in all Latin America. The “brand” Teleton was born in Chile and has become a kind of franchise that was very successfully exported to other countries. We are still in time to plan a transnational investigation.

**Florencia Melgar: How did you approach the investigation? It’s a difficult one.**

Juan Raul Olmos: Yes, because the objective of helping children with disabilities and the families is very noble. It can even be a bad look for the journalist… [some people might think] “are you against helping people…”

No, we aren’t questioning the objective, but how they are managing the resources, and what they are doing with them. In Mexico we discovered that the money they collect is three times more than the one reported back to society. We question what they are doing with the rest… We discovered that it doesn’t end up helping the children, but paying salaries, investments overseas, investments that are also a conflict of interest because they are in the same bank where the founder and president of Teleton is a partner of.

I was just talking with a Peruvian colleague and she said that Peru has the same model. I wouldn’t be surprised if it replicates in other places. So I think we are still in time of doing a joint investigation.

**Florencia Melgar: We have a story pending. Many thanks.**

Juan Raul Olmos: Many thanks
Florencia Melgar (FM): What has been your experience in collaborative journalism in the Latin American region?

Luis Burón: In my case in “La Prensa” newspaper in Panama, I’ve had the chance to talk with colleagues from other counties but not working together in an investigation or report. I can use some help: where to start, who to call; maybe someone can give me a phone number, an email address, or some information about a society, or something like that. But beyond this, I have never had the opportunity of a “complete” or “integral” collaboration with a colleague from overseas.

Florencia Melgar: Is this because you never had the opportunity, or the topic wasn’t suitable?

Luis Burón: I’d say the situation was never discussed with the possibility of an international collaboration. In general, you say… “I’ll call that newspaper of this journalist I know so he can help me with some information, a couple of numbers...”
Florencia Melgar: In Peru, for example, there are more transnational investigations…

Luis Burón: This happens in countries that have an independent movement of journalists that work together with another independent group. There is a common empathy because they left the media, which allows you to collaborate in this way.

Florencia Melgar: And it doesn’t happen in Panama?

Luis Burón: There is like a blockage, not really a blockage, it’s more like a defect as we only collaborate between media outlets. You need two media outlets involved, because when you work with a journalist it is not just about working with him, but rather the media he works for. This doesn’t happen with these groups in Chile or Brazil or even here in Peru. They are independent groups and have freedom to work with a journalist not a media outlet.

Florencia Melgar: So, the collaboration between journalists works at a different level than between media entities.

Luis Burón: Yes, I think so.

Florencia Melgar: Do you think a methodology or guidelines would be useful to work in collaboration, or not?

Luis Burón: I spent six months in Spain with a scholarship; we were 16 Latin American journalists. We lived together; we ate together and talked a lot… mostly about journalistic topics. We were all from the same region and you could still perceive that there are different working methodologies in Colombia, Panama in Costa Rica, in Argentina, in Chile. The idiosyncrasy of a country is transferred to journalism, and many other professions. Each country has its method. So, if in Latin America – which is a fairly homogenous region – comparing the methodology with Australia or Afghanistan or Uruguay and Marruecos there will be discrepancies, and I think it’s a great idea to have something that works as a starting point, maybe you don’t follow all of it, but it’s a
reference to distribute the task and the time. Time in an investigation is the most important thing of all. How you manage and distribute the information you find. I think that to homogenize the journalistic differences, having a guideline as a common ground is a good initiative.

**Florencia Melgar: Who will reject a methodology; what kind of journalists?**

Luis Burón: It will sound cliché, but I think it is the old guard of journalism. Journalism is also a tricky job; we all know that in Uruguay, as well as in Panama, 20 or 25 years ago people could smoke in the newsroom, they could have been drunk. This shows that journalism was done in a certain way.

And in the last 20 years, not only journalism, everything has changed in a very vertiginously manner. Lots of changes have happened very quickly. And I feel that journalism is a profession that still keeps a distance with technology, it is finding very difficult to incorporate new trends. So I think that the old guard of journalism – that is still important and still producing good content – is the one that will resist against having common guidelines, so that everyone knows where to go.

**Florencia Melgar: Many thanks and good luck.**

Luis Burón: Thank you.
Florencia Melgar: What are the methodological lessons learned in investigations involving more than one country?

Matías Longoni: I have some experience of working organically in this way with journalists from Venezuela. The objective was to investigate the multiple commercial and bilateral treaties between Argentina and Venezuela following the hypothesis the agreements had irregularities.

It wasn´t a bad experience during the first stages, when we defined the hypothesis and the objectives of what we were looking for. But later on I felt disappointed because I did a lot of the analytical work of the treaties, and the part that had to be done in Venezuela never happened. I´m not blaming the Venezuelan colleagues; I just think we all had the urgency of doing our own journalistic work and we didn´t have the time to seriously invest in an investigation of this kind. My experience in this specific case was quite frustrating. We could have made a much deeper investigation in Venezuela. In fact, I discovered there were very irregular Argentinean companies, even related to the Argentinean ambassador in Caracas, as I crossed lots of information in Buenos Aires, but we had to check on the ground. These
companies had received significant beneficial contracts from the Chavez government, but sadly none of the Venezuelan journalists spent the time in Venezuela to verify all of this, that involved travelling, costs, etc. So my first reflection about working on a story of this kind, is that you need to have time, resources, have clear objectives, and very consolidated teams, who are solidary in terms of the worked hours invested. The tasks have to be agreed on and done.

_Florence Melgar: The idea of the methodology is also to manage resources more efficiently, and avoid losing time so we need agreements before starting the investigation. There are some journalists, however, who don´t like to make any agreement; they see it as a corset. Where do you sit?_  

Matías Longoni: I think that when you work as a team you need to choose a coordinator, certain methodologies and some obligations. Because in general, journalists do their job in their countries, in their own ways, so it´s a big workload as it comes on top of our obligations in the media organisations we work for.

But once you commit with colleagues from another country, there should be a “commitments method”. Otherwise it´s very disappointing and you end up doing what you do; we are all journalists and the egos play an important role here. And you always tend to think that you part is the most important one.

When you see the counterpart isn´t disciplined or committed with the investigation, what ends up happening is that you publish what you have and you stop following the process or the discipline. I think it´s good to have a method. We should have commitments; I´m not sure if the methods can be too strict because investigative reporting can´t be determined before you start.

Every day you find new information, data, which might open doors and turn the wheel to a different destination; this is the way it works. You can´t say this will be my end point; but you can plan the direction. It´s good to agree on the commitments and the methods; not the disciplines. Otherwise you risk missing out on great stories because you are following a rule.

So that would be the ideal to put together a team and have these rules followed.
Florencia Melgar: And follow it up right? A timeline is also important.

Matías Longoni: No doubt about it. Particularly if you are going to spend time and money in the investigation. Otherwise these are lost resources or they don´t lead to any results; which is also a possible scenario. Sometimes the hypothesis takes you nowhere or it´s a false hypothesis.

Not always you can tell the story you want. I´m coming from investigating for a long time the purchase of a big piece of land by a public official. But I can´t publish it because he declared it, which surprised me. While you are investigating sometimes you discover that your story can´t be published. This can happen. There should be an authority, a coordinator, a helmsman who can speed it up, stop it or change direction.

Florencia Melgar: -The method is a series of steps, starting with a hypothesis. And here you have a viability evaluation, after background and open sources initial research. Maybe here is when you decide how much to invest, in terms of resources.

Matías Longoni: There should be a second meeting; in fact in the experience with IPYS this is what we did: we defined a first hypothesis and when we had a meeting in Venezuela to finish defining it and choose the strategy.

It was good because we started by going through all the information available, and then each of the parts involved defined their own working hypothesis. I think what happened is that I progressed very fast and found two irregular companies in Argentina. And I was disappointed when the Venezuelan colleagues didn´t do their part of the work. But it was finally because it was my story and there wasn´t a coordinator who could build a common story. That´s where we failed. There wasn´t bad intention. There wasn´t someone who could evaluate and balance the protagonism in the research.
Florencia Melgar: In this first version I didn´t contemplate having a coordinator, but a number of colleagues brought it up.

Matías Longoni: Otherwise you have a clash of egos. The coordinator should be a recognised journalist, who is also respected… who hasn´t got…let´s say… journalists are a piece of crap, beyond all of our values…what I mean is when we have a story we want to publish it now and we want to have the local impact.

When you do a binational investigation, each one wants to publish it as soon as possible, not to verify the regional impact, but to see how the investigation modifies immediate context, how it impacts in our country, in your newspaper or media outlet.

We aren´t that interested in knowing about the impact it has across borders. That´s seen as the counterpart´s business. So the coordinator should manage this balance. Or if there are two approaches, if you want the story to impact on both countries at the same time, the coordinator can manage this negotiation; we share the same approach or we have different approaches but we decide this together.

Florencia Melgar: Why is there such a distance between the quality of information we produce in Latin America and how we are perceived overseas?

I´ll change you the question: do Latin American people know they have excellent investigative journalists? No. Even though we know our investigations are powerful and despite our high professional quality.

In fact, investigative journalism is quite ignored in general in our own countries, even if it leads to the fall of a president. Nobody will give the credit to the journalist. So why would Australians know about it?

Florencia Melgar: It can be Europeans, African, I mean…

Matías Longoni: I think Latin America has an excellent investigative journalism in relation to the very little information available, in relation to corruption levels in the governments, and
economic power, compared with Europe or United States…or even Australia, that I imagine is quite an organised country.

Maybe in the global scene, the journalists who get the awards and applause are those from more consolidated media organisations, or from the north hemisphere. But I think it’s a process…and the more we do investigative reporting in Latin America, at same stage it will balance.

**Florencia Melgar:** Maybe there’s also an issue of accessibility. Everything produced by “the north” is in English.

Matías Longoni: It’s like Hollywood: we all end up watching Star Wars. And there are great movie makers in our countries…this is the same. But there’s not much you can do against it. But as we’re journalists and we just want to modify our immediate realities, we don’t have to take it as something serious.

Finally, if we are recognised…in any case we should be recognised and respected as part of the journalism scene in our own realities, so that our newspapers give us time and space to investigate, and enable teams to be formed. That’d be our victory. If Hollywood rules or not, that’s another story.

**Florencia Melgar:** Thank you very much.
Florencia Melgar: Can you describe the investigation about tobacco cigarettes smuggling that involved the president of Paraguay?

Mauri Konig: This investigation started with an invitation of Ipys, to journalists from seven countries, but only four finished the investigation. The big topic was the smuggling of tobacco cigarettes from Paraguay as we already had a mapping that Paraguayan cigarettes were all over Latin America.

The hypothesis we wanted to test was how involved was the president of Paraguay in the cigarettes smuggling. I started by finding out how many cigarettes had been confiscated in Brazil in a period of four years, from 2010 to 2013. I made the decision to work only with official data because based on estimates you can say anything...so with the confiscation data I had the official figures of the amount of cigarettes we’re talking about. So I had a figure of the amount of confiscated cigarettes in this period.
The volume of smuggled cigarettes that entered Paraguay from Brazil is so big that the Brazilian customs started to write down the names of all the brands of cigarettes that entered Brazil.

In our investigation we used the customs list of 72 brands. With this information we tracked the tobacco companies that produced these cigarettes. But we still had a problem as the confiscated cigarettes are only a small part of the smuggling.

So I tried to quantify the size of this business, and its importance in the border between Brazil and Paraguay. As we are talking about an illegal business we need to compare with other illegal businesses, like drug trafficking -marijuana and cocaine. So this is what I did: for this four year period between 2010 and 2013, I also looked at the figures of confiscated marijuana and cocaine. I found out the price of the substances in the Brazilian market.

This final value includes all the production costs, even transport. I found out the price of a box of cigarettes in Brazil, how much a kilo of marijuana and a kilo of cocaine. Knowing the confiscated amounts I multiplied these figures by price of their cost in the market so I knew the monetary value of the confiscated drugs and tobacco. Then I converted this figure into American dollars to use a currency that’s easy to understand in many countries.

For traffickers all that matters is the profit. And I couldn’t compare the volume of a pack of cigarettes with the volume of a kilo of marijuana, for example. That’s why the comparison is based on the value.

With the data of confiscations we proved that the business of smuggling cigarettes was bigger than the marijuana one in the border between Brazil and Paraguay. And it was the equivalent of 65% of the value of the confiscated cocaine in the border between Brazil and Paraguay.

The cigarettes smuggling business started to make changes in the geopolitics of the organised crime in the border between Brazil and Paraguay.

Some of the traffickers were doing both drug trafficking and cigarettes smuggling. But others were leaving the drug trafficking business and only smuggling cigarettes because it was more
profitable and has fewer legal implications for the people on the ground; in Brazil the legislation is quite soft for cigarettes smugglers. But legislation for marijuana trafficking is more severe. In this context we discovered the president of Paraguay is the businessman getting the biggest profit from this business.

Florencia Melgar: So how did the colleagues from other countries participate in this investigation? How did you exchange information? How did it work?

Mauri Konig: From the seven initial countries, only three were left at the end. In the newspaper I worked in Brazil I created a team to do this investigation with two other journalists who helped me. In Colombia, Marta Soto, in El Tiempo newspaper and in Costa Rica, Rodney Rojas on behalf of la Nacion paper. I also did the calculation of how much it’s produced in Paraguay and according to official documents which was Paraguay’s president’s responsibility and the legislation he was violating to keep his smuggling business. I went to the border between Brazil and Paraguay to document in video—and we have a 30 minute video of how things work in the border.

We show how the cigarettes leave Paraguay and get to Brazil through the border that is not very controlled by the Police. They use rivers and roads. So I did all of this in Brazil. Marta Soto looked for the figures of confiscated cigarettes in Colombia and she discovered a very curious case: the cigarettes of President Cartes that went all the way to the Colombian Caribbean state of Guajira, then went down to other parts of Colombia. In that journey, the cigarettes had to go through a region that was under the control of the FARC guerrilla and also through an area controlled by the paramilitary group Urabeños. So these groups charged a toll to let the smuggled cigarette reach other parts of Colombia. So somehow in an indirect way the cigarettes of the president of Paraguay were helping to finance the FARC and criminal groups in Colombia.

Rodney Rojas in Costa Rica is very good with data bases and finding information that is hidden or is difficult to access. He tracked a large part of Paraguay’s cigarette exports to certain parts of the Caribbean such as Belize and Panama for example. So there is a record of the cigarettes arriving to those countries but not leaving to third countries. So the cigarettes go from there to other countries of the region as contraband. This tracking allowed us to put
together a map with nine routes of the cigarettes smuggling that starts in Paraguay. The land routes that arrive to Brazil and go to Argentina I could identify doing field work, because there’s no record at all. And there are also air routes that leave Paraguay and enter Bolivia and from Bolivia they are distributed to other countries. They are smuggled into Chile and Peru through the borders. With Rodney Rojas we could make this map and discover nine routes, but there’s possibly more…

**Florencia Melgar: How did the team systematise all this information?**

Mauri Konig: This story started with seven journalists from seven countries but it finished with journalists of only three countries. Four of them somewhere along the way decided not to continue for some reason.

The newspapers that published the story were “Gazeta do povo” in Brazil and “el Tiempo” in Colombia. Rodney Rojas helped with the data and the infographic but “La Nacion” newspaper didn’t publish anything. It’s necessary to go ahead; it’s worth doing the work as we’ll have good outcomes.

**Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.**
Mónica Almeida

With almost 30 years’ experience both in her country and overseas, Monica has written about politics, economics and international issues. Corruption with public funds, financial crimes, oil issues and database management are some of her areas of expertise. Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper “El Universo”, Monica has carried out numerous investigations on political and economic issues.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=edjP14gl32M&t=87s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florence Melgar: How do egos affect teamwork in journalism?

Monica Almeida: The baseline is to leave the egos behind. It’s important to know the overseas journalist/s you’re going to work with. That’s one thing. Aside of this, the main agreement is that all the parts involved publish on the same day, so nobody will go ahead of anyone else. This is a consensual agreement. This has worked well for us.

Most of the times I’ve had the chance to work with people I know. We trusted each other so we even exchanged some texts. They read what I was going to publish and I read what they were going to publish because the stories had been so complicated, we had to ask for names to be corrected, etc.
Florencia Melgar: Like fact checking.

Monica Almeida: It’s like a crossed fact-checking amongst us, because sometimes the stories were quite complicated.

The [investigation] I’ve presented about Venezuela included Miami and other countries. The story is about Venezuelan, Colombian and Ecuadorian businessmen who created a system of Ecuadorian ghost companies to pretend exports to Venezuela and legally take out of the country the dollars of the Cadivi.

[Cadivi: Venezuelan Foreign Exchange Administration Commission. A government department that sells foreign currency to Venezuelans because there isn’t free access to foreign currency.]

It was done through a compensation system of foreign currency. Ecuador has a dollarised economy, so there were ghost exports from Ecuador to Venezuela.

The money left Venezuela at a rate of 1 dollar equivalent to 4 or 5 Bolivares. This foreign exchange stayed for a while in Ecuador and it went to third countries but now treated like foreign exchange, so when it entered Venezuela again, at the black market’s cost, it is 100 Bolivares. So they are making extraordinary profit.

And all of this happens with the complicity of the officials of the central bank of Venezuela. That was the case. And we managed to track about thirty companies, all of them with legal representatives, shareholders, so we had to track that money.

We tracked around USD 357,000,000, that came from Venezuela, went through Ecuador, and they have gone to Hong Kong, Miami, Dominican Republic, Panama, Colombia, the Caribbean and Peru.

It was an investigation that required great dedication, and lots of Excel sheets to put together.
Even though they were different cases, it was the same strategy the ones the companies used. And some of them operated in more than one country which means there was some kind of coordination between them.

The first time we worked [across borders on this], we couldn’t have a good collaboration with Venezuela. We didn’t look for the right person, or he was busy when we found him.

**Florencia Melgar: Are you talking about another colleague or media?**

Monica Almeida: Another media outlet, and one year before. So when we met in the 2013 Colpin in Rio [de Janeiro] we explained what we had, we need to do this investigation and needed Venezuela’s help.

At that stage we sat down and we put together a project and we submitted it to Connectas to finance us a part of the project that involved travelling, both in Venezuela and in Ecuador, to find these ghost companies. As we were getting to the end of the investigation, we realised the money had gone to United States.

So we thought we should contact “El Nuevo Heraldo”, as we knew a journalist who regularly participates of the Colpin meetings. This way we could set up the trilogy, and we had these three teams working.

**Florencia Melgar: How did you manage the information and data digital exchange? Did you have any security measure?**

Monica Almeida: We did a lot using Skype, we shared information using Dropbox... that’s basically it. We didn’t do any standard phone calls, or sent information as attached files. Everything was like… we didn’t use explicit language.

What we did was to plan around some timelines we agreed on. As we submitted this project to Connectas, this lead us to put together a production plan. How long each part is going to take, how we are going to put it together… and we agreed on a timeline that we submitted to be given the financial support. So this also helped us to organise ourselves.
We obviously didn’t meet the schedule. But it’s a guide that pushes you to meet the deadline.

The other thing was that we depended on Quique, because he wasn’t included in the initial project.

**Florencia Melgar:** Did you have a coordinator or team leader who consolidated all the information?

**Monica Almeida:** We kind of had that. This is because in Ecuador I was the one doing this. We had the biggest amount of information because we could access it. Venezuela is like a black box. There isn’t any information. Hence, it was us the ones providing the information both to Venezuela and Miami. In Venezuela it was also a team of three journalists and the coordinator there was Emilia Diaz.

**Florencia Melgar:** What did you learn in this experience that you’ll apply in future investigations to be more efficient?

**Monica Almeida:** Our schedule was well planned, but we didn’t consider that we were looking for people who were hiding.

You aren’t looking for legal companies. You have to start with the premise that you are looking for someone who is trying to hide. So you have to go five times to leave a note, talk with the doorman, etc. etc.

It doesn’t happen that you find it the first time you go to the location. We need to have a bit more extended schedule and at the same time be more aware that you really need to focus on finding these companies.

The other element [I would include] is to standardise the ways we work if we’re going to do a spreadsheet, we’ll do the same excel sheet.

This mean, don’t send me data for me to add, or things of this kind. No. It’s preferable to have it as google docs, or any other shared document. And we are all adding information.
[An agreement] on the methods from the beginning, yes, I think this is important.

It’s also good to understand how the other country works, from the very beginning. In this case, we lost two days trying to find some information that Emilia couldn’t explain to us because she was travelling.

And when she returned she explained that information didn’t exist because it’s illegal to talk about the topic, so nobody keeps the registry of the price of the parallel dollar. I had that idea somewhere in my head. But as Emilia wasn’t in the office, I had this doubt and I was trying to find it in Internet and trying to understand why I couldn’t’ find it.

These are things we should know from the beginning, what works differently in each country.

I think this is important. In United States sometimes [the problem is] the distance, because it’s a more transparent country, but at the same time you need more time for certain things or sometimes having access to a good database that allows us find addresses, etc. and know where to look for people.

For example, in Ecuador we have access to companies’ balance sheets, at least the last one. In Miami you don’t have access to this data; you can only access a name and an address.

So sometimes you need to go to the address to find out what there is in the place. In Google maps you can find the address and it might look like a high building or a commercial centre and you think it’s an office. When Quique [in Miami] went to one of the addresses to find out what it was, it was just the address of a store where you can rent a locker and that was the company’s address. They were ghost companies in Miami as well.

Florencia Melgar: What are the legal consequences [of the investigation] or any other kind of consequence?

Mónica Almeida: None in Venezuela. They were read by a lot of people, etc., but there wasn’t any consequence because no one investigates anything in Venezuela. And there’s been a kind of investigation related to the misuse of the Cadivi’s foreign exchange system, but still nothing concrete. In Ecuador, we managed to move some authorities, there was
already a process, an inquiry, and they got an instruction from the Prosecutor, but we still
don’t have the results.

There are situations, like trials, that don’t start because the main accused is a fugitive.

This person was detained in Venezuela but they let him escape.

Or a main accused has a business in Bogota, and I found it just looking in the web. I called
him and said he had a trial in Ecuador, etc. and he said to me “no, no, no, these are lawyers’
staff”.

How is possible that I could find him but the staff in the Office of the Prosecutor couldn’t and
hasn’t done anything.

**Florencia Melgar: Is that surprising in Ecuador?**

Monica Almeida: No, And it’s not surprising also because there are a lot of people who
consider it’s a white collar crime and Ecuador hasn’t been harmed as it involves exports and
Venezuela’s money and was basically overcharging or falsifying certain papers to fake the
exports to Venezuela and then the money came back to Ecuador and went to third countries.
That’s the mentality…

And that’s why we titled it: “The bleeding of dollars”, because it’s a very rich economy
because of the oil price but so many schemes were put together to take all the dollars away
from Venezuela… to the point that the Venezuelan Central Bank allows the payment of
imports before the product arrives to the country.

It’s designed to steal the dollars. The rules of foreign trade always require a bank guarantor.
For example, if I’m in Ecuador, I go to a bank and the bank confirms “x” person is an
exporter, and on “x” date this commodity will leave the country. And the other country has to
wait thirty days to receive it. So I am [the bank] the one who guarantees the exporter that he’s
really exporting the goods. And I pay you when the money is credited in Venezuela.
That’s how export guarantee letters work. But in this case, the Venezuelan Central bank says they don’t need anything. They sent the foreign currency, when I’m told someone will buy some goods. There isn’t a request to see the commodity, nothing… so it was a system that seems to be created for this purpose.

**Florencia Melgar:** And you could even think that the same system is being used with other regions of the world…

**Mónica Almeida:** Yes, we discovered the involvement of Argentina in this case. Ecuador imported machinery from Argentina to resell it to Venezuela. So we were also intermediaries of agricultural machinery to be sold to Venezuelans.

We haven’t followed up that part of the investigation. We focused on the chemicals [market] -that we don’t produce- and on agricultural machinery -that we don’t produce either- because these are the most outstanding items [in Ecuadorian exports].

We have identified certain companies but we haven’t finished the investigation because we haven’t been able to access the companies’ bank accounts to know how much they’ve moved and how they did it.

**Florencia Melgar:** Bank accounts in Ecuador?

**Mónica Almeida:** Venezuela and Ecuador.

We started the investigation by putting together a big database that we had to cross check, to be able to individualise out of all the suspicious products exported to Venezuela, who were the exporters behind them.

And only then the investigation started. So we found the data and put it in databases, and crossed them. That gave us the starting point. Then we started to explore the relations between these companies and that was a second starting point. We sent this data to Venezuela and they started working on it.
Florencia Melgar: What’s your opinion about this first draft of a methodology for transnational investigative journalism?

Monica Almeida: Sometimes we don’t have a good planning, because we are rushing. In this case, almost at the end, we realised we should talk with a journalist from El Nuevo Herald we know and who said he could help, but we weren’t counting with that. So we should have guessed from the beginning where the money was going to since it’s known the money of rich Latin Americans goes to Miami, and goes through Panama because it’s a tax haven.

We should have thought about this from the beginning to work with someone in Miami and start working on it with more time. We still had a good outcome, it’s a well told story but maybe if we had planned it better from the beginning, we would have avoided some of the [issues] we faced. “An agreed protocol”...we’ve never made a written agreement. It’s more about trust.

But maybe [it applies] when it’s a transcultural team, or when you don’t know each other all that much. We’ve been working with the people we meet in Colpin [the annual conference], we’ve known for at least 5 years so you already know about what other investigations the journalist did before, so there’s a level of trust... because I’ve seen your work so I know you have certain ethical practices we agree on, so we can work together.

But it’s good to remind this to people. It hasn’t happened to me but sometimes overconfidence might make you think the other part is doing things the same way you are but they aren’t really.

The confirmation of the hypothesis, I think that’s good. We made the hypothesis together with the Venezuelans. From the corrected hypothesis, you map the sources... yes... and now this is something very important and it’s the systematisation of the information to access what another journalist found in Miami or Venezuela.
Florencia Melgar: The model includes some excel tables for this kind of data that can be modified to match the needs of each investigation.

Monica Almeida: You adapt them… because it also depends on the topic. Sometimes you need the timeline, sometimes the timeline isn’t that important. Sometimes you need documental information to be able to track companies and people, so it changes case by case.

Florencia Melgar: Exactly. The key is to agree on how things will be done and to record them systematically from the beginning.

Monica Almeida: Yes, that’s very important. We had to read some 2,000 pages of Court proceedings, so the journalist who did this very hard job, he did a report systematising all the findings. That report was shared with Venezuela. It was very important. And it’s not just taking a few notes…

Florencia Melgar: It takes time but it would take much more if you don’t [do it].

Monica Almeida: Yes it’s an initial investment. You’ll profit from it during the investigation, you can search by keyword, dates, etc. And also… the way you interact with the others; you can’t impose your ways because nobody has been named as a leader or…

Florencia Melgar: You know many of your colleagues have suggested choosing a leader or coordinator, because it naturally happens there is more than one leader, so it’s better to have someone chosen by all the parts from the beginning instead of this happening during the process because someone takes the lead, and maybe not all the parts agree this is the right person.

Monica Almeida: Yes, possibly. But maybe the coordinator needs to understand he’s not the boss, but a coordinator.

The person in this role needs to have the capacity to arrive to agreements without impositions, and knowing he’s no one’s boss. He can coordinate, agree on things, ask how things were done, and softly suggest when it’s not the most adequate way of doing things.
Florencia Melgar: Good team management skills.

Monica Almeida: Management and experience. It can’t be a young new journalist who is just starting. The person also needs to have managed sources and different topics. So [he can compare with previous cases] and say… “I remember in ‘x’ case, I think we put the emphasis on the legal aspect. This case resembles to it, we might need a criminal lawyer…”

It needs to be someone with experience. And with an open personality, who is able to enforce agreements, but who doesn’t provoke disagreements amongst the people involved.

This revision half way [in your methodology]… once you’ve had an approach to the topic, yes, I think it’s important here -as I’m not sure how the coordination with the other media works- but if there are different formats, each media will adapt to its own format and audience.

It needs to be clear from the beginning that I’m not publishing what you write.

In this sense, I remember when we did the investigation about the oil, we worked with a journalist from Reuters because he knew a lot about oil.

They were hesitant to share with us the information they were going to publish. It wasn’t about the findings because we all shared that information. They didn’t share the text they were going to publish. And it was accepted because she reported to her editor. But in this story with Venezuela she shared everything.

In Ecuador, we shared this Venezuelan story with the figure of USD 250 million, and in the third paragraph we said “and there are USD 159 million more than can be added, etc.” But we couldn’t add both figures because the second part was still being inquired. So we couldn’t risk [an overall] figure. So yes, each country has to adjust.

Translations are important; it’s important to know what manager means, what owner means, what legal representative means, what shareholder means… [in each country involved in the investigation], everything that involves knowing the other better, like language, how things are organised, if there’s superintendence or any kind of authority, or not…
In this sense, the information exchange needs to flow easily… and you have to assume that your country is totally different from the other countries involved. Some people assume things work similarly and it’s not right.

Florencia Melgar: Not always the investigations done in Latin America are known overseas…

Monica Almeida: There isn’t much knowledge about Latin America. There’s quite a lot of information from the top. There’s very good investigative journalism in Latin America; the problem we have is that the Justice and Prosecutor’s offices [can be] co-opted by the political power. That’s why many of our investigations don’t have a legal result. We didn’t send anyone to jail; it didn’t happen.

Maybe it happens in other countries because Justice is independent. It makes people think nobody investigates anything in Latin America [because there aren’t many consequences].

And there’s also the fact that the international language is still English.

Florencia Melgar: They can be translated by universities, but [translating] is not part of our conceptual framework.

Mónica Almeida: No, it’s not. You publish it and that’s done. It also happens that news agencies don’t want to reproduce our stories. If Reuters, AFP or AP reproduced one of our stories, when it arrives to Washington, someone might find it interesting to translate it and add it to the English news cue. But this rarely happens.

That’s why we need to start thinking in other languages. I’m impressed that this story only in Ecuador had 53,000 unique browsers. It’s a difficult financial topic involving ghost exports, so I think it’s a success. We have to create those kind of platform to make people engage and continue reading, it’s interesting, maybe you add a video, an audio, an infographic. So I think journalists now need to think globally.
Because we produced that piece of content, we should be aware that it can reach audiences through different channels and we should think about those channels. It doesn’t need you will end up doing it yourself, we do the investigation. You can’t do everything.

I see you put emphasis in the international publication and the evaluation.

**Florencia Melgar: I think we don’t tend to evaluate our projects.**

Monica Almeida: No, we don’t. So much so that I called Armando.info to ask how many readers the story had on their site, as I needed to mention it today here. They said 9,500 and El Nuevo Herald [in Miami] had the story trending for two days. But there was also a scandal as people said… how is it possible they come to Miami to do money laundering.

**Florencia Melgar: Thanks very much for all your contributions.**

Monica Almeida: I hope I helped you.
Oscar Castilla

Investigative journalist. Director and founder of Ojo Público. He received the National Human Rights Award in Peru, the Transparency International-IPYS Award and the Data Journalism Award presented by the Global Editors Network. In addition, he was a finalist for the Latin American Conference on Investigative Journalism and the New Latin American Journalism Foundation Gabriel García Marquez (FNPI).

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZX-Urr2Wcw8
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Oscar Castilla: I started doing judicial journalism fifteen years ago. Then I covered crime stories and then political journalism. I worked in different sections of the newspaper and somehow specialised in topics that in Latin America are considered “hard” like organised crime, narco traffic that directly affects the country, political corruption, a scourge in this country. My speciality was in this kind of topics.

I ended up working in the investigative unite in El Comercio newspaper, where there aren’t limits; you can investigate whatever you want, provided it’s of public interest.
Floren {

cia Melgar: Do you work collaboratively with journalists from other media organisations, or within your team?

Oscar Castilla: We actually do nowadays. We try to change some behaviours we used to have in the past as we strongly opposed to collaborate with other colleagues, even within the organisation. Now we see the advantages of doing investigations collaboratively, choosing the right partner.

In Peru there are very good and very bad journalists; and there some others who are described by other colleagues as much better than what they really are.

There’s also another kind of journalists, with a low profile, but who have access to a lot of information but they are not very known.

So if you want to do a transnational investigation that has impact, you need to find the right partner in another country. The idea of choosing the right partner in another country, you need to know the market of journalists in the other country, know who is who.

We tend to look for partners in print or digital media, because that’s where we come from. Investigative journalism in radio and TV -at least in Latin America- are very small pockets.

You need to do a research to find who is the journalist you are interested in; he might be unknown and not have many twitter followers, he doesn’t have an opinion about everything but he publishes crime or judicial stories, has access to sources and has probably mimetised with the source and became reserved as well. That’s the kind of people we target to work with.

It might sound bad to say it like this, but it’s almost like recruiting a new partner and create a synergy that leads to a story of impact.

In Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, we don’t want to publish a story the readers in Bolivia, say, for example” “we knew that already”. It needs to have an impact in the other country as well.
We’ve done reporting with Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Bolivia. We try to find an adequate partner; not always in the journalistic world; sometimes in the academic world or NGOs, until we find the right partner.

I think the success of this story is that we were aware that the impact wasn’t going to come from the Peruvian side of the story - because we knew we were going to have a strong story here. The challenge was to publish a good story in the other countries and find a connection between all of them.

In Bolivia the report had a very strong impact. Our partner in Bolivia was a person who was familiar with the topic inside out, a person from a traditional media organisation but with a very low profile, who wasn’t dedicated to investigative reporting. He’s training started as a crime reporter but he did a bit of everything.

He never lost the traditional relationship with the sources and he helped a lot. It’s key to choose the right partner. If you don’t know who you are working with, when you publish you might discover the story was already known.

You didn’t know it because you aren’t there. Avoid being misled by the partner. The same rigor we apply to the people we are denouncing, also apply to the journalists we work with. Investigate them; how well regarded they are.

It’s very important to understand the logistics when you travel overseas to work on a transnational story.

Then you have the ICIJ model of data based stories with journalists in many countries through a collaborative model, using encrypted secure communication tools. Both ways of cross-border journalism are adequate; they all have the same factor, knowing the other part.

**Florencia Melgar:** Do you think it’s important to agree on a methodology or steps to follow from the beginning or not because journalism is too dynamic...

Oscar Castilla: Look, journalism is dynamic because we haven’t had the time to systematise and conceptualise all the knowledge, to sit down and write it down.
It’s like a deficiency in origin. At some stage in our lives maybe we have to sit down, do the minimum academic work of collecting the stories we’ve done, how we resolved the cases.

You share them in the pub with colleagues. If you aren’t a journalist, you’d be impressed. But it’s an anecdote; so I think the academic work about investigative journalism is very very valuable. We go through so many things, there isn’t enough time to systematise all of it.

Even though there is a dynamic component of the classic reporter who guides the investigation following his instinct and that’s also successful.

To have a more integral approach to the work, I think you need to bring both of these things together: follow the instinct but also systematise behaviours.

When you go to work with a Bolivian journalist, for example, you won’t say: “we are doing point 1, 2, 3...” You explain what you are doing in simple language, explain the workflow, but to do so, you need to have it clear in your head first.

When they are part of your routine... the trans-border investigative journalism isn’t a Decalogue. You can explain it in a very colloquial way so the colleague who isn’t necessarily into it, can understand.

**Florencia Melgar: Why do some journalists reject the systematisation of a methodology?**

Oscar Castilla: Generally, in investigative reporting, we’ve been standing on high altars. We’ve had our egos fed for a long time; we’ve told the audience what’s important to them. Internet has democratised things and changed behavioural patterns, but there are still journalists who see themselves as gurus.

I think it’s not like this anymore. We can’t despise data analysis or conceptualise, because finally there are patterns of behaviours in organised crime or corporate corruption which pose challenges that require these qualities. If you don’t access this way of working, you’ll be fishing [a story] within a bigger one.
You won’t see everything; if someone stole “x” you won’t see the other one that stole more. There is a need to be ordered. You need to put your ideas in order. Maybe it also depends on the personality of the journalist. Not everyone is ordered and disciplined with their work.

Many things influence at the same time: the personality, the media where he works, the age…

**Florentina Melgar:** What positive and negative lessons have you learnt through collaborative experiences?

Oscar Castilla: As a positive you learn how much the partner is giving -when you chose the right one.

There’s great satisfaction, because investigative journalists work between four walls, they’re very reserved... If we did a study of journalists, we’ll find many of them are paranoid, and I say it because I’ve been there. For them, collaborating is perjury, like a bad word.

Little by little the field is opening. This allows you to call and collaborate. The very fact of collaboration is fantastic; almost like a life experience for a journalist.

The negatives... if you don’t choose the right partner, many things can happen in the field work when you go to an area you don’t know, because they recommended bad logistics, or the driver. And if it’s a cabinet work, the person might not be reserved when you said he had to be.

You need to trust the person. When you choose, aside of the expertise, you need to fully trust the journalist. If you tell him something and he starts talking about it, someone else can publish it before you, or the information reaches the person who shouldn’t know about it, and get into trouble.

I think it’s important to spread the analysis of our behaviour, especially in times when the scourge affecting a country is very similar to the one the border countries are facing as well.
You realise that your local approach to your investigation isn’t that useful and you need a regional approach, and learn to play the game you play locally, but with the rest of the colleagues in South America.

**Florence Melgar: Many thanks.**

Oscar Castilla: Thanks.
Florencia Melgar (FM): How would you use a methodology if you had to work with journalists from overseas?

Oscar Libón (OL): I think it would help organise the ideas, and increase effectiveness. Even though many times we do it intuitively, I’ve noticed the information you sent and the steps you normally follow is a systematic and more comprehensive way. Of course each case is different, but it reflects well the steps we follow.

Florencia Melgar: What about having agreements on safe exchange of digital information?

Oscar Libón: It depends on the topic; and you’re right. It also depends on the political system where you are doing the search. Something like that happened to me when I was tracking the...
accounts of the [future] Peruvian first lady. I had to exchange information with Venezuelan colleagues. Chavez was in the government, and it was evident they were doing interception of all kinds of communications, so we used encryption methods. We used to do it, and I think the [Venezuelans] were used to doing it. I think it’s a very good alternative, depending on the case. If we made it a general procedure, I think it would be safer for journalists.

**Florencia Melgar:** Have you worked with journalists from other countries, and could you share the pros and cons of the experiences?

Oscar Libón: The pros are obviously accessing information; all the advantages of finding and checking your hypothesis and achieving a result. The cons are related to the availability of the other journalists, their hours… these kinds of agreements are informal, so it depends a lot on the other persons activities and personal responsibilities. There’s nothing that obliges them to get the information you are asking from them and that’s fine.

Sometimes, even because of a trust issue, I tried to ask how I can access the information directly from the relevant entity, before asking a colleague to help me. Sometimes it is complicated, sometimes it’s easier. It depends on the regulation of each country. Because when I was investigating the ex-president Alejandro Toledo, his accounts, etc. I could find all the migration movements of the people close to him and all the tracks lead me to Panama. And in Panama I tried to find more information from migration records, but in Panama I was told it wasn’t possible to find that information

**Florencia Melgar:** The authorities told you?

Oscar Libón: No, a colleague did. He said it was difficult. They apparently did the search and they said they couldn’t find anything. I was a little stuck there, because most of the information we knew about later on was in Costa Rica. Panama was a bridge in-between.
Florencia Melgar: In Costa Rica you could find …

Oscar Libón: In Costa Rica we could find information because that’s where they had the off-shore companies to send money to Lima, to buy real estate. That was the difficulty I had to face in that moment.

Florencia Melgar: Have you ever been in contact with a journalist but not being sure whether you could trust them?

Oscar Libón: Yes, that has happened to me. And that’s why sometimes I prefer they explain to me how I can access the information directly, but sometimes it’s not possible because it requires the physical presence. It depends. In the Venezuelan case, what I was asking was just references of who could manage certain kinds of information. In this specific case I was helped by the NGO Ipys in Venezuela, and I contacted people who had a trajectory, who had credibility, who could recommend me a colleague I could trust.

Florencia Melgar: How do you experience the challenge of finding time to investigate within your shift?

Oscar Libón: It’s complicated. In the last two years, I’ve been doing more day to day coverage. What I’ve needed the most is time, and I can sense it. Because you have a hypothesis, you have a topic to investigate and you can’t do it because you don’t have the time.

I also think media managers don’t have the vision and believe that bringing corrupt practices to light can only be published if the sources of the information are the Prosecutor officer or the Police, or the Judicial power. As if that was the only credible information. They don’t consider the information very much that the journalist finds by his own means, as the product of this investigative work, that in many cases neither the Prosecutor, or the Police take into account, or even consider it. To do this you need time and media organisations continue cutting jobs, and I’m not taking about investigative units, just the normal journalist jobs. They are moving into the multiplatform model and one person does many tasks. What’s the cost? There’s a high cost being paid. I see it as a limitation. Sometimes I think they do it because they don’t want to cover some stories.
It’s frustrating. I feel frustrated because I experience it every day. And when you have the elements to publish a story, sometimes they hesitate because it wasn’t said by someone [publicly] or it isn’t supported by an official. In this moment in Peru, journalism has decayed too much. There aren’t many places to take shelter either. There used to be certain trenches that kept these premises of the importance of the investigations and publish, but pushed by declarations and scandals they have been in decline and they don’t pay much attention to this. I hope we go back to it, when the present media model reaches its limit. But I’ve also noticed there are proposals outside traditional media.

**Florence Melgar: Ojo Público for example**

Oscar Libón: Ojo Publico has some traction. There are a number of interesting initiatives that look viable.
Pedro Salinas was born in Lima (Peru) in 1963. He is a writer and journalist. In the last 7 years he has been investigating and publishing about several cases of abuse in the heart of the religious organisation Sodalicio.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wCgWXAZIIrY&t=3s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Pedro Salinas: I’m an opinion journalist, I’m a political interviewer. This story I tell in this book called *Half monks, half soldier* is the story of a Peruvian religious organisation, similar to Marcial Maciel’s Legionaries of Christ, that also has a pederast founder, landed on my desk, when a victim of the institution contacted me.

I realised there was a story to tell, something to denounce. But it required an investigation, something I hadn’t done before.

I immediately contact Paola Ugaz, an investigative journalist who was trained by Gustavo Gorriti, one of the most important investigative journalists in Peru, or the most important one, very prominent in Latin America, to accompany and guide me in this effort, and be my outboard motor to carry out this project, this adventure.

Hadn’t been for Paola, this book might have not been published. It’s also a very complicated topic; very delicate because it involves dealing regularly with human pain, with the suffering
of people who’ve been sexual victims, which means you reopen wounds during the interviews, but you are also a human being and a sponge and that pain ends up touching you as well. It’s been a very complicated experience.

But as I said before, I couldn’t have done it by myself. Let alone finish it. Collaboration is essential. It’s not only Paola’s collaboration but also other people who want to help, or that we contact to ask for information for the book.

This book is not done by one person; 200 people participated in this book, many of them with a pseudonym, who have been vital to put together the investigation.

**Florencia Melgar: What did you learn in this process of working together with this investigative journalist? What are the lessons?**

Pedro Salinas: Organise the information and protect it. You’d think that with religious organisations, that somehow project a kind of saint image of dignity and well meaning, you wouldn’t face things that seem like taken from a movie: hacking, phone tapping, attempts to stop the investigation through law firms, some of them like threats and other pretending to be trying to buy the book, in other words, to bribe you and stop the investigation so you end up not publishing.

And if it wasn’t because I have been contrasting the information all the time with Paola...

I didn’t have another option. I tried to delegate the story to an investigative journalist, with more experience, who would take the case and get involved, but unfortunately it was going to take him/her much longer to contact the people, get to know the movement, reach the victims. It was unavoidable.

If destiny existed, that was what I had to do in that moment.

If we could go back to the past, I think my reaction and choice would have been the same.
I can’t say I’m satisfied about how it impacted on my personal life, no, there’s an obvious cost. But on the other hand, it’s something I had to do.

**Florence Melgar: What did you learn in this investigation, that you wouldn’t do again if you did another investigation? Maybe getting too much emotionally involved?**

Pedro Salinas: In this case I did get too much emotionally involved. It’s difficult. In this case, I was investigating an organisation that I had integrated in the past that had caused me psychological damage due to psychological and physical abuse, as well as brainwashing. So taking some distance from the object of the investigation -when you’ve been part of the institution, wasn’t easy.

This is how I sorted this out. This book brings together 30 testimonies of protagonists, over a period of more than 40 years, from 1970s to 2012-13. I decided to be one of the testimonies and this is my space to ‘vomit’ whatever I want to say to the institution.

I thought this is my moment and I added my testimony. This allowed me to treat the rest of the investigation with more distance, something I think I managed to achieve.

That’s why the institution -using a metaphor- surrendered because the factual evidence was strong. Until today nobody from the Sodalicio organisation has confronted me or threatened to take me to Court, not even questioned the things I say in the book. In a press release they accepted the verisimilitude of the testimonies.

**Florence Melgar: After your experience in this investigation, do you think it’s helpful to systematise the investigation process?**

Pedro Salinas: Yes, let’s see... There are things that are essential. You start with a working hypothesis. But before going there, I didn’t look to write this book. The story popped in my face and I couldn’t look to the other side, or assign the investigation to an experimented journalist, because he wouldn’t have the advantage of knowing the institution from inside, and meet the main characters.
The people who went through the institution don’t tend to talk about it unless you’ve been part of it as well, and there’s this kind of empathetic relationship, because somehow they feel part of a brotherhood of war veterans, or something like that.

Only an ex Sodalite can understand another ex Sodalite. That’s why the story was dragging me like a black hole, I couldn’t distance myself from it.

I had to start from a working hypothesis, put the information in order, read a lot, incorporate a lot of literature -because it was a subject I knew very little about or nothing at all so I went to the background information, and finding literature about the topic is not easy as there isn’t much available.

I read about the Catholic Church. It was essential to increase my general knowledge to understand what I was dealing with.

After that you need patience, tenacity, be stubborn. If you are convinced about your investigation, you will do it. And discipline, Discipline is essential because if you are not disciplined, at some point you’ll give up and the investigation will be left in a drawer. As I said, if it wasn’t for Paola’s collaboration, who pushed me to continue; at the end almost pushing me to sit down and write everything we had collected.

**Florencia Melgar: It sounds as if you had a moral obligation to tell this story.**

Pedro Salinas: Yes. And I tell you more... I involved many people of the times I was part of the Sodalicio, and unfortunately [I found out] some of them ended up in the closest circles of the main pederasts of the institution, and I presume they were sexually abused, and was damaged and there was a sense of awareness, guilt, responsibility, and the fury caused by deducing these facts, led me to seek justice, to make these things transparent, and the truth be publically known.
Florencia Melgar: Do you think this is happening in other parts of Latin America and the world?

Pedro Salinas: Specific countries: Mexico and Chile -because this situation is very similar to what happened there.

The whole story about clerical pederasty exploded in 2002 in Boston and then it expanded to other states in United States, and then it jumped to Europe, to countries like Germany, Ireland -the most Catholic country on Earth together with Poland, Belgium, Holland and more... And in Latin America we have the Mexican case with Marcial Maciel, the founder of the Legionaries of Christ.

When I started this [investigation] a story of a Chilean priest in a parish for rich people had just come, and the priest’s name was Fernando Karadima. He had something in common with Fernando Figari, the founder of the Sodalicio. It’s interesting that without having met, there was a kind of manual of the pederast. The methods were not the same, but they were very similar in many aspects.

Now, when you extrapolate this case and you frame it in the space of the sects -Scientology, Children of God, you name it... you also find similarities. There is a modus operandi that you can see reflected there.

And on a personal level, my reflection as a father is to be responsible and not give your children blindly to a religious school, thinking they are good people because they show a smiley face from the door to the outside world, because you don’t know what they are doing inside doors.

You have to keep track of your children all the time; without invading them, even without instilling your convictions, but encouraging critical thinking, and the capacity to question things (why this and why that) and not surrender to dogmas or imposed truths, usually preached by a kind of enlightened guru who pretends to own the truth.
Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.

Pedro Salinas: Thank you Florencia.
Ricardo Uceda Perez is a Peruvian journalist notable for his award-winning coverage of military and government corruption. In 1994, Ricardo Uceda resigned as editor-in-chief of Sí to form a special investigative team at El Comercio, then Peru’s most popular daily newspaper. In 2000, the International Press Institute selected him as one of 50 World Press Freedom Heroes of the past half-century.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9UoFo0A7Vro&t=38s
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florencia Melgar: How did the project of the bank of stories start?

Ricardo Uceda: As we were very interested in knowing about Latin American investigative journalism, we wanted to systematise it and we asked very simple questions in relation to journalistic investigations that had to demonstrate something.

The first thing we did was asking Latin American journalists who had done emblematic investigations, what did they discover in their work. Then, how did they discover it. And that implies a methodology, right? And within the methodology there are some very important questions. For example, how long did you work? How much did you spend? What’s the final cost?
In terms of resources, everything is money because many media outlets have very limited resources, like media outlets in regional areas of Latin America, if you compare their resources with big media like TV Globo, La Nación in Argentina… the main media organisations… you can’t compare.

So we asked… “For this investigation, did you have to go beyond your budget? How much more have you spent in this investigation than the usual expenses used in your newsroom? It’s very important to estimate the cost because there is the idea –that I think it’s a myth to a certain extent- that you can’t investigate without resources. These innocent questions are basic, even when they don’t seem to be. For example, how did the investigation start? It’s amazing to discover that 40% start by some random piece of information. This means the investigation begins because someone heard a rumour. Or it’s a rumour circulating and someone stops to assess if it has legs.

For example, the story of the white house of [president] Piña Nieto started with a photo in “Hola” magazine. We’re really interested in knowing how investigations start. Sometimes it’s an impulse, not a big planning born in a kind of investigations lab. Sometimes it comes from a previous investigation you did. So that’s the raw material that was found before and was used later on [for this library of investigations]; sometimes it’s an editorial decision “I want to investigate the judicial system”, etc.

**Florencia Melgar: What happens when you receive the information, sometimes anonymously?**

Ricardo Uceda: I’m not against it; I check the information and publish it. Investigative reporting is not a genre, a speciality to treat as a cult, it’s an instrument. Investigations exist because it’s necessary to find important news that are relevant to the society.

No media, regardless of how strong and established it is will fund investigations that don’t have more or less a feasible objective, or don’t have a plan or sources. So investigations are necessary because there are very important things that aren’t known. But to look for them anyone can do it, even young journalists. You just need to be cunning and logic and have
common sense to find feasible stories. You need objectives; you need to know what you’re looking for. And maybe not try to address the whole problem but a part of it and do it right.

Florencia Melgar: When there are many countries involved, there are other challenges. What are the lessons you’ve learned in your experience?

Ricardo Uceda: We have a very interesting experience of calling for project proposals. This happens because there are donors who want to foment journalistic approach to problems that aren’t news and that aren’t attractive to media organisations but that are very important for the people.

Topics like health, climate change and a series of themes that are targeted in these calls for projects and journalists apply for the funding that’s normally USD 5,000 for a four month project.

Journalists think about the objective, they make a plan and 70% of the projects approved by us are successful, they are published. I think the most important thing is to have a clear idea of what you are looking for, have sources and the capacity to glimpse the steps of the investigation and place them in a timeline. It’s very important that the journalist knows what to do in the first week, in the second week…. Since the moment he starts using the time assigned to the project; he needs to know what he’s looking for, not just going out to investigate as the super investigator with the magnifying glass, and not knowing where he’s going to, is a recipe for failure. In most cases, even though it can still go wrong, normally you get the results you need if you have the right planning in place.

Florencia Melgar: How did IPYS’s bank of Latin American Journalistic investigations come about?

Ricardo Uceda: We had an investigative journalism contest for 13 years so every year we had many works. We do a first pre-selection before passing them on to the jury. Then we discovered this was very useful for the journalists, and we started systematising it methodologically amongst journalists who know the dynamics of investigative works. Each year we’ve compiled this systematised information. There have been many donors and
foundations to do interviews, to compile information. In the first years of the bank –I’m talking about year 2002- we hired journalists to put together a list of the ten best investigations in their countries, interview the authors, and then, the raw material is there already to be analysed and needs to be systematised and maintained.

**Florencia Melgar:** Every year new investigations will thicken the list…

Ricardo Uceda: Yes, that’s why IPYS has partnered with a University, because we have limited resources. Keeping the [investigations] bank updated has a cost, so we’ve made alliances with UNESCO and with a university to manage the IT part of it. Every year we give an award and organise a conference. We need to improve our capacity of explaining this better.

**Florencia Melgar:** What about the translations to English to reach the rest of the world?

Ricardo Uceda: I think that would be very interesting, especially for universities where they study Latin America. In this moment we aren’t in a position to translate.

**Florencia Melgar:** Why aren’t we telling these stories within Latin America and to the world?

Ricardo Uceda: Journalists tell a story, we do it, we close it and we move on to something else. How many stories a journalists does per year? Forty?

**Florencia Melgar:** Thanks you very much.
Rodis Recalt is an Argentinean journalist who works as a political journalist for *Perfil* publisher.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HohUmrazDwc&t=220s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HohUmrazDwc&t=220s)

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

**Florencia Melgar:** What kind of experiences have you had in transnational investigative journalism?

**Rodis Recalt:** They have all been very negative. When I investigated about the intelligence services, I tried to contact journalists from the New York Times, who worked in investigations about the CIA, and wrote books with CIA sources.

I contacted them to ask if they could be the connection between their sources and I, to find an Argentinean spy living in the United States.

My plan was to find him to knock at his door, but they didn’t want to collaborate arguing that they work for a media company -the New York Times- and it wouldn’t be highly regarded if they collaborated with another media outlet that in Argentina is Perfil publisher / Noticias magazine, where I work.
That was the justification to say “no”. And that was it. I still expressed my will to work with them in the future and offered my help if he ever needed information from Argentina. That’s what I’m after… to find a net of colleagues that help each other, because journalists know how to operate in their own country and how institutions work, and where to find the information. Beyond the sources, they know how to manage the country’s data bases which are very important.

Then I tried with Spain, with a former journalist of “El Mundo” newspaper. I tried to exchange information with him… not really… I asked him for some information, and I offered that when he needs anything from Argentina, he can call me or write to me and I’d do my best to help him.

I sent him my request, he sent me his request that was related to Argentina. I answered and sent him the information he needed, but he didn’t send anything of what I asked. So I could never get anything in this way.

And something that happens quite a lot is that investigations I’m working on get stuck when the protagonists leave the country. In Argentina it is very common to fly to Brazil or Uruguay as a scale before they fly to a third country.

So when you are able to access the migration log of a person, unless it’s a direct flight to destination, the log stops in Uruguay or Brazil, which are not the final destination. But that’s how it’s recorded in the migration log.

I’d like to find a Uruguay journalist to whom I could say: I followed the route up to here… can you complete the rest of the route with your sources?

And then both can publish…

We could both publish, but sometimes the interest of the journalist who starts the investigation is not the same interest of the journalist helping him. I think it’s much more collaborative and depends on the colleague’s good will because if I’m not interested in the story, I’m not going to ask to be credited… it’s all good I shared the information and that’s it.
I feel it doesn’t compete with me; I compete with the magazine of the competitor media organisation in my country, or the paper that covers the same topics I cover and I try to come first; but I don’t compete with the Uruguayan colleague publishing the story.

And maybe he isn’t interested. Now, if the countries had a common agenda, and both countries are covering the same stories, if there are news that are crossing each other, then we should agree on the kind of publications, the credits…

**Florencia Melgar:** Like agreeing on a shared copyright.

**Rodis Recalt:** Yes, that’s it. But it also depends on the media organisations [involved]. Sometimes you might want to agree on a more informal level but then you have to consult with your boss, your editor and you tell him you are signing an article with a colleague from Uruguay’s El Pais paper, or with a colleague from O’Globo.. I think there shouldn’t be any problem but this is also new so we’ll have to see how media organisations adapt to this.

Personally I wouldn’t have any issue. The problem might be the time difference, for example you might collaborate with someone from Spain and in Spain they publish your story at 5 am Argentina’s time, and the local newspapers are already publishing it.

And when it’s published in your magazine, you are 8 hours late. So you need to coordinate and there are many details to fine-tune.

Moreover, I believe that this collaboration is disinterested. This is based on my experience. I was asked to help in [the production of] stories I wasn’t interested in publishing. It had nothing to do with my line of work, or what I do. I just give them the information and I think it’s like credit [I have for the future]. When I need some information [further down the track] please be there for me, because one day I’ll need you.

**Florencia Melgar:** But also because there are common ethics shared by investigative journalists that we want the story out when it’s an information someone is hiding.

**Rodis Recalt:** Yes, that’s it.
Florence Melgar: That’s the motive that unites us all in investigative journalism.

Rodis Recalt: Yes, yes. Investigative journalists don’t think who will benefit and who will be hurt… and besides, what do I win by blocking the publication of a colleague?

Florence Melgar: Now we are talking about the role of media and there are more and more independent organisations that are not financed by advertising, and maybe it’s easier to build journalists’ networks in this context because there isn’t any media pressure to stop journalists.

Rodis Recalt: The cases I know of independent organisations (NGOs, blogs…) I think they would love to publish in a mass media outlet so when one of their investigations is published by a big media outlet, it’s like a prize for them; they work to make their stories public. I think media organisations will end up adapting. In Argentina I have collaborated and have received collaborations from bloggers who are excellent data base investigators, geniuses of Internet and finding that piece of information that might take you months to find, or that you need someone to tell you can find it.

They find them; they know how to search, as well as content curators.

Showing and quoting a blog and their work in your “prestigious” media, for them it’s very important, and it doesn’t change any of the journalists’ story; it’s just a line.

Florence Melgar: And it’s the way to do it.

Rodis Recalt: It is the way to do it, sure.

Florence Melgar: What’s your opinion about using an agreed methodology?

Rodis Recalt: I started as an online journalist an then I joined print media, traditional media if you want… I believe you need to be where the information is.

It can be in a face to face conversation having a scotch in a pub at 2 am, in a data base, in Twitter, in Facebook, wherever... I’ve done stories only based on the Instagram account of a
person. That wasn’t investigative journalism, but it is journalism. And I’ve completed investigations [using] images that appeared on Facebook, Twitter.

People you need to find who have a Facebook profile. In fact, one of the stories I’m presenting here in Colpin, one of the sources was Facebook, because one of the persons I had to find was there, and you need certain standards to be sure you can individualise a person. You need to be sure that this “Jorge Perez” is the “Jorge Perez” you are looking for. You need to corroborate the context: mother, father, siblings, and if they are part of the group of Facebook friends you are clearly very close to that “Jorge Perez” you are after.

I think we have to use all the tools. And in regards to the methodology, personally I’m not a very methodological person. But I think that database analysis needs a methodology and rigor.

But in journalism, when you are asked to verify information with three different sources or publish the story first, these are methodologies. You are always tied to a methodology.

**Florencia Melgar: Making the method transparent could help validate investigations done overseas.**

Rodis Recalt: It happened to me of working with or quoting bloggers and I was questioned by traditional journalists who depreciated the value of my story. In Argentina –I don’t know how these things are in other parts of the world- I work in an Argentinean media outlet with Argentinean colleagues, and within the “Porteña” culture.

So quoting a blog or using a blogger’s story to start an investigation and go deeper into the topic, what Argentinean colleagues normally do is they depreciate the value of the story and question its credibility.

And sometimes the information is good. If you have ways of verifying the other person’s work, and it’s good, it’s good. Full stop. What’s important is to quote the source, and I think the information, regardless of the origin, if it’s information, it’s ok. I’m not interested in the
other person’s interest—even if it’s my source- I’m not interested in why he is giving me the information, as far as the information is true.

If the guy wants to hurt someone, I don’t ask. I might assume why [he is sharing the information] but if the information he is giving me is true, it’s true.

If a blog publishes information that is true, I think that publishing their story and crediting them, I think it’s totally legit.

**Florencia Melgar:** In this space of collaboration between journalists, what would be the ideal? What would you like to happen?

Rodis Recalt: It would be spectacular to pick up the phone and call a Uruguayan colleague and say “Hey, this is Rodis, how can I find the owners of this company?” or “How can I know what companies this guy owns?”

The same way, they can call me. In Argentina there are amazing data bases with information about Argentinean citizens and foreigners, and they are useful to understand the story. It might not resolve it but they add information. The disinterested collaboration is the one I like. I might not share a piece of information with a local colleague working on the same story I’m doing.

**Florencia Melgar:** It’s the competitor.

Rodis Recalt: It’s the competitor. But with someone from another country who is not within my competition range [I share] everything… everything because I think it will reciprocate, and because I believe it makes good journalism, because it broadens his horizon, and it also broadens mine.
Florencia Melgar: This means that transnational investigative journalism opens doors to kinds of collaboration that you wouldn’t do within your country because of the media competitors.

Rodis Recalt: Exactly. That’s why I think you can work with the number one of another country without him feeling jealous.

It also depends on the timing. Journalists are very disorganised. It’s difficult to find a super methodical journo; they are always overwhelmed…

There’s always a piece of information to check, a guy you have to meet with, a family… so investing time in the other…

I live in Buenos Aires. If I’m asked by a colleague to go to the Patagonia to check the front of the house of a guy there, can you go there in a rush? [if it was this particular case] No, I can’t go.

But if I can, it’s like a favour, what in Argentina we call “gauchada”.

[If the neighbour] asked me for a cup of sugar… of course I’d say yes if it’ no too inconvenient. If you asked me… “can you check this information in the Argentinean data bases?” I do it. Or “can you ask about this to your sources?” “Yes, not problem.”

Don’t ask me to go around the world for you because I also have responsibilities. But a collaboration that adds to your work, no problem.

Florencia Melgar: Are there legal limitations in Argentina to publish some information because it can be an attack on national security, as it happens in the United States and Australia?

Rodis Recalt: I was reported in Argentina for violating state secrets. There is court case against me. My boss, the head editor of the magazine, the director of the publisher and myself were reported because we published a list of spies who were militants of a political group who were given public jobs. The government in Argentina is finishing its period. As of today, 20th November they have 20 days left.
A few months ago they started to name new agents within the Intelligence Secretary of Argentina, who didn’t have any kind of experience. We took the risk of being reported for violating a secret of state. But we were able to publish evidence of a disloyal manoeuvre with an organism that in six months would be under the control of different authorities. They were leaving a number of infiltrated staff –if you want- for the following administration. We disarticulated it and they reported us. There are limitations of this kind. It’s important to have the support [of your media organisation].

**Florencia Melgar: Can they put you in jail?**

Rodis Recalt: I don’t’ know, I still don’t know. The case is still open.

The difference between this and small organisations, is that we have a structure of lawyers and advisers to support us. But if you are a blogger, it’s likely you have to pay for a lawyer. We are able to continue working and publishing because we don’t have to worry for the legal issues.

**Florencia Melgar: Imagine a situation in your country didn’t allow you to publish a particular story that involves another country. Would you give the story to a journalist overseas to publish?**

Rodis Recalt: If there aren’t any agenda issues, I have no problem. It’s happened with colleagues you talk to regularly, they give you some information or I give to them. This is when some information couldn’t be included in my story. Or I know about the information after the edition is closed. We close on Thursday, if you receive some info on Friday, you pass it on to a colleague… because the day after tomorrow someone else will have it as well.

The people you have good relation with, you say… “Hey, I got this, if it’s useful for you…” This is with someone you have a friendship, a good relationship.

Imagine if you can do it with someone who is a competitor, of course you’ll do it with someone from another country.
We had two cases of this kind. A few months ago when we investigated the Secretary of Intelligence, an Argentinean spy that was in the United States nobody knew his face, how he looked like now. We found a photo of him but we got it the day after the magazine closed. The magazine I work for is edited once a week and we are part of a publishing company that has many publications. We gave it to the newspaper we compete with. Beyond the camaraderie and belonging to the same company, we compete… we compete for the agenda, the topics and with the colleagues… and we ended up giving it to them. We didn’t want to risk missing the exclusive story. And they gave the credit to the magazine, ok?

What happens is that these things are so discussed in an organisation, that I think that would be the maximum to what you can aspire in terms of the relationships… get to a point where relationship are so close that there is a fluid dialogue and information exchange. That happens sometimes with the guy you compete with.

**Florence Melgar:** You said it would be great to pick up the phone and be able to access a network of journalists to confirm information. How do you trust that journalist if he’s someone you don’t know.

Rodis Recalt: There you go… what we were talking about before, the blogs and organisations, and prestigious journalists –there are prestigious journalists you know through their work- who you can know by reading and analysing the publications and you can generate a level of trust; like reading an author you are interested in. You believe in him because he has a working history behind him to back him up. In the case of a person you don’t know, what you are after is other kind of information; not what he can get you with his sources, but the access to the data bases.

For example, if a Spanish journalist can get you the list of members of an anonymous society, if it’s part of a public data base, he can tell you the source and that’s it.
Florencia Melgar: So it would be more about data exchange than investigating together.

Rodis Recalt: Exactly. The main disadvantage of joint investigations is time. Look, I’m trying to put together a genealogical tree of a person I’m investigating and I need to re-build his family’s history.

And I’m being supported by a journalist of another media who is not my competitor and she is an expert in genealogy.

We started exchanging information and she helped me. She has helped me to move forward but we are still stuck basically because she hasn’t got time for this. So joint investigations are limited to the time the other [has available]. Even more when there isn’t any economic retribution.

Beyond the issue of time – you assign importance to time, according to your interest, whether it means to lose that time or invest the time.

Maybe the investigation of a colleague I’m not interested in the time I invest is inversely proportional to the time I need for my other work, so I can help you, but I won’t be a priority. Now, if you are saying – and this is what I’m interested in – that we agree on certain rules, methodology and working goals, we have to see what the project is about. It’s case by case. When you were describing it, it made me think of historical investigations, when there is a mutual interest in different countries, then we can make and then we can make an extra effort to invest time in the project.

That’s why it all depends on how much interest there is in each project. If the biggest interest comes from one of the parts involved, the other one will give you a hand but won’t commit as much as you do.
Florencia Melgar: There are colleagues who don’t want to change their investigation method.

Rodis Recalt: It’s a limited investigation. I investigate by myself, no team. The maximum would be a colleague you work with because he gives you some information. But the investigation stops when the object –the person- leaves the country. That’s the important part. If you can get collaboration… don’t see it like… because you present it as a team work of a group of colleagues who collaborate and share the credit. Maybe we should start looking at our colleagues as sources. I’m his source when he needs something from Argentina; he’s my source when I need something from Brazil, Uruguay, Spain, Peru…

Maybe is a way of not making the other waste his time when you collaborate with each other. If it’s a big investigation, a heavy one that involves many countries, your project of a methodology, working together, and publishing together, is viable, but it has to be as super heavy project. If we don’t adapt we won’t survive.

Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.

Rodis Recalt: Thank you.
Walter Pernas is a Uruguay journalist specialised in investigative journalism; he’s also a teacher and a writer. He is one of the co-directors and founders of the journalistic website *Sudestada*.

Access the video interview:  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3Gi3NNFvvQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3Gi3NNFvvQ)

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation (Lima, Peru, November 2015)

**Florencia Melgar**: What’s your experience in transnational investigations, what are the lessons learnt?

In general, when you help someone or you ask for help to a colleague in another country, you try to answer the request and also put the information in context to help them assess if the story can be done or not.

For example, if I was asked for the members of Parliament’s registration of affidavits, I’d say…maybe that’s legal in your country. In mine, you can find that information only through sources. And that would delay the other journalist’s work.

In terms of what each country’s legislation allows to investigate there’s a lack of a broad knowledge between journalists of different countries; for example, of Uruguayans of what happens in Colombia or Peru, etc. We make a phone call or send emails and that’s sorted.
The experience [of working collaboratively] has been beneficial in each investigation where other countries participated, at least for Uruguay. Beyond the support of just providing some information, it happened that we got involved in stories where both media organisations could benefit from the same information.

The best scenario in terms of coordination was when we worked Uruguay with Spain. The best situation is when you have two media outlets from two countries working on the same investigation. Maybe each country chooses different angles of the same story. Sometimes you manage to publish at the same time.

The other scenario is when you share data with a colleague and you are giving a hand. In those cases there isn’t much coordination involved.

**Florencia Melgar:** The organisation Connectas [also] has a methodology and recommendations with journalists making agreements. Which are the pros and cons?

**Walter Pernas:** Every journalist who starts an investigation has a hypothesis. I’m not sure if we could apply such a scientific methodology as you propose here; I’m not sure if that would be possible or not. I think we advance slowly, sometimes in concentric circles, sometimes from low to high, but that the permanent communication between the teams working together makes it more viable.

I’m not sure if you need to follow phase by phase. You can be in contact on a daily basis, using chat or email and ask the other part for their opinion every time you obtain new information. I think the coordination can work in this way. However, there are basic hypothesis that are reviewed all the time.

I don’t think you have to wait a whole cycle to rethink a hypothesis, as new data can make it veer at any time, and what used to look, now it might become orange or greenish. I think that’s the way. What I think it’s good to have when coordinating a number of countries: two, three, four, is that we all need to know the basic rules of each of the countries involved. For example, open sources, freedom of information requests, the pros and cons of each country to
be able to think with a macro perspective. I think the hypothesis review will happen permanently.

**Florencia Melgar:** In terms of data exchange and its systematisation, an Ecuadorian journalist said earlier that when she worked with databases it would be good to agree on the same practices [or Excel templates] when working with data.

Walter Pernas: If it was an investigation of the impact of one topic in the different countries involved, it could work as parallel actions. If it was an investigation in which each country contributes with a distinctive part, in that case I think the planning should involve agreeing on who does what to obtain certain information. We agree on a timeline and when we have the information we get together again to discuss how to move forward and if we need a new hypothesis.

Basically we need to know the real possibilities of each of the parts involved. Otherwise you can delay the others’ work.

**Florencia Melgar:** during this year Colpin congress I was suggested to include a coordinator as part of this model. This person’s role would be to consolidate and bring some order, but also to balance relationships because journalists have big egos. It’d be a facilitator’s role.

Walter Pernas: I think there should be a person or team who is responsible for the project. If the project is leaded, for example by Argentina, that’s better because if there isn’t a leader imagine 14 countries, each of them trying to push the investigation to one or the other side. It’s better to have someone conducting the investigation and force the hypothesis revision with new ideas and dialogue. Otherwise it could be chaotic.

**Florencia Melgar:** how do you agree on a timeline?

Walter Pernas: Well, depending on the topic you have to allow the necessary timeframe. If I’m doing a FOI in Uruguay, it doesn’t take the same number of days than in El Salvador.
They have 10 waiting days and we have 20 days. The laws vary…when the state can deny the information arguing security reasons or because it didn’t produce it.

Florencia Melgar: what do you think about the initial division of roles? Do you think it’s necessary?

Walter Pernas: With nine strikers you don’t win the match because you don’t have any defence. This is similar. For example, for each investigation there are the most suitable journalists. Are we targeting journalists who are quick with data? Or with access to information in United States or Panama…

Florencia Melgar: The methodology proposes an early analysis of viability to maximise resources.

Walter Pernas: One thing is to decide if it’s viable and something different is if you can contrast the validity of the hypothesis in the field. You might go out to do field work and realise there isn’t a story. At some stage you might realise that your initial hypothesis is not true and you don’t need another hypothesis because you don’t have a story.

For example in a corruption case you might conclude there isn’t evidence against the people you are investigating. It is interesting when a conclusion leads you to another hypothesis. For example, in the case of how the political campaigns are funded, we came across a document of a donation for a political party of a company that got a benefit after the election with a tax exemption.

We knew we already had a story. Based on this story we created an app, we cross checked with the legislation, we discovered that it wasn’t the only exemption but that there were many others and altogether involved millions of dollars.

There were other companies with privileged exemptions like the Eurnekian group that made donations and then benefited from the contacts with the government to get tax exemptions. So the data allowed us to confirm this. Even if we didn’t investigate for a year, this was already a story to publish.
Florencia Melgar: the planning and the methodology help support funding applications, something we aren’t used to but necessary in a context of increasing self-funding investigative journalism.

Walter Pernas: if it starts as a regional project with financial support, then it would establish the practical foundations of the production. If it’s an in-depth investigation each journalist will have to dedicate some of their time to the project. If doing this investigation is a paid job, it’s much better, but most of the time the investigations aren’t like this. So what we are most used to doing is giving a hand to colleagues who are doing a story in another country. But we know we will be able to ask them for information in the future.

However, the professionalisation in the field of securing resources for investigations would be very positive for the region and the world. I think what you are doing here is very interesting, because it would be the first time we can systematise something. I’m not sure if everything you are proposing will work, but the exercise of systematising something of what we normally do in the field. (…) that’s a very good thing and has a lot of value.
Vinicius Sassine

Journalist and economist. Journalist for newspaper O Globo -Brasilia. Winner of the Esso 2014 Prize, the most important in Brazil, with a series of reports on the refinery Abreu and Lima. In 2015 he received an honourable mention of the Prize for Excellence in Journalism, awarded by the Inter American Press Association.

Original Interview in Spanish. Translation
Interview video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNAau5I6mnc

Vinicius Sassine: It’s an investigation about a refinery in Brazil. The name is “Abreu y Lima” refinery. It’s a refinery owned by the state, Petrobras. The investigation is about a big project that involved two countries, Brazil and Venezuela. Presidents Lula and Hugo Chavez came up with this project idea in 2003, always as a binational project in Pernambuco, a north-eastern state in Brazil.

The evolution of the project’s costs made Venezuela leave the project; Chavez had to leave it. So Brazil was left alone with this project. This was a big problem because this project was over-invoiced. There were very large surcharges, large deviations of capital and bribes. There’s a big investigation in Brazil, carried out by the Police and the Prosecutor’s office. It’s a big corruption scandal and the core of the investigation is this refinery.
Florencia Melgar: Did you work by yourself or with colleagues?

Vinicius Sassine: We are a team. And this is a series of reports. We are a team of four journalists; two in Brasilia (a colleague and I) and two in Rio de Janeiro. O’Globo is a newspaper based in Rio de Janeiro, with a branch in Brasilia. So we work together in a team.

Florencia Melgar: Did you have the support of a Venezuelan journalist?

Vinicius Sassine: No, everything was done in Brazil, we didn’t have the support of Venezuelan journalists, because Venezuelan’s involvement finished some time before, around 2009 and for the last 5 or 6 years it’s been a Petrobras project, and the corruption scandal doesn’t involve Venezuela, but the Brazilian government and the direction of Petrobras.

Venezuela’s involvement is more an administration-related issue of this project, when it was created and all the political errors made then. It was a project that was technically conceived to serve the refinery of oil of two countries, and because Chavez left the project, Brazil had to re-define the whole project, invest much more. The initial budget was 2,000 million dollars, and it ended up costing Petrobras AUD 20,000 million. One of the main reasons of this increase was Venezuela’s decision of leaving the project in 2009.

Florencia Melgar: Has the investigation triggered political or legal developments?

Yes, many political consequences. We started this investigation when a big Police operation to investigate the case started in Brazil. But we did our reports independently from the Police, using documents from Petrobras, the contracts, the contractual agreements that were an open door that lead to corruption. After this report, the Police started a big investigation and now we are more following the Police’s investigation, as the scandal unfolds.
Florencia Melgar: What did you learn in this project about how to carry out an investigation?

Vinicius Sassine: It was a great experience. Firstly, in relation to the team work, working with journalists based in two cities. It’s not easy but it’s very positive because we were working in two out of the three biggest cities in Brazil. You always learn when you work in a team. You learn to look for sources, you learn to decipher very technical information, because in such big oil refinery enterprises is very difficult to decipher what overprice means, what a contract means, what’s legal, what’s not. So I think there is a big learning curve when you start producing this kind of reportages.

Florencia Melgar: How did you work? Did you have any method, a way to exchange information?

Vinicius Sassine: Yes, we had access to lots of Petrobras´ official internal documents, a state company that used to operate with no transparency at all. After this Police operation, things have changed a bit. Things are a bit more open now. But in that context there wasn’t much access to documents, so we had to contact Petrobras´ internal auditors, former directors, employees, and sources that work in auditing processes.

It’s important to contact these people and identify who of them is interested in helping the journalist and who understands the relevance of journalistic investigations. Also, when the documents are assessed, there’s a process of document analysis and evaluation of their relevance to find where the story was.

Florencia Melgar: How did you archive these documents? How did you share them between cities? Was it digital or paper copies?

Vinicius Sassine: Basically digitally, using email, or over the phone. We met once but it was mostly digital communications.
Florencia Melgar: If you were working with a team of four or five journalists from different countries, would it be useful to have a methodology in common, or do you think that it may affect your freedom?

Vinicius Sassine: I think it would be an important experience, especially in Latin America, because there are many stories that need to be told. And this cooperation between journalists of different countries would be very important. I haven’t had an experience of that kind, but I think it’d be important to develop a methodology and identify journalists’ ways of working, because journalism is very dynamic, each journalist has his/her way of working, and with topics they are interested in. So it’s necessary to identify those profiles.

It’s important to develop a methodology, as well as having a journalist acting as a leader, who is able to consolidate all the information, who can consolidate the texts. We had a journalist playing this role in this series of reports, who was working in Rio de Janeiro. He consolidated all the texts and gave them a unified identity and style. I think that’s very important.

**Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.**

Vinicius Sassine: Thank you.
Amanda Gearing

Amanda Gearing is an investigative journalist, author and broadcaster. She completed her Doctorate of Philosophy in the field of Journalism at Queensland University of Technology in 2016. Her thesis Global investigative journalism in the network society explores Castells’ network theory and Berglez’s global journalism theory to conceptualise global investigative journalism and the emergence of a global Fourth Estate.

Amanda Gearing [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQU9x02W6g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQU9x02W6g)

Florence Melgar: Why are you interested in transnational investigative journalism? Where is your interest coming from?

Amanda Gearing: It came from a story that came to me at the end of 2012. I was contacted by a totally unknown person in England because he had found a story that I had written about four years ago and the key words in that story came up on a search when he was looking for information. He was also looking for a journalist to write his story. He had already approached a local newspaper in Britain, he had already approached the London Times and both of them had said no, they weren’t interested in the story. So he was interested not only in understanding what had happened to him but he was also interested in the coverage. So when he found information in an article he looked to the top and found who wrote it, then he...
searched for me and wrote me an email and said ‘this is what’s going on and would you write the story?’.

I wasn’t interested at the time. I had done a lot of work which had been emotionally stressful over a lot of years and I didn’t want to do it anymore. And so I replied politely but didn’t offer to meet him. But I did say that I would be back in England. He was up north and I said that I would go as far north as Cambridge, and if he wanted to see me he could come. And that’s where I left it. However, a few weeks later we’re in Cambridge, and he drove down to us on an icy snowy night and upon meeting him I realised that he was suicidal, and that he needed information to be able to survive.

There was one other victim that he knew that was dead. So he didn’t have any pattern for survival amongst the people he knew. And so I could see that he was very vulnerable. So I spoke to him another 3 or 4 times that week to get his feet on the ground and to do the best-in a sense of looking after him, but also looking after myself. Because I knew from dealing with many other very fragile victims of abuse some of whom had committed suicide, I didn’t want another suicide. And so in a sense I was looking after him for me, if you see what I mean. I wanted him to make it.

And so I did a bit of research from our discussions, I went back to where I was staying in Seaford in England. I did some google searches and I was looking for someone I could never have found before. I was looking for the name of a particular victim of abuse, of a particular perpetrator in Australia that would not have been findable before. But when I put in some google search terms, after two hours of google searching, I found him. I didn’t know if he was alive or dead, but I knew he existed, I knew he identified the offender as an offender. He identified the offender who induced another person to also become a paedophile. And that person was now in jail. So it seemed like there was some validity that I could check and I did and it was true, I checked that out.

So that’s where the story came from and I just kept going forward one step at a time, and in the end that story, which was 50 years old by the time it was published, even so it ran in the front page of the Australian newspaper and the front page of the London Times on the same day. And it made a big splash.
Florencia Melgar: What did you learn from that experience that led you to think more theoretically or more about the practice of working across borders?

Amanda Gearing: Well, that it’s possible. I was a journalist living in a regional town in Australia and yet I was able to make connections from my home which enabled me to write a story that shook up a major British institution and I thought ‘well that’s pretty good! What else can I do? What else are other people already doing?’ and that become my PHD. To find out what other leading journalists in this country are doing and how they are doing it.

So for my PHD I interviewed 16 journalists, most of whom were finalists and winners of 2013 Walkley awards for investigative sections of the Walkley awards, which is the most important national competition for journalism in Australia. I chose the participants carefully. They were all in all media category, not just press, radio or television competing against each other. It was all media competing against each other. So I was getting the best in the class, not just the best print or the best radio. The best of the best. And it was in the investigative section. They weren’t necessarily named investigative but when you’re talking about the best social issues reporter in Australia, you are by definition talking about someone who has done an investigation that has led to something happening.

Florencia Melgar: That you can measure the impact.

Amanda Gearing: Social impact, socio-political impact. So we’re talking about [categories like] social issues reporting, best business reporting, best international reporting, those types of categories.

Florencia Melgar: And what did you find out from these interviews?

Amanda Gearing: What I did was asking them how they got the story that won them an award and I didn’t tell them what I was looking for. I just wanted to hear from them what they did. And then from those narratives - they spoke those to me as a narrative of how it all unfolded, where they got the lead from, how they verified it, etc. And I then looked at those narratives and I worked out what was going on with all of them. And there were four basic things.
Creative use of social media platforms for investigation is the first thing. Creative use of web-based communication for investigation; Reporter collaboration, so working with someone else who is also a reporter; this might be a reporter sitting at the desk next to you, or at another office of the same media, or collaborating with a reporter who works for a rival in a different media [organisation] or the same one, interstate, or overseas. And [who were] also persuading to collaborate with another media outlet to investigate the story and to publish it collaboratively. So those collaborations are not coming from the top down. They are bottom up collaborations where the journalists working on the story say ‘please collaborate and this is why’.

Because that’s not been done before. Usually an investigative journalist would work alone as what they call a lone wolf. And if they got a story that they couldn’t do themselves they would certainly never give it away. They would die with it in their notepad rather than give it to anyone or tell anyone what they were doing.

**Florencia Melgar: Is the culture of investigative journalism changing?**

Amanda Gearing: I think it’s changing slowly for some people. What is happening is that all but one of those investigations were won by people collaborating. There was only one that was won by a journalist working by himself.

Every other one was an example of collaboration. So the journalists who are doing good work, who want to win a Walkley, who doesn’t want to? They’re going ‘oh!’ There are lots of ingredients that go into it of course, there are lots of skills, there’s lots of work etc. But one of the ingredients is the combination of skills, the speeding up on investigations etc. that happens when you collaborate with someone. Because I’m a freelance reporter I collaborate with journalists in different organisations. And even to do this research I was really quite surprised because I’m by definition talking to some of the best reporters in the country and yet when I said what is your Skype address, they didn’t have Skype. So they had to get set up. Or I might say ‘what is your Facebook account?’ and they’re not on Facebook. And for some of them that was a deliberate decision. One of the journalists said he is deliberately not on any social media to see if it kills his career or not.
Florencia Melgar: Have you had journalists who were concerned about sending delicate information over [the internet/social media]

Amanda Gearing: Oh yes. That was a large part of what I did. (...) So it’s a lot safer to drop something on a stick, put it in the post, and send it to where you want to send it than to send it over the Internet. But there are also ways of encrypting things. And there are ways of being untraceable even using email. You can send and receive email between two people without having any metadata at all if you know what you’re doing. So that’s what you do. So when there’s a need it’s possible.

Florencia Melgar: What do you think about the steps I sent to you earlier?

Amanda Gearing: I saw those steps and I thought it looked awfully confusing. A complex set of steps to say ‘what I’m doing is looking at what’s happening now and I’m trying to make a model for how things can be better’. I would have some caution with that approach because my plan started off with a view to build some sort of model for international/global investigative journalism and in the end my supervisor just said ‘well it’s not your job to reinvent the wheel, don’t do it’.

All my findings they said ‘yep that’s fine’ but when it came to the very chapter at the end where I said ‘well this is the new model for investigative journalism’ they just said ‘cut it off’.

Florencia Melgar: So what was your model about, how did it look?

Amanda Gearing: It was a model that took someone through the types of connections they need to operate as a journalist in what I would call the digital age, or the global journalistic age. (...) The power of it is the potential to be able to connect with a lot of people. And therefore it was just a step by step, depending on what someone’s round is. If you’re on a political round you’ll connect with particular sorts of people, if you’re on an agricultural round you’ll connect with particular sorts of people, you’ll have secret Facebook accounts with some people, you’ll have open Facebook groups with other people, you’ll use Twitter for some particular things. You’ll use Skype to interview anyone anywhere in the world.
There will be different things you do with web-based communications, making sure that you have the basic tools of trade. Some things like GPS, which is a web-based communication, didn’t use to be part of journalistic kit.

You’d have a notebook, you’d have a pencil, you’d have a camera and an audio recording, but you didn’t normally have a GPS. Now if you’re doing an environmental round, for example, and you need to locate the damage done by a mining company of a national park, as one of my participant groups did, it was vital kit. And it was so vital that Fairfax has rolled that out as regular part of a kit for everyone in the news group because they saw how important that was. And a GoPro, to have a GoPro where you can just put a video on your head and show your readers what you’re seeing is a fabulous piece of the kit. So it’s basic stuff, it’s pretty basic stuff.

Florencia Melgar: So you were consolidating the knowledge that was around?

Amanda Gearing: Yes but I was also drawing it out of the interviews that I had done with all the journalists.

Florencia Melgar: I would like to read it.

Amanda Gearing: Yes.

Florencia Melgar: When you see any academic report, you validate it based on the method, how it was done. However, as a consumer, or even as a journalist I see a story of another country - if I don’t know the author, or the journalist who did it, or the media, I’m not sure if I’m going to trust. If I know how the story was made, and I know a bit of the process, the method, then you assess if you can trust the story…

Amanda Gearing: It’s quality assurance. Of both the journalism and the product of the journalistic investigation, which is the coverage, on behalf of the reader, isn’t it? It seems to me that what you’re trying to create is a quality assurance framework. I wonder whether ISO 9000 might also work for journalism. Because there is an absence of quality assurance in
journalism, customers look for [the media] brand as a substitute for quality assurance. Because that’s the only assurance we have.

**Florencia Melgar:** Yes. That’s exactly what I was saying, [how do you validate] if you don’t know the brand or the author.

Amanda Gearing: That is the function that brand is playing in the media because there is no quality assurance of the way the journalism is done, or the output. And I wonder if your quality assurance standards that you want to make are something that could be adopted by peak bodies of journalistic s around the world in any country, which maybe agree on something like a code of ethics, and get a tick of approval from whoever, which could involve some little symbol by their by-line wherever their name is by-lined, so that the reader can know ‘actually, they are a member of that union, and they abide by a code of ethics’. I mean fantastic, it sets us apart from citizen journalism. If I was a reader and I was reading stuff, and I could read a story by someone with an icon beside their name that says they’re accredited by their national journalistic - whatever they are - standard setters - I would read that in preference to anything by anyone who doesn’t have one. The trust- let’s apply that into another field like medicine. If I go to my doctor, I trust him, not because he’s my doctor- if I’ve not been to him before, how do I know that he’s not going to kill me, or he’s going to do the wrong thing? I know that because he’s trained in Australia and accredited by the Australian medical board.

Someone goes to talk to a journalist, or a citizen journalist, or someone who calls himself journalist, there is no distinction between any of those. You could be getting a great journalist or you could be getting someone who’s got no qualifications at all.

**Florencia Melgar:** Thank you so much. It was a pleasure to meet you (…)

Amanda Gearing: That’s OK. Thank you.
Ben-Hur Demeneck

Doctor of Communication Sciences School of Communications and Arts / USP (University of São Paulo). Professor of Journalism at UEPG (Ponta Grossa State University). Master in Journalism from UFSC.

Linked to the research group “Journalism, Law and Freedom” of the USP’s Institute of Advanced Studies (http://www.iea.usp.br/pessoas/pasta-pessoab/ben-hur-demeneck).

Graduated in Journalism (2004) from the Ponta Grossa State University (UEPG) and a Masters in Journalism (2009) from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC). Currently, he holds a PhD in Communication Sciences from the School of Communications and Art (ECA) at USP and researches the theme of “transnational reporting”. In 2010, he received the Adelmo Genro Filho award from SBPJor (Brazilian Association of Journalists) for his contribution to the scientific field of journalism.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBKvN_Xdn-8
Original Interview in Spanish. Translation

Florencia Melgar: Do you think is necessary to have a methodology or guidelines to work in Transnational Investigative Journalism?

Ben-Hur Demeneck: I think this point of a methodology is interesting to study because there are many professional cultures. A method can help people to agree on the same
objectives, a same code, and the same language. I think this is good and opens a dialogue opportunity between different professional cultures.

For me, transnational journalism is not necessarily the journalism of global corporations; it’s not international journalism, or industrial journalism. In my view, transnational journalism is like a journalistic method. It’s investigative journalism coordinated in a network; it’s long form journalism; it is done slowly and it is post-industrial, as described by Anderson, etc.

It’s also a concept in development, it’s collaborative journalism, global guidelines, and even regional stories and it also benefits from philanthropy and alternative financial sources.

The network has a news value in transnational journalism. For example when they investigate a mafia network or a tax haven, the journalists’ network is very important.

Transnational journalism is an antidote to the asymmetries of globalisation.

I think this first generation of transnational journalists should focus on investigative stories, instead of other kind of topics, like cultural stories, etc. I think the approach should be investigative stories but maybe in the future there will be room to do other kind of stories.

A terminology I use in my investigation is “the double cosmopolitan loyalty of transnational journalism”.

It’s like the anticipation of a more effective global civil society. To be cosmopolitan the dialogue should go beyond the global aspects of the own region.

But the information of a global civil society is not a reality for all, even for investigators. There are asymmetries. In order to change the role of the nation states from being war mediators and start legislating multilaterally for peace, the methodology for transnational journalism is a systematic practice of communicational counter power to the globalisations asymmetries.

And I also think it’s an illustration of the concept of a more multifaceted objectivity, instead of the XIX or XX centuries’ objectivity.
It’s a more critical realism, based on a more systematic practice, and journalistic knowledge of high cognitive value. It’s a more multifaceted approach that includes the views of the others. I think it exposes a critical dimension and a deontology of a global journalism.

I’m not an expert but I’m interested in collaborative practices of the different business models in journalism, like philanthropy. At least in Brazil, I see there’s a similarity with United States in the period 2008-2009, because after the crisis there was a notorious interest in non-profit journalism. I think Brazil is experiencing a similar reality. The relevance of transnational journalism is such that’s now become a trend.

I also think that the impact of the publication is bigger [and] it leads to a new framing of invisible topics.

Florence Melgar: When you discuss ethics, you quote Stephen Ward, and this made me reflect about a concern of some Latin American investigative journalists in relation to the [north-south] collaborative journalism because the frame of suspicion of a Latin American journalist and an Anglo Saxon colleague will be different.

In any topic, what’s the investigation, what are the variables, what’s the hypothesis, that go beyond the method, what are we looking for, what the objective is, and what’s the ethical framework.

So beyond the series of steps I suggest in the methodology, I ask myself –and you- how and when do we fit the discussion about ethics. Should it be the first step before working together?

Ben-Hur Demeneck: Stephen Ward asks himself, how we can be global agents to leave behind parochial values. But in a method, I think it’s a bit difficult [to implement].
Florence Melgar: I don’t have an answer for this now, but maybe as part of the method we could suggest some basic questions:

- Why do you want to investigate this topic
- Why are you a journalist
- What’s your objective

These questions as a way of making explicit if the journalist has an agenda, or if his/her interest is to seek the [possible] truth. And what’s the journalist’s view of the truth. That’s a whole new chapter. What we understand as “truth” is very different in South Asian cultures, in Latin American or Anglo Saxon cultures.

Ben-Hur Demeneck: That’s the debate over objectivity in journalism, because the [conversation] about “the truth” is a very philosophical concept. Objectivity is a more pragmatic concept than the “truth”, which is a very abstract value.

But the objectivity in the XIX century has a very naive approach to the concept as if you could say I’ll tell the truth or I won’t tell the truth. It’s not like that.

We observe a lot of [journalists’] scepticism about economics or politics but the more cognitive debate is a bit left aside.

In terms of the discussion about ethics, maybe in the first stages of transnational journalism the main values to explore are more diffuse topics. From a rights perspective, more diffuse [general] values, like human rights stories, or environment stories. I think this would be easier to do.
Florencia Melgar: Why did you arrive to the dialogue about a methodology, and why did I arrive to a methodology proposal as well? [I think] it’s a pragmatic way of starting a dialogue in a common place between different cultures, different ethics, and different ways [of doing journalism]. It’s like trying to set a common ground. And we have to add the north-south differences, and cultural diversity… I came across Latin American journalists who said: “If the investigation is financed by another country, who will be the leader of the project? Aren’t they going to impose [their editorial]?” [There are fears of losing the editorial decision].

[The methodology] also tries to avoid one team imposing a view by creating a common ground where all the parts feel they participate at the same level. It’s a way to democratise [the production process]

Ben-Hur Demeneck: It’s having a common code to dialogue so all the parts can discuss together. I think this is a correct approach. Your view is right. People tend to feel insecure towards things that are imposed.

I think that a method needs to be seen like something in development, right?
When I read you proposal, I think this proposal calls for a dialogue. There’s a Brazilian theoretician who died in 1989 who had a very interesting observation about journalism practice: journalism as a way of knowledge about singular events. [But] investigative journalism is closer to talk about something that’s particular and global. It’s closer to a consensual knowledge, a more solid knowledge.

I think the distinction between singular, particular and universal is interesting because transnational journalism is more a particular kind of knowledge than a singular one. As we were before talking about objectivity, in my Masters degree I made a distinction out of the three stages of the truth in a journalistic process. In my view, there is a first moment, that’s like a starting point of the investigation: an impulse the journalist has towards the truth. His principles, his motivations, when he chooses the topic; it’s the initial impulse. The second stage is the course of the investigation. You have the beginning, then the investigation itself and there you have the methods chosen to find the truth; the checking and the validation [of the information].
The third moment is the validation after the investigation’s results: the validation of the journalistic statement as the best available cognitive basis.

These are three different moments of approaching how we are telling the truth. Most of the ethical journalistic discussions are focused on the impulses, but not so much on the method.

**Florence Melgar:** Somehow making the method more transparent increases the chances of the story being picked up by international media. When you look into an academic publication, you can validate it—or not—based on the methods used. That’s what we are trained to do. But when you try to validate an investigative report produced by a journalist who might have done a great job, but no one knows him… he might be a blogger who isn’t coming from a known media outlet, then there’s a trust issue as well. And traditional journalists or the biggest media organisations tend to say... “Mmm… I’m not sure if I’ll publish because we don’t know who [the author] is.”

Ben-Hur Demeneck: It’s convenient to say that a method is not important when you have a great audience, like CNN or alike because they don’t need to worry about having visibility. When you have a method, you can visualise the asymmetries of globalisation. I think that is what your work is doing.

The information is out there, but how do you show that this validation is possible. This construction of databases [you propose] and the testing of the hypothesis, I think it is also a change of mentality because otherwise we’ll always depend on the same communication channels—and sources.

I think that your work of applying a method that considers multiple cultures has an added value of building a more robust cognitive base.

It’s also clear that this won’t be the only way of doing journalism.
Florencia Melgar: What kind of resistances have you come across in your research approach?

Ben-Hur Demeneck: I think Brazil has a big deficit in transnational journalism. Even the Off Shore Leaks, none of the big Brazilian media outlets covered it. My interest in transnational journalism is also to explore how to start a dialogue, a more internationalised democratic culture.

Florencia Melgar: Thank you very much.

Ben-Hur Demeneck: Thank you.
Brigitte Alfter is an expert in European affairs and a member of the team that successfully sought data regarding the € 50-billion European farm subsidy program. She’s a co-founder of http://www.farmsubsidy.org Alfter is the author of a handbook for journalist on cross-border journalism, currently available in Danish, forthcoming translations. She is the founding director of the European Fund for Investigative Journalism, and a leading figure in establishing the European Data Harvest Festival http://www.dataharvest.eu for data and FOI journalism and European affairs. Since 2002 she has been an active member of the Danish Association for Investigative Journalism.

Access the video interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rYdU2sKb640&t=52s

Brigitte Alfter: My starting point, and still is, that both on the research side and on the publication side we need to collaborate. Networking allows that because furthermore in Europe we have very different storytelling traditions. So we have a Germanic or Anglo-saxon or Francophone or Franco Romanian from the Latin tradition and the way we tell the stories to our readers is completely different so we have to take care of that and networking has been like the first obvious solution.

What I do with the journal in the organisation I work with -Journalism Fund- is that we try to stimulate cross-border collaborative journalism through research grants and through network opportunities and this kind of thing, in order to establish good examples and good contacts between the journalists. Through the practice of collaborating in a team of three, five, seven, eleven journalists… they get to know each other, and we can see that they do collaborate
again at a later stage because they have built trust. We also start educating with a smile, we start educating the publishers who start demanding this kind of journalism. And we can now see the 2015 edition of the very important print news German magazine, Der Spiegel, got the idea of collaborative journalism and for the next annual European Investigative Conference they had set up a team where I think there are currently eight or so countries covered in Europe on how they do collaborative journalism.

**Florencia Melgar:** In your paper you talk about the ethical challenges. You mentioned that ethics in journalism should be addressed with a comparative approach. So I guess it is case by case based on the journalists who are involved?

**Brigitte Alfter:** Yeah I think I’m currently coordinating or assisting to coordinate on handing over now to the team itself. A team of currently nine, soon ten, journalists from all over Europe EU and non-EU and the ethical approach (...) has to be discussed during the preparation, during the research phase of course and then when you approach publication. So the ethical approach when you have a team and the practical approach you have the ethical comparatives.

But I think when we start developing this method and I found it difficult to find a scholarly literature on comparative journalism ethics. I believe that Ben Hur in Brazil has done some work on that. Once we as active journalists as well as journalism students sort of discuss comparative journalism ethics it will be much easier for us to understand what to watch out for in the practical process.

I am from a Nordic journalism school and we are very careful with [the use of] hidden cameras and some other parts of the world are not so careful with hidden cameras. This is one example which is good for a team to discuss. So how do we deal with hidden cameras and then we have a huge discussion and the [INAUDIBLE] and then we can see ‘okay how do we deal with it’, you know, who makes decisions. Let’s take this as an exercise to talk about decision making and so on. And also sometimes is the legal question because if I take pictures with a hidden camera in some countries I cannot publish this so I cannot use this as a document. Or leaked documents how do you deal with leaked documents? In some countries are it’s illegal so you are breaking the law by using it, whether you quote it, or whether you
summarise or you were given a print of it or whatever, it’s potentially a criminal breach of privacy, breach of secrecy, whatever.

So in European case law I know sort of how to navigate but even there in some European countries there are very strict criminal laws on leaked documents- using information from leaked documents in some other parts of Europe there is an obligation for the court or for publishers to weigh the public interest versus the seriousness of the breach. And all these things are the challenges that we have to approach more and more.

Stefan Candea is doing a PhD about the networking aspects of all this we know that networks hold an element of power. Being exclusive or inclusive and how they are structured etc. So this is another aspect to consider in the team [building].

Florence Melgar: When you see these big cross-border investigations managed by a big umbrella organisation, you wonder how the editorial call is made. A coordinator is necessary, but who makes the call and based on what?

Brigitte Alfter: That’s project-by-project obviously because if you have a large research project that must be it, but in general in the starting point a network is peers meeting peers and eventually you have to make decisions on governance within the network or call it coordination or call it editorial responsibility or whatever.

Florence Melgar: What are we touching when we talk about a method that people say “we have that”?

Brigitte Alfter: Some journalists are more used to the notion of working along a certain method than others because in the tradition of journalism education has been that, in many countries and in many traditions first journalists were educators, and were turned from ordinary youngsters into journalists by working in a newsroom. So they were just like apprentices, they learned the craft by working in the newsroom and then in the 70’s [INAUDIBLE] in the 90s the Nordics and since then the others also started to talk about methodology. Scholars have been talking about methodologies. Meyers in the US with precision journalism and so on, they started talking about a methodology and I think some
people who feel that they are deep within the craft of journalism and they’re doing it well and win all the awards so why would they look into the methodology?

They don’t, you know, they feel fine and they’re successful so why do more? And my ambition here is not to question them because they do good work, they unveil important stories etc. My ambition is… let me just take a little bracket to give you the overall context.

I see two big challenges for journalism. One is digitalisation and the other is internationalisation. And overall we have the media problem of the funding, but it’s on the content we have digitalisation and internationalisation so we have to find new ways of research and storytelling on the digital using the digital tools and matching the digital power structures and on the other side- we and also content- we have to match the power structures of politics, business etc. that go international. And here we in our generation have to develop a method that matches these changing structures of power.

So when there is internationalisation of course as a journalist I can’t stay in Denmark and pretend the rest of the world isn’t there or pretend the Danish companies do not trade with other countries etc. That would be really narrow-minded and I wouldn’t give my audience the right information.

So how do we do to develop the method and write it down and share it, so I try to write down the process with six or seven steps and I hand it over to you, and you are interested in the same and you challenge it and you say ‘wow but this step should be subdivided in three because…’ and like that we developed the method and all of a sudden because we have it on paper we can put it into the literature list of the students and so the next generation can start trying it themselves and all of a sudden it’s not just the particular newsroom where it already works and there maybe two, three, five apprentices there but it’s a whole class at university and we can move it from Europe to Australia or from Latin America to Australia.

The essence of the book I wrote, which is only available in Dutch, I went more into detail with the last step, which is also the first step, that is sharing the method at a journalism conference and through that sharing you force yourself think about what you do. At the same time you share it with others, with peers, and through that sharing the peers can see ‘Oh she has her ethical approach is like that and her fact-checking capacity is like that and she knows
about this content and so on’ so that’s the presentation, actually is the first step of networking for another story.

I described what you would you call evaluation and evaluation I think is a very good term. I have described that as the first step of networking for the next story because I have experienced that myself, that when I present stories at conferences then afterwards people came and said ‘you know what I don’t have anything actual now but maybe we should stay in touch because I have similar interests’. Or people have contacted me. I’ve been part of the ICIJ team for example several times because I am the EU geek and so they could use what I was teaching about how to get EU documents, EU data, blah blah blah and then they would pull me in to use exactly these competencies because they knew, because I had told about it at a conference.

So the presentation of what you’ve done or the evaluation of what you’ve done to peers is definitely in my definition or in my process description, let’s call it that. And in my book I tried to focus on how to develop the hypothesis, and this is the step two “the idea”. I’d called it the idea and how to find stories because I am- I have been a freelancer for parts of my life or worked for a small media outlet of a small country. So usually I wouldn’t wait for leaks; I had to develop my own hypothesis as you call it, I call it ideas, I’m in the Danish way of wording. And so I try to also here find the acute stories of something that really blows up in your front garden and then you have to think internationally.

Or think across borders then the ‘organisations stories’ which are for example European Union or World Trade Organisation or some international organisation which affects all members and the team, then what I call the ‘chain stories’ that could be trade involving several countries and transit countries. It could be trafficking trade legal or illegal, or companies that active in several countries. And then I have also the ‘comparative stories’. So these four groups within these teams you can then look for ‘ok what’s burning in my country?’ and then you look at the other team members and they say ‘wow it’s the same in my country’ or it’s similar or it’s another aspect of the same chain story’. And the chain, that’s about crafting the hypothesis which can, in a multiple country team, obviously be different aspects of the same problem.
So for example when you have a chain story you have a very poor country at one end of the chain where people are desperate to get a job, some are so desperate they would go into prostitution, or at least they’re desperate to get a job somewhere else somehow, that they trust anyone who says ‘job’. And so they follow this anyone and then end up as prostitutes or end up as slave workers or whatever. And we had a story like that where people from a very poor part of Europe ended up in a sort of medium-level economy part of Europe where they worked as slave labourers.

Slaves, and then in the camp, and they had taken their passports away. There were armed guards and so this medium-level development of the country allowed companies to keep slaves without the local police interfering or even noticing internally. And then this company was owned by a very wealthy country so you had the whole chain of extremely poor labor being kept in a sort of medium, not-too-well-organised not-too-well-controlled country and the end of the chain was a very wealthy country where the company is owned.

What I’m doing in Europe is try to get donor money and build models that make sure that there still editorial independence, while we give money from donors to journalists. So what we do at the Journalism Fund is we have a peer-reviewed jury so we go fundraising with the big foundation and we know the big funders have one agenda or the other, that’s why they’re there, and if the agenda is European democracy that fits very nicely if the agenda is protecting the environment that may fit nicely in some cases but not in all cases, then we need some sort of independence in between.

And that’s what we do at Journalism Fund (...). For example, last year we received money from Oxfam Novik which is a development. Usually as a journalist I would not be able to take money from them because they are an interest group.

So we say ‘ok what do you want to give the money for?’ They wanted to give money for journalists who wanted to collaborate between Europe and for collaborative journalism between European and African journalists and we said ‘ok yes we’ll do it and we have installed a peer review so the jury members are anonymous, they don’t know you as an applicant, the donor, nobody except the administration of Journalism Fund knows who is in the jury’.
It’s really difficult to map funding to non-profit journalism on a global level I think it would be more or less, more or less impossible to make an overall picture of supporting non-profit journalism because you have multiple interests.

If you go back to actually doing cross-border collaborations, and whom do we take money from is another serious ethical consideration, which teams should discuss early on in their work process.

In some countries you don’t take money from governments because you consider it manipulative, dangerous, damaging of your credibility, whatever. In other countries absolutely we take government money, like public service broadcasting in Europe is all funded by governments. We just make the necessarily checks and balances and you have a lot of money from wealthier countries going to poorer countries to support journalism. Now is that geopolitics? Is that democracy development? Is that independent? Is it, you know, what is it?

So then you have to dig deeper into what they actually cover with that money, what they get the money for and all the strings attached. When you get government money or foundation money or business money, you have to go into the detail of the contracts to see whether it’s editorially independent.

At some point, or several times, I have either turned down or not applied for money for the Journalism Fund, or to another grant-giving organisation. Another project I was involved in is called Scoop, and because there were strings attached to the fine print saying that as long as you work with this money, the organisation has the right to screen everything within your organisation (and could be the government who gave money). That means you cannot protect the editorial independence, you cannot protect your reporters, your sources, and if you make, sort of like the devil’s advocate you give access to a government to find whistle-blowers or whatever. Or to track journalists who work on dodgy stories.

If, for example, if there was one grant from the European Commission - and I know that’s not only Journalism Fund, other media projects have complained about that terminology too, that says that as long as you work with the Commission grant, the Commission has the right to
control everything in your report. And so it’s like a journalist writes a research plan to apply for a grant and says ‘okay we have a whistle-blower in this and this part of the Commission and the whistle-blower says X and Y and this is why I believe we have to blah-blah-blah, and then send me more money’.

So if then the authority can look into this application at any time of the process this is impossible. So I think it’s really important when you give money to journalists to give the uttermost possible transparency including the contracts. You shouldn’t be paranoid but if you have to if you work on a story that involves a critical approach to a government that’s funded it, you have to know the conditions. So the question of independence is really tricky and you have to consider that from an ethical point of view for the countries where you come from and intend to publish, because at the end of the day you are responsible to your listeners.

**Florence Melgar**: The fact checking. *Which are the challenges that you face working, you know, with journalists from different working standards and ethics?*

Brigitte Alfter: Fact checking, yes. Because in the U.S. everybody knows it is part of the education. Journalists are so used to it that they complain when media makes comments on the fact-checking department. Some of them have even fact-checking departments and in the Nordic/Anglo-Saxon tradition it’s sort of coming in. In the continental European I see it too. It’s not nearly as systematic as in the U.S. tradition and as you can hear I know the US and I know the European traditions.

I know very little about Asia, Australia, Latin America, so you have to apologise for that; this is my frame of reference and the rest I simple don’t know about. So fact-checking is something that you need to talk about.

One of the interviews I did for the book was with Frederick Loring who collaborated with journalists from all over the world and he said some of them publish rumours and then they wait what kind of reactions come on that. Then they use these reactions as the next step in the research and they don’t mind, you know, they don’t mind publishing rumours.
I don’t say this is good or bad; it’s just a different tradition because then they use the reactions as part of the research. In some parts of the world you use that to spark reactions and then if you work with someone from such a tradition you have to be aware of that, that you can’t just quote an article because it’s published, you have to question, and in a team if you have a team that come from traditions that are so different then you really have to be careful.

In Europe I experienced on one of the teams that we loved each other, we trusted each other, we shared a lot and then just before publication there was panic because in one tradition we record the source during the interview, we cross-check with the source that we understood him correctly and then that’s it, we publish. And in her country you needed to go back to the source just before publication and present the sentence or the information that you would quote just before publishing. And I hadn’t done that obviously and it had been a few months since, and he’d moved and so on to a new job. So that was like you know, I have an hour to give this to the lawyer and where is the confirmation that this quote is right? Which confirmation you know? You just have to be aware that the different traditions and sometimes hit you an hour before publication and then you have to run fast.

I don’t say this is right or wrong because each of these, what we consider a not fact-checking traditions, in our terminology it wouldn’t be fact-checking. In their reality it is sort of fact-checking because there may be things that you and I don’t get. We may not get that in a certain society, your car would have the tyres cut open if you didn’t quote four politically different whatever. But there may be other ways of communication or other realities that we simply don’t get where their way of doing things make sense, because other ways of doing things are not possible. I don’t want to judge it, it’s just when you have a team you have to be aware of the fact that there are very different traditions.

Florencia Melgar: How do you manage this because you still have to fact-check.

Brigitte Alfter: You know all these fact-checking questions can be perceived as an expression of lack of trust, and lack of trust within a team is of course making the collaboration difficult. So you have to either frame it in the conversation, or you have to say ‘ah this is my boss you
know and my boss is always asking me these questions I have to answer it, sorry, so I like you, I really admire your work but my boss…’.

You know invent something so that you don’t hurt the person you work with. Make sure that you don’t damage the collaboration and the staff, and this is again very personal and which culture you come from, and what a person you are, what kind of networking person you are. And this is why I suggest pulling in networking and intercultural communication, which are fields of study from business, where they have worked with exactly these challenges for decades. Because in the business world they have been cross-border for decades and they have sociologists to work with networking and structures of international teams. They have sociologists and psychologists to work with intercultural communication. Someone from a very formal tradition meeting someone from a very informal tradition - the informality as such could be considered impolite or badly educated. And the moment you understand this, you understand the fact that your tie or lack of tie could even offend someone or could be part of the communication, and then you get a whole different way of acting in a team. And once you start reading about it- it’s like when I started reading about it, it was such an eye-opener and all of a sudden I started to read signals from other people completely different.

Florencia Melgar: Sometimes journalists when you talk about ‘you know let’s have a good model’, journalists say we don’t get into that role, we don’t belong.

Brigitte Alfter: ‘Let’s cut all the all the marketing bullshit and get to the content’ you know this is the typical journalist approach and our business, or our task. We have to cut through the crap and go to what is actually in there in a proposal, in whatever, in an activity project. And then move in our process of educating the next generation, we then go to business schools ‘okay let’s borrow some of your marketing crap’ then we will block ourselves and once we have bypassed this little obstacle and then we can actually learn a lot from what’s there. And maybe we shouldn’t buy directly into the business school, or usually where you have these language problems as I would call it, where you have this marketing style lingo that journalists are allergic to, that are popular versions of business research, business sociology research: to go to the actual scholars and their actual scientific publications.
Florence Melgar: Thank you very much.

Brigitte Alfter: See you again.

Florence Melgar: Yes you again, thanks.
Charles Lewis

Charles Lewis is an investigative journalist based in Washington D.C. Lewis founded *The Centre for Public Integrity* and other non-profit organisations. He is currently the executive editor of the *Investigative Reporting Workshop* at the American University School of Communication in Washington D.C. He was an investigative producer for ABC News and the CBS news program *60 Minutes*. He left *60 Minutes* in 1989 and began the *Centre for Public Integrity*, a non-partisan group which reports on political and government workings.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sbS0Ti6hxo&t=3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2sbS0Ti6hxo&t=3s)

Florencia Melgar: What’s your opinion about creating a method for the best practice of transnational investigative journalism that respects multiculturalism?

Charles Lewis: Sure, you mean the methodology that you described in your emails some time ago. I think so, I mean the odd thing about this is it involves humans and cultures and the subjects of investigations also vary of course from extremely complex to the point of being too complex for most journalists even to comprehend to extremely simple so it’s hard to come up with a one-size-fits-all methodology for any investigation. But with that caveat I think you know any attempt is exciting and path-breaking by itself so I think it’s such a relatively new phenomenon still in the history of journalism that some degree of humility and modesty and humility I think is necessary so that’s where I would come down.
Florencia Melgar: In your experience which would be the must-have, whether it’s a methodology, a workflow or a suggested number of steps. What are the main lessons of things to be considered?

Charles Lewis: You know I wanted to tell you that what you’re thinking about and trying to do here both as a journalist and as an academic is actually unusual. Most journalists are very good at doing but they’re not very good at chronicling what they’ve done or how they did it. The methodology part of it is always seat of the pants as you know and kind of helter skelter kind of frenetic and disorganised essentially. So I guess what I’m getting at is what you’re doing is a very useful thing because as you noted yourself I think there’s very little literature about the methodology for collaborations by large numbers of journalists across borders; it’s actually an extremely new field really in just the last few years [INAUDIBLE]. It’s really an astonishing thing that’s happened historically but there’s very little literature. You’re ground-breaking in what you’re attempting by itself, you just know that, so the answer to your question is not a simple one because in part no one has agreed on what those principles what the common mores are, are for how do you proceed. And that’s a problem and it’s an exciting opportunity. I would favour the latter if I were you but I do think that’s relevant to how you look at this because A. there’s no one perfect way because people are different, situations are different, and it’s very hard to create a cookie cutter for every single case. And B. there’s nothing to compare it with as far as I know I’m not aware of anyone who has done the sophisticated, detailed systematic, methodology for how one can do these things, because every case and every story and every circumstance differs. So I’m not trying to make it sound impossible but I also want you to acknowledge from my experience each case is so different it’s very- there’s a reason no one has done it before because it’s hard to generalise about all reporting in the world on all potential subjects and have a one-size-fits-all you know, I’m not saying it doesn’t mean it’s not a lofty idea and that it’s not needed I think it is needed but people are so busy especially journalists doing what they do that they don’t ever think about being systematic about what they did and explaining it later, that’s not how they think, as you know, and even editors are just worried about the deadlines and what goes out tomorrow or next week or whatever it is.

So there’s a sort of a short attention span to put it mildly amongst all journalists at all levels and for all those reasons it is necessary for an academic to then explain it because journalists
have never figured that out or at least if they do figure it out they’ll see it as a competitive advantage and not tell anyone else.

**Florencia Melgar: Well… this defeats the purpose of the collaboration…**

Charles Lewis: I know it’s just kind of silly and sometimes methodologies are so complex they have to toss them out and start all over and that has happened in the last few years.

**Florencia Melgar: I did all these interviews with Latin American journalists who said ‘all right but what about who is going to manage the resources; who is going to have the last editorial say, the role of a coordinator is a coordinator or a director? so at the end of the day who is guiding the editorial. So the methodology can be a way of helping manage that.**

Charles Lewis: Right, no, it’s true you know my impression now in these last two three years as collaborations have now entered into hundreds of people around the planet on a single subject, that at least of my own experience with the international consortium of investigative journalists (ICIJ) is at the time that was created there was almost no collaboration in the world, across borders for investigations. Now they’re doing collaborations with hundreds of journalists and that’s to my knowledge for investigative reporting in my experience unprecedented. And what is happening is when the publisher in that case has always been the platform, that is ICIJ.

Those as you’re noting the in- but I’m making it more specific the director and the deputy director of the consortium decide everything pretty much. It’s up to them about the standards about who gets included about what will be the parameters of the story about what’s in what’s out. And it is, it’s got a bit of a top-down element to it that doesn’t mean that they don’t glom on to important information and expand the scope, which apparently is what’s happening right now with the latest investigation, which will be the largest in the history of the world in the next few weeks.

But you still have someone in my experience at least also having to worry about libel and other little litigation-related things you have to not just to mention safety of course. There still
has to be someone it can’t be completely kumbaya that’s all I mean. I’m telling you already like to do this and do it yourself but my experiences there has to be someone somewhere and someone where the buck stops or the whatever, the decision gets made at the eleventh hour - up, down, in, out, because otherwise you have some sort of Woodstock Film Festival where everyone sings and everyone hangs out and everyone does drugs and it’s a wonderful time but what the hell is it? And it’s the old cliché by Winston Churchill, this pudding has no theme, mixing metaphors. So I do feel like there is a need for some editorial guidance at some point. I mean at least my experience it’s hard to do it without that.

Florencia Melgar: How and when do you decide you trust a journalist from another country?

Charles Lewis: Well I think like everything in life and human affairs, it has a lot to do with experience. What I mean is the interactions of humans basically it’s very hard to interact with people you don’t know and make pretty important decisions. There has to be some degree of familiarity and my experiences is that the only way to deal with that is you can’t foretell that and you can’t predict it and you can’t assume it. It does still come down to humans at least for a few more years and, I’m kidding, but uh not entirely, anyway I do think that is a crucial element and I know that in my experiences trust is everything especially when you’re dealing with human sources, because you’re depending on another journalist to assure you that their source is ironclad and highly credible and if you find out later that was not true the whole house of cards could collapse based on one mistake like that one. And it could also end up in a litigious mess or even a safety issue because of that so the trust these are in capital letters in boldface trust Trust trust.

I think the reason a lot of journalists and I suspect my own experiences I’ve gravitated this way myself - when I ran the Center for Public Integrity we were known for documents and primary records which of course later then became data that was based on that that kind of solid sort of cement. That doesn’t mean documents can’t be forged or falsified but generally speaking they are not and that gives some foundation to the notion that there’s something here with actual records, whether it’s bank records, secret bank records or whatever it is and that does give a sense of trust along with journalists who know that subject area inside-out.

The problem with collaborations is I think journalism in general, in every field of
journalism in every part of investigative journalism has become so highly specialised that if you know you have financial journalists now who are so arcane specific and knowledgeable about their financial field that they can’t cover any other specified field because natural security has its own little realm as you know and corruption and organised crime has this little realm and every one of these little fields. So it’s very hard to do a generic topic and getting lots of folks that just help out on it. I find investigative reporting is becoming highly specialised in covering one of these specific areas and that’s why you go to a conference with 150 panels now because that’s how many specialised things, you add in 1200 people that just gathered in the US for a data journalism conference and that’s just one example of so many conferences around the world. But these numbers are getting really huge and the data journalists of the 80s and 90s can’t talk today to the data journalists of 2016 because some are dealing with algorithms and all these other high technologies and others are still dealing with government records in the most primitive state - using computers - but not all that deeply.

And so the unevenness of professional talent and experience and then of course add in things like language and culture barriers and then of course media journalism, ethical standards, or lack thereof. You’re dealing with quicksand, I mean it’s really dangerous, it’s actually physically dangerous and in terms of litigation it’s precarious in the extreme and it’s enough to give someone grey hair very quickly

Florence Melgar: Do you think generational differences that are, you know, particularly challenging in collaborations?

Charles Lewis: Well I think the only challenging generational part of it is probably the technologies that keep changing every three minutes and I remember when Chico Mendes died in the Brazilian Amazon and no one could film it for like three or four years everyone’s waiting for the movie. That’s back as you know as the world wide web was just starting to be created and we only had the internet but not the web and very few journalists had handheld high eight cameras, or whatever style camera it was back in the infancy of all these technologies. But now the technologies have been exploding for decades but you still have variations in technology, you also have variations in technological prowess by journalists you’re collaborating with 55 [INAUDIBLE] journalists around the world and some of them just graduated from a typewriter and others are on their fifth smartphone and not to mention
six other things. Then you’re dealing with- I don’t know if you heard about this - the international consortium for one of the bank projects developed a database that took seven or eight months and lots of money - let’s not even think about how much money - and they figured out that it was too technically extensive and elaborate in almost a labyrinth almost ridiculous way that no one could understand the database. They couldn’t get into it.

The centre ICIJ had wasted I’m guessing over a hundred thousand dollars I don’t know how much exactly, they had to throw the whole thing out the window and start all over again. And another six to twelve months later they had the same data organised in a more what’s the word you know easy to understand data set, others all levels highly proficient and not-so-proficient could comprehend. So the logistical encumbrances to Investigative reporting without technology, without collaboration even are substantial for one person. And when you have several people with the gradations of all the things we’re talking about it’s really a miracle when something really important gets published and it has no significant and problems with it. I’m actually not kidding it’s stunning if we think about it it’s miraculous there’s no other word for it. And that’s what makes it so exciting when it happens and it happens in a magnificent way and it’s bulletproof in terms of credibility no one can say a word about it. But it’s also quite precarious because you also know the entire time one little thing could go wrong in the whole thing, you’re suddenly all smeared for being either idiots or having made a career-ending mistake by some assumption you’ve made. I mean I think it’s quite- the stakes are quite high.

Florence Melgar: When we talk about cross-border journalism we’re basically focusing on data journalism, what happens when it’s not data journalism?

Charles Lewis: I think that that’s harder in a way. [INAUDIBLE] a data journalist everyone can look at the data and then take pieces out that affect their country or whatever their situation. The other kind like you’re investigating an organised crime situation say the tobacco industry and you’re looking at records that may be relevant around the world like customs duties paid by different countries or the World Health Organisation numbers that’s how that story was broken because one-third of all the world’s cigarettes were not being sold mysteriously, and of course it was being smuggled. In those situations you have to just - I’m sorry to make everything sound so complicated, the fact is it is - and you know you also have
the risk issues like to send a reporter into a dangerous place even if they say they can go, and they were willing to go, the editor has the horrific decision, should we want them to go, isn’t that dangerous no matter what they say, and is that responsible? And then the other part is sure they know what the hell they’re talking about, will they really do it? And then back to your morals and ethics stuff.

When I ran the centre and started the international consortium we had to make a point that all ethics and all reporting standards had to be North American. Had to have at least two sources, that no one was going to pay anyone for any [INAUDIBLE]. Now all the ethical standards that are predominantly, at least we associate, at least Americans do, with North America the US since that’s where the libel litigation would be brought because the publisher and the offices were in Washington.

It would have to be based on those standards and that sounds really basic but when you have a sort of kumbaya five continent investigation with journalists literally all over planet Earth they may say they’re all operating by the one standard but most of them have never operated under that other standard and so how do you actually know it’s actually occurred? You can’t, it’s not humanly possible unless you go and visit everyone’s newsroom and check their phone records, which I don’t recommend but I’m just saying you can lose sleep over what you don’t know as a manager and as an editor, I think it’s quite serious.

You know having been sued by Russian billionaire oligarchs for a story about Dick Cheney and lived through a five-year lawsuit one of the biggest in the last 25 years in the US and being deposed deposition for two days by fancy lawyers working for the Russian folks I’m mindful of these things. That doesn’t mean it’s not exciting and really thrilling what’s happening I don’t mean to sound like I don’t think that I do very much so.

But I think I mean it’s good news/bad news, I guess Dickens the best of times the worst of times with technologies and the increasing ability of journalists to use multiple technologies that’s thrilling and the possibilities are multiplying every everyday about what one can do with information.
That’s exciting but we are still dealing with humans and humans still have their own quirks that are not necessarily predictable or typical, they’re quite atypical. We have lots of people who are different from each other and getting them to collaborate and frankly investigative reporters excuse my language are some of the biggest pains in the ass on planet Earth.

They’re by definition curmudgeonly sometimes or at least stubborn or disbelieving or incredibly sceptical and you know it’s basically it’s a real challenge to get everyone to be on the same page on the same story on the same moment even, you know, and let alone agreeing with it. So it is slightly amusing on one level but it can be maddening also. Yeah we noticed that with the consortium the older journalists are- they have- we had folks at we call them the queen bees - the queen bees and the worker bees - the queen bees were the most famous journalists who were - it’s sort of the back end of their careers - and their reputations were transcendent and literally global reputations in many cases. The problem was basically the old cliché you can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

They were so convinced of their own brilliance and their own certitude about everything, they knew everything, and also on their subjects whatever it was even if it was not confined to their country they were the expert, and so the folks who were older were calcified in their in their sort of rigidity about their views and not terribly open minded and actually the biggest problem of all - and also they weren’t all that anxious to work hard they were a little bit working less say - because they already had their career made and they were sort of - I wouldn’t say coasting but they were not- they had nothing to prove necessarily at that point.

Add all that together so you’re getting the prestige of their involvement but not much else, and then on the other side you would have young whippersnapper really excited and aggressive energetic journalists who - young journalists - who might not have much experience but they were extremely courageous almost to a fault, maybe too much so sometimes, and in terms of technology they’d have everything, something that came out ten minutes ago they would have it and know how to use it. And so you would have to- we used to- our common refrain internally was you have to combine the worker bees and the queen bees together, and because often the queen bees will have judgment and experience that is useful but not in every case and if things involving any technology whatsoever your younger journalists are going to always know more and be more of the edge about the technologies
than the older journalists. So you had that it becomes a very it’s already complex enough because of language and culture and geography and expertise issues but the other one this - hate use it - but a little bit of a generational slash technology savvy those kinds of considerations.

And so it’s yet these are just additional variables that really make it- well it’s a reason a lot of people haven’t done this until recently I think it’s partly we’re enabled by the technology that’s why we can all do this while you and I could talk right now across the world with video and audio but in addition to that I think journalists increasingly know that the stories they want to do go beyond one person and they need to collaborate that’s all wonderful.

The other thing is the old competitive news organisations that were arrogant beyond words, and frankly many of them still are, that see the world through their own eyes and everyone else is chopped liver. There’s still a lot of that arrogance by the so-called elite or the different words for it. But you know what I mean the bastions of traditional journalism shall we say, and even though they’re now online they still see themselves as the equivalent of Greek columns you know and they are unwilling- their arrogance is dripping and a really offensive I’ve always I’ve always not enjoyed talking to any of those people to be very candid. Because they’re so smug and full of themselves they’re insufferable. But occasionally you must work with them but I find that the added the arrogance then the attitudes sometimes get on my nerves and to get all these cats together - and it is herding cats it’s probably not fair to cats - it is really a challenge.

It can’t be overstated how hard- you know I think in some cases that’s the case especially the folks who have sort of gravitated to books you know and as a person who’s written several books I understand this phenomenon where you will disappear into- the fade into the ether you will be you’ll disappear from planet Earth into your subject and you get lost in your subject and you also then become an expert in the most arcane subject areas for a period of years and then you come out almost come out of the cave proverbial cave and you think you’re an expert but actually you’ve missed the rest of the world the last several years. And a lot of that’s just trade off you’re getting someone who is and still has numerous sources and is highly regarded but it’s - excuse my language - also a pain in the ass and you have to juggle that with the young buck who is arrogant beyond words and actually doesn’t have any
wisdom or any scar tissue or any seasoning or experience and you actually have to meld those
talents all together and you want to take the best of both, you want the high tech folks- the
ones who are the worker bees are going to be the ones who are most rambunctious and
aggressive and willing to take chances and frankly I hate to say it but also put themselves in
delicate and even risky situations.

The older journalists have already done that and they might be less inclined to do it and are
also not as tech savvy but they also have judgment and lots of wisdom about what has
transcended the last few years on decades. That’s context that is quite useful and you have to
meld all that into something that becomes solid and covers everything simultaneously. It is
really an art form.

And the international consortium has now done 25 cross-border investigations in the last 17
or so years roughly and now of course there are many other networks that I mean that’s not
the only one but that certainly one of the first ones. Now you have several that are breaking
down by subject areas, it’s really thrilling to see the extensive subsets now in all kinds of
fields and subjects of journalists across the world in various fields now or beat I guess you’d
call it we used to call beat subjects beat areas, environment, health and so it’s actually a
thrilling time but it wasn’t always- as it really makes everything I described look kind of
quaint like discuss this, you know discussing the dinosaur era of journalism or something.

But because it’s now changing so fast you have subsets genres of expertise across the world
now that are starting to evolve and I actually think that’s thrilling to watch and it’s necessary
we live in a peculiar world where journalism is defined but has historically been defined
mostly by geography, which city, what country and the issues of our time around the world
obviously transcend geography. And the beauty of the web I think and all the new
 technologies of say the last 20 years have allowed us to look more broadly for the first time
it’s also What’s helped to disrupt all the media companies and their bottom lines but the other
side of it editorially is I think it’s widened the aperture of the possible by all journalists and
that’s thrilling by itself and that’s historic by itself we’ve never had a way to look at the
world and then divide it into subsets and then have journalists across the world and each
subject develop information about that subject. It’s never happened before maybe think how
new this is. It’s really in the last 10 or 20 years of humankind it’s really an astonishing thing
and you know I teach international investigative reporting at American University here and we weren’t looking at the timber industry and the relationship with China and certain parts of South America and they are the biggest importer of timber I guess from South America I believe, and I know we were only looking at of two or three countries not the whole continent, but I know that so I was trying to think and part of what you wrote about the relationship between Australia and Latin America and how you could relate those things I mean it’s clear that there are powerful corporate interests that traffic in both places I would say but-

**Florencia Melgar: The mining industry—**

Charles Lewis: Mining is an obvious- and that’s why pulling documents from different parts of the world are always fun because well I think that’s how we broke the tobacco smuggling story that the 1/3 of the cigarettes in the world were not being sold it didn’t make sense and it was actually South America where that story broke through. There were 10 journalists on six continents looking at tobacco documents from British American Tobacco and there was some sort of repository in Guildford England and you had to get permission to go there. They were required by law because of all the tobacco litigation to present that, just as there’s a similar place in the US in Minnesota different companies Phillip Morris I think the other one is B.A.T. So they add to if you wanted to go look at their documents you had to make an appointment between like 10 o’clock and 2 o’clock 3 days a week or some silly thing, it was way out of outside London somewhere. So one of the world’s great journalists Duncan Campbell went there and he and the head of the international consortium [?] Maud Beelman [?] had figured out that one-third of the world’s cigarettes were not being sold and that made absolutely no sense and of course the industry the tobacco industry said they were trying to find out what was happening to their cigarettes which of course is ludicrous no one manufactures billions of extra cigarettes that aren’t being sold year after year.

It did look awfully fishy I guess you’d say or whatever very strange. So the journalist Duncan Campbell goes there he pulls thousands and thousands of records and there’s some mystique about what exactly he did there’s some thinking he took off more than that even. We don’t know all we know is when he left he had 10 or 11,000 records, back when there were modems and faxes and he sent that to the ten journalists on planet earth on six continents.
And the British American Tobacco executives on all the continents had been very careful and never once used the Spanish word for smuggle except in one place in Brazil and another country in the area there in northern part of South America and it was a journalist there who discovered they had not disguised in the B.A.T. documents, inside company documents they actually used the smuggle word and they basically acknowledged it by the use of that word, what they were doing they were using third party cut-outs in places like Aruba, people that smuggle guns, you name it, anything, drugs, guns, they don’t care. And yes they were also doing tobacco that had not been otherwise sold and they were avoiding customs duties saving billions of dollars in taxes on planet Earth not just South America and here smuggling globally not just in South America.

But anyway that document is what we use for that report and it went viral like within minutes around the world and criminal prosecutions were- criminal investigations were announced in Brazil, Argentina and Britain. And the process was the journalist in Colombia saw it and we basically protected the person’s name because we’re afraid that journalist would be at risk which I think wasn’t crazy I think it is possible that would have happened so anyway that’s a case of everyone looking and one person being able to see something and having something no one no one else spoke Spanish of the text journalist and this person did and it’s pretty great. It was a great illustrative example of what’s possible with a collaboration that’s really- and it was actually the first investigation which is even better and from that moment on it was look out world.

**Florence Melgar: Thank you so much for your time and for sharing all your experience and thoughts.**

Charles Lewis: Oh well sure good luck with what you’re doing I mean if there’s any way to stay in touch or let me know how it turns out I’m very interested in what you’re doing I think it’s really important. You are trying to do something in the systematic thoughtful international way and kind of lay out a template for how things ought to be done when as far as I can tell almost no one has attempted that or succeeded in doing it so I’m wishing you well.
Gerard Ryle leads the ICIJ’s headquarters staff in Washington, D.C., as well as overseeing the consortium’s more than 190 member journalists in more than 65 countries. Before joining as the ICIJ’s first non-American director in September 2011, Ryle spent 26 years working as a reporter, investigative reporter and editor in Australia and Ireland, including two decades at The Sydney Morning Herald and The Age newspapers. Together with the ICIJ deputy director Marina Walker Guevara, Ryle coordinated the Swiss Leaks, one of the biggest multi-country investigations, leading a team of 86 journalists from 46 countries through a complex 15-month investigation. It was followed by The Panama Papers where the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, together with the German newspaper Suddeutsche Zeitung and more than 100 other media partners exposed the identities of shareholders and directors of 214,000 shell companies set up by Mossack Fonseca, a Panamanian law firm and corporate service provider.

Access the video interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NXyGWyQGRI

Florencia Melgar: What are the main experiences in terms of planning, method and the challenges that you face when you manage investigations of the kind and size of the Panama Papers?

Gerard Ryle: Well you do have to have some sort of method but my method is quite reasonably simple. I basically only ask three simple questions before every story. You know one of them being is something of concern? That we know, obviously you have to write about stories I think that generally concern people, for us it’s always an issue not just about concerning people in one country but it’s got to be a global issue. So you’ve got to pick the
right topic, I think it’s putting time into getting the right story in the first place and testing it before you introduce it to other people.

The other thing I look for a systemic failure in the story. So if there’s a system that’s designed to protect people and it’s broken, for me that’s a story. You know and then that continues on with unique patterns. If you step out of your house tomorrow and you step into a pothole in front of your home it’s of concern to you but it’s not necessarily of concern to other people in the room because it, you know. But if everyone’s stepping into potholes, there’s a systemic failure somewhere, the council isn’t actually fixing the potholes, so you’ve got yourself the story.

The third thing I always ask, and this is controversial, there’s no point doing stories unless you get some sort of result. So you have to have impact for a story, so when you’re exposing something or wrongdoing you want to think at the beginning what do we want to happen after we publish you know resignations, government inquiries, public protests, and that’s what I would call the impact. But after that that’s it there are the only three things I think about.

You know I do put a lot of thought into the story in the first place, and then what can we do when we’re writing our stories to make sure that the government or whatever it is you want to react to this actually are being forced, or react to in and so you’re creating social change of some kind.

**Florencia Melgar:** Once that’s decided and you have these three questions answered, in terms of working with teams from different parts of the world, diverse languages, etc., do you have a kind of code of ethics for example?

**Gerard Ryle:** We want all of them to share everything with each other so no matter how irrelevant it might seem to them. If they find something in the documents, say we make a lot of documents available to the reporters, you find every reporter’s got the same essential motivation; they love the story, so again it goes back to that first question. Come to them with the right story and you basically are giving them what they want in the first place and they’re able to buy into the collaboration, they’re able to buy into your methods, you’re able to
impose rules on them, which is basically let’s all share everything we find as we go along, let’s make sure.

You know we built a virtual newsroom for the project, make sure you go into it every day and when you do find something of interest tell your colleagues about it. So but it’s all driven by that. If you didn’t have a story in the first place you wouldn’t get their attention and you wouldn’t be able to impose this kind of rules but after that it’s really hands off because they need to help each other.

**Florecia Melgar:** About this proposal of a methodology that I showed you, do you think that could help you, or don’t find a use for it; would you add something, get rid of something? I’d like your honest view.

Gerard Ryle: I just think it’s too complicated. I think there are too many steps there; I think you need to refine it. When I was trying to work out what exactly you know my methods of working I would go and listen to lots of you know- go and read pretty much all these you know big people like Chuck Lewis, other famous investigative reporters and what did they present to conferences of methodology and found that often they would produce these very long lists and after a while you [INAUDIBLE] all those things so I think you need to refine and refine and refine.

It’s like when you- people tell you how to write, you need to lose a lot of the words to get you know to get the meaning across. So this is more simpler you can make it the better but there’s nothing wrong with the methodology at all I mean it’s all very logical. You know we would probably apply this kind of thinking too even if we do it’s just that I never thought of putting it down in so many different steps.

Don’t get me wrong I’m a great believer in process I’m just you know I tend to have, you know, when for instance I’ve got a great data team it’s run by Mar Cabra who’s in charge of the data team. She is very much into process, she has processes, diaries, you know, meetings, stand-up meetings almost every day as well and I’m a different kind of journalist, I’m more of a you know instinctual journalist I think but for other people they need- I mean Jen she says that her people need that process they need to know that they’re all marching. I think it’s
easier for me to have, I mean I’m older I’ve been through it before, you know I think with younger especially if you’ve got data driven people they do like, you know, it means that their brains think that way so if that’s what they think that they need, then give them what they need. You know apply it but for me it wouldn’t work for me to come in and say I want you to do 12 things today because I’m going to you know spend more of my time thinking about what I’m supposed to do next than doing my job. I mean I think the other thing we forget is that we’re all human beings and everyone has a different way of working.

**Florencia Melgar:** Well, the idea is that I’m suggesting this is as a proposal and maybe you use only some of the steps.

Gerard Ryle: Yes yeah yeah I know you might take some of steps from someone like me but then you might apply more of the steps for somebody else whatever their needs are. I mean I find when you’re managing people you need to realise that they all work differently in different ways and you need to work out what they need more to be able to give them- I mean if you’re a manager your job is to essentially allow them to do their best work that’s essentially what a good manager should do.

But everyone’s human and different so therefore you need to work out how Mar works best what makes it for Marina or Mike or where it is for your team; they’ll need different things from you as a manager but you want them to come in every day doing their best work so it’s easy for me to know what my task is.

**Florencia Melgar:** Do you start working with a hypothesis to test…?

Gerard Ryle: Yeah and I always mean but again hypothesis for me is just simply asking questions you know, what’s the what’s the story here, can we use this material or whatever that happens to be that question. It just depends on what scenario you’re facing. Like if I was using the Panama papers as an example then our first questions will be, you know first question was can we use this material it’s clearly taken by somebody without the permission of the firm that we got the material from. First question. Once you get that answered by the lawyers then you say well okay what’s the issue here? One of the things that you’re looking
at in the offshore world is that a lot of what’s happening is perfectly legal, so do we have a story or not?

And for me that’s the second question you have to ask. What is the story and for me the story here was you know is you know even if it is legal that actually makes it more interesting because it’s kind of a surprise factor that you weren’t expecting. You know it’s easy to get a document and it shows a clear wrongdoing, well that’s an easy story but when you’ve got something that’s much more nuanced then you’ve got an extra set of questions to ask yourself or what is- and can- is it as black and white as it looks or if there’s shades of grey in there you’ve got to factor that in as a journalist.

**Florencia Melgar: What would be the most difficult or most common challenges when working with journalists across borders?**

Gerard Ryle: Challenges are basically cultural challenges, you’ve got language challenges, it’s setting the ground rules at beginning how we like to work. We mostly work in Spanish and English mainly because a lot of my staff for Spanish speakers we also speak German we also speak French but yeah languages is the first issue.

You need to have common rules around language. So we more or less work in English which is great for me because my language skills are terrible. But other things just think you know understanding culture, for instance in a place like India it is perfectly normal for you to pay for someone to go and find a court document for you, whereas in America that’s a no-no, paying for anything, absolutely not, but you have to learn and at least I’ve learned is that you need to allow the journalist to do whatever it is that’s the normal practice in their country and you can’t impose American ethics or rules across the whole world or English ethics and rules across the whole world or your wire or whatever is. That each journalist is going to be able to work within the environment you know their own ethics their own standards and allowing them to do that. So it’s okay to buy a document in India that’s fine for the Indian journalists to do that. I couldn’t do it but let them do it.
Hamish McDonald

The author of books on Indonesia, India and Japan, has been made an inaugural Fellow of the *Australian Institute of International Affairs* in 2008 and is a frequent public speaker on topics ranging across contemporary Asia, the South Pacific, and Australia’s foreign and defence policies, and takes a keen interest in Australia’s ethnic communities.

- Asia-Pacific Editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*
- Foreign correspondent in Jakarta, Tokyo, Beijing and New Delhi
- Senior editor at the *Far Eastern Economic Review* in Hong Kong
- Twice won Walkley awards/report on Burma into the record of US Congress.

Access the video interview: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fptFeZs8vA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4fptFeZs8vA)

Florencia Melgar: What do you think about the concept of a methodology or best practices?

Hamish Mc Donald: I think it’s probably a good idea to have some articulation of our practices and rules because I suspect a lot of investigative work starts in a very haphazard way and people come together and start working on one story long story and then get formed into an investigative unit and tend to follow intuitively a kind of methodology without really stepping back and trying to make it systematic so it’s probably a useful exercise.
Florencia Melgar: In your experience have you ever come across challenges in terms of coordinating with other colleagues?

Hamish Mc Donald: The usual ego contest with other journalists and people trying to put their stamp on things or to position the material they collected more prominently; so that’s sort of natural in any kind of journalism. I’ve being both involved as a writer and as an editor and coordinating sort of large-scale stories involving a lot of writers researchers so that’s pretty normal and it’s a question of having someone to decide what are the best bits and how it should be arranged and so on.

I did have a clash in the case of the investigation I first did into the Balibo killings in Timor for the National Times where we employed as a researcher on the ground in Lisbon a writer who was very committed to one side of Timorese politics we knew that and so I think she was perhaps formed the impression that she was going to be a co-author. Her research was acknowledged but she had no part in the writing anyway, but she got very shirty about it and that’s 1979 and it’s still going on her part. With the other things I’ve done again on Timor and Indonesia I’ve been more on my own really looking for particular sources and particularly in the intelligence sphere where you keep everything very tight even from your editors it’s a lot of trust involved.

A thing I more recently on the old Croatian 6 alleged terrorism case… that was over several years getting what I could. I’m using opportunities to grab some fairly widely scattered people researching archives and so on so um in terms of coordinating I really don’t have a lot of experience in that area.

Florencia Melgar: What did you learn in the cases that you worked with other journalists?

Hamish Mc Donald: Well I guess the lesson is to make it clear what’s expected of them what their input is, what rights and authorship they have. Usually they know what protections they need and what protections their sources need and that becomes very evident in the process but that needs to be very clear but I think it’s more the question of authorship final authorship and what whose responsibility the final product is and I can see going back to that Timor...
story the first one that should have been made much more clear. Ideally if the newspaper had the resources I should have gone to Lisbon because I gave a crucial name of a crucial witness to the researcher on the ground for her to claim it was her work is stretching it a bit actually. So you can’t always do that it’s an expensive business, so you’ve got to work with people who are where you need them, and I think you’ve got to be very clear about their agendas and backgrounds and what why they want to be involved.

**Florencia Melgar:** We have the challenge today of communicating in a safe way across not only across borders because here we do it as well through email but at least you have the option to put it in the mail or seeing the person and giving the document in hand. But when its overseas it’s a bit more challenging. Have you come across any of these situations where you’re concerned about the safety of documents to be sent overseas?

**Hamish Mc Donald:** Oh yeah there were documents that were leaked to me and one in Jakarta that I kept and I waited till I had a safe pair of hands to carry it down to the office in Sydney. There were other many times I’ve kept phone conversations to a very cautious level and trying to avoid using what would be obvious keywords that would pick up in a voice recognition program and trigger some kind of alert that was especially true in China. We just would not mention Tiananmen on the phone or Falun Gong or some other obvious words or even names of leaders could sometimes trigger the same in emails you do that um I’ve been very wary in Australia in recent years of triggering keyword searches in my own emails. I was listed on one federal police search warrant into leaks of Timor documents in the early sort of around 2001 2002 so that made me very wary of they never actually executed the search from my place but other people in the warrant named in the warrant had had their places turned over so that’s that.

Well it was so a lot of leaks about what Australian intelligence knew about the Indonesian militias in Timor 1999 and that came out in partly in the Bulletin Magazine John Lyons and partly on Four Corners and partly to me and they had a search warrant out or weren’t on a particular Australian army officer and a couple of them I think and then a guy called Philip Dorling [?] who was then working as a Labor staffer for Laurie Brereton the Foreign Affairs spokesman so there were searches in Canberra and here so people got very nervous then so
you kept phone conversations to a fairly innocent level with any of those people and if you had something to say to them you would somehow try to grab them at a face-to-face meeting when you could arrange it all think of a plausible reason to ring them up and say where you be kind of thing and fancy a cup of coffee or something. You know yeah so that was something. I think if you’re working on Middle East and so on now you’d be very nervous about setting up some kind of surveillance yeah.

**Florencia Melgar:** And how do you know when you can trust the journalist who is overseas?

Hamish Mc Donald: Well there are some people who have a long track record in an established publication, so you know what their career record is, and you can make a judgment then; with less experienced people it’s a bit of a trial and error process. When I’d just started as foreign editor at Sydney Morning Herald in 1997 I was contacted by John Martinkus you probably heard from who he was a young kind of activist journalists who went to Timor on a tourist visa and got around and went out into the bush and watched a lot of Indonesian operations and so on and would come back to an Internet cafe in Delhi or somewhere and send me a stream of just raw notes about what he’d seen. Initially I was thinking well this is completely unusual and getting where we don’t have any information is just not coming through conventional news media at all or our correspondent in Jakarta.

So I was intrigued because it looked interesting and had good start so I eventually having received couple of these I reworked them myself into a conventional news story because he had no idea how to write news or had done no time when he went to an Internet café. He just got it down and sent it anyway so I spent hours rewriting his emails and started running them so I sort of developed a trust in him that he was telling me exactly what he saw and wasn’t distorting it and they were very good and very brave.

**Florencia Melgar:** So you took the risk.

Hamish Mc Donald: Well it was a risk for me and others. Often you don’t have a budget to hire outside people anyway so back pre-1998 and the Herald we did have a big budget I mean it was just open slather you could hire anybody almost so I had this network of quite whacky
people all over the world and they were fun and I got to know them and they usually I’d get them to send me a sample or a story and I sort of check it out a bit. But I developed that it was trial and error but then some of them you just said no it’s not going to work and I don’t think you’re really getting into a good stuff but they had some good interesting people. But then the bean counters got in and cut the budgets and I had to say no more and just use staff reporters and the brands that we paid for like New York Times and Washington Post and London Telegraph and so on.

So that was the way that worked with the Far Eastern Economic Review we had a lot of self-nominated amateur journalists around Asia who were generally honest types but some of them had blind spots in there one or two had gone home loans from that BCCI remember there was a big Pakistani Middle Eastern bands, about 97 98 it crashed it collapsed as there was a great story about that Bank that we could not use correspondents could in some cases like a guide Bangladesh cut a loan from this Bank that transformed his personal finances he’s going to buy a house and so on, so you could not expect him to do a hard-hitting expose a of how this Bank was splashing money around with people like him to get respectability.

Others were part of the establishment… we had a guy in Nepal who was locked into the elite of the kingdom, so you couldn’t really expect more than the surface events from him. Others were in very difficult positions in Thailand to talk about the monarchy or Malaysia. We had a Malay correspondent who knew the unknown power structure very well but was constantly getting called a traitor by the community for writing about them. In Singapore we had people who risked jail you know and torture by the [INAUDIBLE] soft torture...

Florencia Melgar: Is there such a thing [like “soft torture”]?

Hamish Mc Donald: What they would call it is enhanced interrogation perhaps you know not waterboarding but the cold treatment and sleep deprivation and all that stuff you know the Brits used it in Northern Ireland and Singapore perfected it. They don’t leave a mark and so you developed a feeling for what you could ask of certain people and what you couldn’t sometimes it was best to bring in an outsider who was willing to be burned in that country and ready to risk being PNG for a while and I was called in to Thailand to do a story on how the Thai military had done a deal with the Burmese to basically to ransack the teak forests of
Burma. I wrote that up because the local guys could not do it so and then I went back to Hong Kong and wrote it from there.

Florencia Melgar: And this kind of methodology what would you think? what’s good, what’s bad, what’s missing?

Hamish Mc Donald: So you’re basically talking about a story that is really transnational involving many countries… so when you’re trying to pull together resources, journalists and missing investigators in all these countries…

Florencia Melgar: They have to agree to go together.

Hamish Mc Donald: There’s a question of payment and reward; where does that come in?

Florencia Melgar: Well this model fits journalists who come from a media organisation; the resource involved is the time of the journalist. (...) But when it’s an NGO, it’s case by case… (...)

Hamish Mc Donald: Yeah all right I just think you probably need a step with NGOs organisations because a lot of them have a preconceived idea that big pharmaceutical companies are automatically bad or that transnational mining companies are always wrong, always exploitative and don’t try all that hydroelectric dams are dangerous.

Florencia Melgar: They have agendas.

Hamish Mc Donald: So you’ve got to be clear about their agenda and what input they have and the authenticity of the data they’re giving you. Of course they do a lot of courageous work and there’s a Brit in Thailand who’s just got four years suspended jail sentence for some work he did for a Finnish NGO on slave labour so you’ve got a lot of respect but on the other hand you you’ve got to be aware as you say what they’re about and be willing to balance that I think with other steps and I think there are methods and questions of disclosure but that would come in to this protocol I think and how much you give away about what you’re doing. I think here is the important thing I think this is probably where you get to the
point where you’re deciding is this a story or not yeah and do you go forward or do you drop it.

**Florencia Melgar:** Well, the idea is to avoid sitting for six months waiting to find out if there is a story [if an early assessment can determine the viability or not of a story…]

Hamish Mc Donald: Oh yeah what about point at which you might actually instigate a legal process by supplying information to or exchanging information with an investigative agency like police or corporate ASIC type corporate regulator or a banking regulator or a reserve bank where you might get to the point where journalism reaches a blank wall and that the only way you can get beyond that would be to start developing implicit cooperation with an agency that had the powers to for example tap phones, break into emails, call witnesses, seize documents, and so on.

And you might develop a working relationship that you would get the first break on what they were doing or if they decided to prosecute or in fact it might only be when they lodge something in a court that you would have the legal protection to publish what you found out that you might otherwise risk tremendous you know legal consequences like defamation or you know punishing defamation for your company, your employer or that the individual you’re chasing the people you’re chasing might actually use it to get away escape somehow or you know beat the rap… because I’m thinking of the age team and the [?] secrecy you know the banknote printing scandal was the Reserve Bank.

They were sort of working in tandem with investigations I think so I mean no this is just something that could come into the mix somehow that you before you publish even.

The code of ethics was good that you’ve got it in early because I think that’s important that there’s a whole question of deception in journalism which well I tend to think the MEAA code of ethics here is a bit unrealistic that you don’t that you’ve always got to be upfront that you’re a journalist and asking questions and so on I think it doesn’t work like that a lot of people masquerade is just say an ordinary customer of a bank or whatever to get the experience of what ordinary people happen or I mean there are certain types of deception where you might really mislead somebody and use them and lose them that that can be very
nasty oh but anyway that’s a question that you nut out of you know that you make clear as you go along.

Probably if somebody says how about if I pretend to this lady that I’m really keen on her and that kind of thing I think you’d say no I don’t go that far you know or you know try to involve somebody in a fake financial scheme to see how far that go and the other hand people do you know people have gone to celebrities in London with a bag of money and put a camera hidden in the bag to see what they would do you know I think a couple of members of the British royal family, Princess Fergie she got lured by some newspaper journalist pretending to be oil sheiks from the Gulf or something they wanted her to do something dodgy and you know produced a suitcase full of money.
In October 1996, Carey’s investigation brought to light the alleged financial links between a Singaporean government firm and a branded Burmese drug lord. ‘Singapore Sling’ was the investigative aired by SBS’s ‘Dateline’. In the report, Mike Carey shows that the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation (GIC) had investments in the Myanmar Fund in which an accused Burmese heroin kingpin close to the military is also involved.

Twenty years afterwards, Carey reflects about the investigation process, the collaboration he received from colleagues overseas and says: “I relied too much on my own, on me doing it myself because I was afraid that if I talked about it too much then I would lose the story.”

Aside of SBS, Michael Carey has worked for the ABC and Al Jazeera and has lived in South-East Asia and Brazil.

Access the video interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dzSMwhnL_gg

Florence Melgar: The idea of using a transparent methodology to do investigative reporting aims to go beyond the rationale that only trust in the journalist or media can validate the credibility of an investigation. What do you think?

Michael Carey: So that’s that becoming less and less sound, you can’t trust the organisation these days like you used to be able to trust the organisation.
Florencia Melgar: So who do we trust?

Michael Carey: I don’t know; that’s a problem.

Florencia Melgar: So why we can’t we trust organisations like we used to?

Michael Carey: Well major broadcasters like the BBC for example, or Reuters, people that say let’s focus on the BBC. BBC has become more ideological and maybe I just seen it more maybe my eyes have been opened up maybe it was always up it’s because BBC World Service was always funded by the British Foreign Service you know, so its role was always to put a British perspective on things but I get the impression that it’s become more overt and more used as a tool of propaganda or tool of diplomacy than ever before and you just can’t trust that you’re going to get accurate, fair coverage where once that might have had a veneer of Britishness and whatever, as you would expect, done from a British perspective.

Now I think the situation is such that actively television and networks are actively playing a role in the propaganda game more openly and blatantly than they’ve done in in my memory as a journalist. You know you have the case of Al Jazeera news journalists fabricating stories in the Middle East in the early days of the Syrian war. In recent times you’ve had appalling coverage and biased coverage by the BBC for example almost trying to push for a Western boots on the ground intervention in Syria for example. You know more obviously and more openly than I would have expected from the BBC in past times.

Florencia Melgar: But that also shows the need to have more diverse journalists from different parts of the world who are...

Michael Carey: Yes, and to rely on different sources and to be honest and not just driven by whatever is easiest to produce and cheapest to produce. You know to grab a BBC piece and put it on air now is not cheap but you know… what are we really doing? You know is that good enough?
Florencia Melgar: So I was surprised in the last four or five years in some parts of the world they don’t have exactly a lot of resources [but they still do investigations] Like in Latin America -and I’m talking about that because it’s the experience I have. The congresses of investigative journalists are platforms to share not only the findings but also the methods they use and sharing ways of working, but why don’t we know about these investigations, unless it’s something massive like the Panama Papers…

Michael Carey: (...) I hate to say this but the old SBS would have been more interested in running those sorts of stories than the new SBS, than today’s SBS. And why it is like that, I don’t know. I mean, for example, the vote against Dilma Rousseff in Brazil at the moment we’re not getting a proper fleshed out coverage of what’s really going on in Brazil, you know….

I mean look at the background of these people and what they’re accused of and convicted of in some cases. We should be hearing that, but we’re not. Because we’re relying on the old methods, the old organisations like the BBC, like the American networks, they’re not going to tell you the honest truth about Dilma Roussef because they agree with her dismissal, in fact many people believe the United States has been involved in the campaign to kick her out of her position.

Florencia Melgar: How to maximize resources and agree on what we are investigating is basic, having a hypothesis. Sometimes you have the topic but not exactly a story.

Michael Carey: Hmm that’s right; well, for an example in my coverage of Burma and I’ve done a couple of very long investigative pieces in Burma years ago, I relied very heavily on a group of journalists in three different countries. It was individual journalists in three different countries: in Thailand, in Hong Kong, and Singapore, and myself who was at that stage living in Indonesia.

And these people were all specialists in Burma in one way or another, and so we were coming at the story and they didn’t even know why -well now that’s not true…Bertle Lintner who I know very well who’s written a lot of books about Burma, he knew the story I was chasing. But some of the others who I asked for help didn’t really know the bigger story I
was chasing but they were helpful and eager to help in building blocks to make the bigger story.

**Florencia Melgar: And how did you exchange the information, to keep it safe?**

Michael Carey: In those days, well see this is basically just by simple on the web those days. Email probably.

**Florencia Melgar: Because there wasn’t surveillance then.**

Michael Carey: Well there was, but I was very careful about what I was talking about. To get some documents I actually had to fly physically to Bangkok. Documents that were smuggled out of Burma for example, which were the crucial documents, the company documents that we were looking for. I had this story for a long time but I could never prove it and I waited for 18 months for the documents to come out of Burma. And they were physical, on paper documents.

**Florencia Melgar: So tell me what are the most important learnings? The positives and negatives, what to do and what not?**

Michael Carey: In that situation I relied too much on my own, on me doing it by myself because I was afraid that if I talked about it too much or gave it to other people I would lose the story. It was a big story that linked the Singapore government with the biggest drug lord in Burma. The Singapore government had allowed the family to establish companies in Singapore and they were in a joint venture business of state-owned companies from Singapore with who at that moment was probably the world’s largest heroin producer, you know… Meanwhile, Singapore was hanging people if I they had more than 15 grams of heroin. And yet they were prepared to do business with this guy, and they still do, they still allow him to have companies in Singapore.
Florencia Melgar: So what was the impact of the story? Did it bring any kind of at least awareness or?

Michael Carey: Yes it did. It’s probably still the best story showing the hypocrisy of Singapore that it hangs people for drugs and yet does business with drug dealers, and it’s still the best story that shows how close Singapore is with the Burmese military and the people who are effectively still running Myanmar.

Florencia Melgar: When was that published?

Michael Carey: 1996, a long time ago.

Florencia Melgar: Do you think it would have a different impact today with social media in terms of reach?

Michael Carey: Yes, absolutely. Because when it went to air in Australia, the wire services picked it up and started running it and the Singaporean government took everybody in into their media headquarters and said if you publish this story we’ll sue you. Now with the web, it just would have been out there and they wouldn’t have been able to stop it. It’s a great shame because it never really got very much- a lot of people were very afraid to report about it.

And they threatened to sue me too but again it was 1996 and we published it, we broadcast it here, and they didn’t want to take me to court in Australia because it was legal, and I had the documents, I had the bloody… the son of the big drug dealer who’s not allowed into the United States to this day because of his involvement in the drugs trade. I had him on camera in Singapore at the airport flying back to Burma. We had him on tape, we tried to interview him, and we had all the company documents that said he was the principle of the company; it was registered in Singapore, and we went and filmed at the company address. We had this.
Florencia Melgar: Is there any concern in relation to the production process that’s not contemplated in this methodology?

Michael Carey: If it’s a big story, how to do it without losing—well how to deal with that being hacked. That people who might be opposed to you publishing the story or broadcasting the story, how to keep it secure while you’re doing it, you haven’t got anything in there about security.

Florencia Melgar: Yes it is in the protocols and all of this, it’s not in detail.

Michael Carey: Oh OK.

Florencia Melgar: How do we have real credible voices, or how do we give credibility to the sources that have something to say and it’s relevant, and they’re not given a voice in the main channels…

Michael Carey: And you have to put them into a story that is big and then somehow get it in entirely, with its integrity intact, you know on to the web. You’ve got to have a delivery system that…you’ve got to get it onto a mainstream broadcaster somehow. That’s the thing…increasingly they’re not taking this stuff and we were talking about the BBC before. When was the last time you heard of the BBC breaking a story?

The marks of entry to university to do journalism are still high, so you’re taking from the private schools and people who are wealthy who’ve got good education and so you’re not bringing in the people who are from the lower classes of society like in the old days. You’re getting wealthy people, kids from GPS schools, from well-educated people who haven’t had to face hardship that might encourage you to be a bit more ballsy about uncovering what’s really going on, and seeing themselves as the voice of the people, asking questions on behalf of the people who don’t get the opportunity to ask questions of the people in power. I think that’s one of the big problems that I’ve seen happen in my time as a journalist. And that’s impacting the investigative journalism too because people don’t want to rock the boat; they want to keep the job.
Stefan Candea

Stefan Candea, from Romania, is an investigative journalist and co-founder of the Romanian Centre for Investigative Journalism (CRJI), a non-profit registered in Bucharest. Candea has broad experience in cross-border investigative stories. He’s member of the International Consortium for Investigative Journalism and has taught investigative journalism at Bucharest University and was the 2011 Carroll Binder Nieman Fellow at Harvard University. He’s been working at European Institute for Journalism and Communication Research (EIJC) on his PhD research with the University of Westminster, analysing the structures of cross-border investigative networks (“Cross-border Networks for Investigative Journalism and their Relevance for Press Freedom in Europe”). In 2015 Stefan founded the European Investigative Collaborations Network.

Access the video interview: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4kmkdntRgk&t=1917s

Florence Melgar: Do you think it’s useful to have a methodology and to reflect about it, considering the scenarios you are familiar with?

Stefan Candea: Sure, I mean… of course this process is not enough documented I think so then it cannot be enough debated or people cannot really consider what’s best or what are the different ways to do exactly this kind of work. So of course you do need first to document what people do in what circumstances and with what sort of differences. This is the first step actually that I think is very useful.
Florenicia Melgar: I’m sure you’ve reflected about your own experiences, which are the biggest lessons in terms of processes in cross-border investigations.

Stefan Candea: You need to talk and meet on a regular basis, I think that’s the most important thing but this kind of lesson doesn’t come from investigative journalism per se, it’s coming from any work, collaborative work. That especially collaborative work is done on remotely from different places so it’s not in the same place where people meet on a daily basis.

Having said that, I visited a newsroom where people are meeting on a daily basis in regular meetings as well so it’s the newsroom conference every morning and then there are different people in different hierarchies in different meetings… I think this is the way to organise investigative journalism projects, like you would organise any other projects.

Florenicia Melgar: The respect diversity and the agreement on a common ground is a bit of a challenge but I don’t know if you faced any of those situations.

Stefan Candea: Different cultural and political backgrounds have different sort of influence on the story, on the research process yes and I see there are a lot of examples but I think the example that comes a lot in discussions between Eastern Europe and Western Europe or Eastern Europe and the US is the use of incognito or hidden reporting, and this I’ve seen coming over and over again.

It’s just one example. There are others; as you said if you go further in other countries the way reporters expect officials to behave, so let’s say there are lower expectations in new democracies compared to what reporters expect in the Western world. Also from one media to another, different media have different expectations if you are talking about Spiegel in Germany well they expect people to react and to react fast.

If you talk about a small NGO that has a website then they don’t have these expectations and they do different stuff they are differently pushy or they organise their research differently in order to get the results.
Florencia Melgar: I’m thinking about the relation with the truth, have you had more philosophical kind of discussions about what truth is?

Stefan Candea: I think when we are in a cross-border project we are in a process of gathering information first and then we are in the process of interpreting, arranging, processing, analysing that information. Yes the ultimate goal is the truth but it’s never a topic of debate during the process.

Florencia Melgar: When I went to South America last year, a very experienced journalist said a methodological discussion should consider what he calls ‘the framework of suspicion’ and he says Anglo-Saxon or Western media’s framing is based on what’s legal and illegal. However, in other kind of democracies (more in line of with the journalism of outrage or more like activism) the framing would include what’s ethical and not ethical. Sometimes there are situations that are legal but they are non-ethical. So conversations can sometimes be difficult. Have you come across this or have you reflected on it?

Stefan Candea: I don’t think so. I mean, I look at the discussions in the race for the Presidency of the United States, around the candidates. This is not about investigative journalism but it’s journalism and look at the journalism in the US and the discussions around Donald Trump. They discuss his ethics as a businessman, they don’t discuss necessarily his legal steps in his business process so they are analysing his different decisions in business and the ethics of them.

So I do understand that in some parts of the world the decision on whether this is a topic we investigate or not is different but I don’t think we should only report on legal stuff or on unethical stuff. Because in my world, Eastern Europe, a lot of the stuff is happening is actually the other way around. It’s a possible conflict of interest, it’s a possible ethical moral issue and maybe the legislation it’s not actually showing that to be illegal but we still go after that and the questions around the links between officials and officials’ family’s business and political career and so on.
I would say that I was surprised to hear about Eastern Europe journalists not wanting to investigate a story because it doesn’t hit a target of millions of dollars in corruption, or you know like it’s not a big story if it doesn’t if it doesn’t bring up for discussion big sum of money.

And they would not go after a story about people being killed or having a lot of victims because it’s not that big for us. And what’s big for us is a big corruption and big names in politics.

And I’m thinking specifically of the former Soviet Union countries where journalists are totally after big names. You know you want to expose Putin and you want to show his secret bank account. And it doesn’t matter for a newspaper in the former Soviet Union that negligence or corruption took the life of 5, 6, 20 people. This is the sign of society being sort of flooded by these kind of examples so there are no news anymore. Maybe it’s a problem of the journalists, I don’t know but this is the type of discussions I heard when talking about whether this is a story or not.

Florence Melgar: You are doing your PhD about transnational investigative journalism as well, so what are doing your research about?

Stefan Candea: I’m trying to see if a network topology can be used in investigative journalists across borders. To do so, I need to see what does it mean, first of all, to have a network and secondly to see if existing operations that are described as being networks or networked investigative projects are real networks or if they are just sort of all types of organisations with a different name. So basically I want to look around and see how investigative journalism come to this discussion of using networks, organising networks, for what are these networks used. I could be producing Journalism or you could be sharing information and conferencing, and then I want to see I want to analyse these existing organisations and projects and so on, and see how they are really structured, how they really work.

Because what I see so far is that what’s going on here it’s not real networking. What I’m seeing both in terms of global conferences for Investigative Journalism and in terms of let’s say ICIJ projects or smaller networks, we are seeing basically a group of people over
centralised in terms of decision and organisation, workflows, resource sharing, and so on, and publication. So this is under no circumstances what you would call the collective action or a collective group.

Florence Melgar: So you’re thinking of a more kind of horizontal structure right?

Stefan Candea: We have networks that in my understanding are centralised. If you start to look around you see the same people traveling from a conference to another or endorsing each other on different email groups, Facebook, whatever, so yes it’s kind of very few people if you think - these people shouldn’t be representing the global phenomenon of investigative journalism. I mean we are talking about maybe 50-80 maybe a hundred but not really this is really few. The names that you see most of time coming back and like the names that you see all the time being associated with investigative journalism cross-border these are like less than 50.

Well it’s also an issue of access in terms of language of course, because the chosen language is English but also in terms of resources, and that’s part of my research as well.

I want to see once the extra pressure that configures these constructions. I find that the extra pressure with the most influence is what’s going on is from donors, big organisations like Open Society or the State department or these kinds of organisations. It’s not in terms of these putting pressure on the journalists but the journalism themselves as part of these NGOs trying to follow the rules of the game. Basically they are interested in satisfying the requests of such donors and then going after solutions that are not necessarily bringing or growing the network but are fine with the narrative and financial reports that such organisation requires.

So you rather want to have a perfect conference where you can say 1000 people attended and where you’re organised, instead of playing and experimenting with people that you know it means having to deal with tougher personalities, but they’re good professionals, and having different characters and different backgrounds around the table without necessary everybody agreeing with each other.
Florencia Melgar: You’re talking about the management of the business of investigative journalism.

Stefan Candea: That’s basically what I’m after and I’m not sure I can say at the end of the research this is a model or that is a good model, or that is a bad model or whatever. They want to see at least that you are able to describe what’s going on and where does this all come from and where does it go, towards which direction. I find unfortunate that this approach of non-profit investigative journalism and networks was a sort of reaction to the lack of space in mainstream media, but it is sort of turning into the wrong direction because the reason to start all this for me and for others that I know was to have the independence you need, no pressure whatsoever and no influence from anybody when you do your investigative work.

And you need resources to do that. Now what I’m seeing is that these organisations look even worse than what it was. We are running away from the big problem of the lack of separation between the economic decisions that the media company media made, and the editorial decisions. Right, but there you had more people and you had still some sort of separation. Now, with this non-profit world you basically have in most of the organisations the same people who are applying for money and asking donors to give them money. I think the end result is this that you have a much weaker configuration right now.

Florencia Melgar: What about going back to universities as a place where to do investigative journalism?

Stefan Candea: I don’t know. I mean, yes, you end up with the same problem. Some universities will have budget for this and some won’t and they cannot cover- they cannot replace the missing information needs from other places or communities where you don’t have universities at all. So maybe [universities] can cover one place in the country or two or three but that doesn’t really cover what you actually need. So it’s also a problem. We should find a way to have the people we need.

To share some sort of free information, but for the detailed information -the source documents or whatever- to have people paying for that. So to have people directly paying for
what you produce, what you put out there, instead of having others to pay and have this split between who pays for your work and who benefits from your work.

These networks use big names and buzzwords and also because of the relationship with donors what you have in reality is for instance that most of the data journalism is not really paid a journalism; it’s just a click and search in different datasets and maybe some need some sort of more knowledge in organising excel tables. So this is what a secretary would do 20 years ago in a big corporation, organising information, it’s not something that only journalists do and only a type of special journalist. And I think this is why people don’t want it to go too much into the details of the methodology, to maintain a sort of mysticism about how hard it is.

But I also think that it should be documented all the research published in more languages, with examples so that you have newcomers into this and they will become some sort of protection for the people who do this kind of jobs in dangerous places. The more you have [doing it] the less pressure it is on the few doing it.

**Florencia Melgar:** Something else some journalists from the south are concerned about is that if you’re doing cross-border journalism and there is a common funding, how is this going to be managed. Could the methodology somehow give some kind of guarantee that it’s going to be a bit more transparent and democratic, both the management of the resources and the decision-making, then some journalists might find an advantage in the methodology beyond following a series of steps.

**Stefan Candea:** Of course, still if you have these basics covered [at least] you have something because in projects like the ones of the ICIJ for instance there aren’t even these basics covered. I’m not saying here there are no bad intentions or anything like this. It’s the fact that you as the journalist producing stuff about really important or powerful people, you’ll become liable so these people could go against the organisation that has most of the assets. So they wouldn’t go against the freelancer from Romania but if that freelancer works with I say Jake from Washington of course they would go after the ICIJ in Washington.

So there are reasons for that to have an editorial check and a fact checker and a lawyer and a legal screening and so on and the decision. The system is centralised and it is closed, it’s not
inviting everybody in the network so there is no technical mechanism to get other people to participate in deciding in the same way. This is the old model of the newsrooms where you have the privilege of the decision but also the responsibility, so it’s a double edged sword.

I think what we try to do with this network in Europe is to test it in small groups before you can scale. And it doesn’t necessarily need to scale so you don’t need to have one network that is converging the whole world. You can have the model of small networks, more networks around the same country or whatever and you don’t need to cover the entire length, really, with the same technology, the same mechanisms and methodology maybe that’s even something that simply cannot function.

So we’ll try with this European network to have a smaller group, the one we just started to have these kinds of mechanisms in place. If people want to use them, they have access to the system of information management where everybody can put stuff, add stuff, comment stuff to be part of the editorial process from the beginning and in the end everybody decides his own product and publishes in his own media in his own language and using one common brand but there is no centralised decision maker who says we will use this article we will use this package and everybody should translate that, and also the decision most important [INAUDIBLE] is related to deadline for publication. This is always hard when you have more partners involved because one has print weekly, one has a daily, one has an online behind a paywall, one has an online without no pay wall, whatever… so there are different motives where when people want to control this publication and usually how I’ve seen it working with other groups is that the biggest wins, because everybody wants to have the biggest media partner publishing, they don’t want to piss him off.

Well what I’m trying to do here with this group is to have to accept that there is always an initiator of a story of an investigation and that there is another sort of follower of that person or that media group and these initiators who decide together with the coordinator -which is me in this case- on the publication date. So if the initiator is a smaller actor in the network still that initiator will have the sort of first word on when to publish and the others would have to deal with that.
Florencia Melgar: So you’re trying to make it more democratic, you want a representative way of managing it.

Stefan Candea: It’s not more democratic, it’s shifting the coordination role from one partner to another so it gives you the possibility to come with a story and then also lead the research plan and also lead the publication date. So instead of full democratic because there’s no vote here, but the person who started researching and doing the initial work, this person will have the say on a publication.

Florencia Melgar: I totally understand. I just wanted to make it more equal opportunities to everyone who is involved based on merit, not based on the size or power.

Stefan Candea: Yes.

Florencia Melgar: So when you say that you have this kind of specific process of how you work in this European organisation… is that something that is a public document or is something informal, is it something that I could read or not yet?

Stefan Candea: Not yet, I don’t know what I put online. So there is a bit of description on how we are working and what we are focusing on and how is the decision process and so on, and also there are some description of the technologies we want to use and I think that’s important because that’s the technology -it’s important in terms of free software versus proprietary software. Free software means anybody can take that piece and reuse it even if they are going away from the library. It means that if you are with a proprietary tool you can use that as long as you remember and then that’s it, you’re out with the [INAUDIBLE] you can re-install that and use it further. So that’s something crucial I think the tools that you’re generating or that you’re using as a network to manage the information, to process and analyse, follow all these steps.

If you have access to such tools only when you are permitted to be part of a network then you will behave differently, you don’t want to offend the network or maybe you make compromises but you don’t really participate in the network you are there only to use these
tools you don’t really participate you don’t bring stuff to the network. Whereas when you know that you have the freedom to take these tools and use them even if you’re not part of that network anymore [INAUDIBLE] you discuss differently and you are more engaged with the group. So this is described on the website and then links to free software and the tools we are trying to experiment with. What it’s not described is the workflow of the network and the workflow of each project but this is because what we published was a test project and we are still refining our workflow and so it’s a document, it’s a work in progress. It’s sort of going around this idea of having each time for each project, someone was proposing the story with a bit of documentation and someone who’s taken accepting it and then the others decide if they aren’t part of it or not or if they wait for another project.

Florencia Melgar: How do you see the role of the coordinator?

Stefan Candea: The coordinator should be a sort of facilitator, not the director. The current coordinator is more of a buffer between various interests and egos and should balance the network I think. That’s how- it’s my role now and I’ve sort of designed the role but I was saying this having in mind all this research I’m doing for my PhD and all these different critiques I have of other initiatives. If that will work I don’t know, there is a tendency in everybody to take over and there’s a tendency in groups to split over control, so I think my idea for this is that coordinator should have a role of rebalancing this tendency. So in other words don’t put too much power in anyone’s hands.

Florencia Melgar: Have you come across the discussion about trust, trust in other media and the journalists. Knowing the partners is sometimes a must for some journalists. But how do we open the circle of people, how do we expand this network. I’m very interested in Africa, for example, the chances of me getting into what happened in Eritrea that is so hermetic, if I have a journalist there what I’m going to with the trust issue. It’s just such a challenge. How do you see that?

Stefan Candea: That’s obviously the big discussion when something starts it’s who you know and who you trust and who you worked with before and then this trusted group at the beginning establishes a circle of trust and then they recommend others. Basically, each one in the group would say… hey I know another person whenever we need another person and the
others would accept it just because they accept the first one, the introducer. And so the trust is expended to someone else.

(...)

Florencia Melgar: Do you have to disclose conflicts of interest as part of your workflow or is it assumed that people would say if they had any conflict of interest?

Stefan Candea: Sort of expected from people if they do have a conflict.

Florencia Melgar: They would come and say it without being asked.

Stefan Candea: Yeah to tell you about it, but it’s been the case with networks like a [INAUDIBLE] for instance where is the biggest network sort of building in the years. I know members in Eastern Europe who become involved with the secret services in their countries, like spokesperson or whatever, and they didn’t tell the network about that and you hope that nobody will know. If the members from the other countries realise, they’d alert Washington about it and they would be taken out from the membership list.

But before you know these guys were still using their branding as part of this journalist network and I don’t know any complete example if they misused their position or not. But you would expect someone to tell you ‘I switched to the other side, take me out from your website’ or not too involved to get involved in a project. But this is like any ethical discussion in journalism of course. It’s good to have rules and regulations and guidelines and discuss possible examples so that the other part thinks about it, but in the end is the ethical lines are with everybody with each different person it’s with yourself, because you can follow the guidelines and still organize pretty nasty conflict of interest.

Actually what’s needed in this field is for people to stay as critical as they are as journalists as they are with themselves and with what’s going on around. It’s no problem it there is criticism, it shouldn’t be a problem that there is criticism and debate I think. It should be a problem when you realise that there is no criticism and no debate and that people are like in a
church, when you know… everybody agrees and chant. So I see this is sort of happening, especially in the last years.

Florencia Melgar: Let me know how you advance with yours.

Stefan Candea: I will I need to do it really fast now anyway, I’ll see.
Vivien Altman

Vivien Altman, Australian investigative journalist and TV producer, she worked as a journalist and producer at Foreign Correspondent ABC TV 1999-2015.

Nearly 30 years of investigative journalism and visually engaging storytelling has secured her reputation as a highly valued researcher, writer and field producer for global public affairs programs such as ABC TV’s Foreign Correspondent and SBS TV’s Dateline. She has also produced short background stories and structured controversial debates on far ranging topics of the day for SBS TV’s leading national discussion program, Insight.

Access the video interview https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oGlt72muZo0

Florenca Melgar: What were the most challenging situations you faced while you worked across borders with journalists in other parts of the world in different stories?

Vivien Altman: It really depends what story you’re working on firstly and who and what country you’re dealing with, I guess the most challenging situation that I faced would have been (…) the story that we did about prisoner X. That was a story which involved research in Australia and research in Israel and because it was a state secret in Israel and there was a gag order on the case. It was virtually impossible formally to break through the barriers so we had to find ways to get around the barriers which involved you know… in the case of Australia, Freedom of Information requests, it involved people talking to us off the record. In Israel it involved a combination of informal approaches to gain access to databases and to gain access to records. So in a sense I mean it’s an interesting sort of challenge because the methodology
was a combination of traditional and non-traditional [ways] I mean if we just stuck to kind of traditional ways of trying to get access to information we wouldn’t have succeeded because essentially we had to break through state security and it was a really interesting example actually of how fundamental is the access and communication and good relationships with other journalists and other people working in similar areas.

**Florencia Melgar: When do you know when you can trust the journalist that you never met before and lives overseas…?**

Vivien Altman: Good question. Look, sometimes you just have to make an educated guess and sometimes you know them or you know of them. So quite often you look at what they’ve written or what they’ve broadcast so you get a sense of who they are in terms of where they sit for example on the political spectrum. It doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re going to be honourable people but what I find generally and this is a general thing that most serious investigative journalists are keen to get stuff out and you know if it’s in their interests as much as in my interests or your interests quite very often they’ll cooperate, it might be that they’re not in a position to broadcast to write about a story as it was in the case of prisoner X in Israel. They wanted to get the story out, they knew the only way it could get out was if it was done internationally so there was a common interest there so I think the other thing is look you have to feel your way you have to A. find out as much as you can about the journalists and B. see what they’ve produced and then maybe even you ask around.

**Florencia Melgar: What about the difference in ethics for example, you know working with a journalist you’ve never worked with before.**

Vivien Altman: Well look I think again… if you’re working in an area of investigative journalism, that tends to attract certain kind of journalists and for example there are some kind of journalists who work in certain kinds of media that I would know straightaway that we wouldn’t be interested in the same kind of journalism, we wouldn’t be after the same- or investigating the same kinds of things. I think that in my experience and I’ve worked a lot internationally and I haven’t really found that to be a problem. In fact I’ve been quite impressed that most people I wouldn’t say all but most people I’ve dealt with internationally had pretty good ethics, similar to the sort of ethics (…).
Florencia Melgar: When there is money involved, there journalists who expect to be paid or need to be paid. Have you come across any situations of that kind?

Vivien Altman: Look that’s a huge problem. I think that’s a really huge problem in journalism because you know you go to somewhere where you’re investigating something and people you know it’s a country or where people are in much more humble circumstances of course. They see you come from the first world for example and you are a television journalist or producer, I mean obviously the perception is that you have money, you’re able to travel and you’re able to come to this country, so you must have money.

So look I think that’s a very delicate area and I think it’s something that you just have to think about quite a lot. It seems to me that if you’re working with people you pay them as you would. For example if you’re working with an investigative journalist and they work with you side by side then you would pay them as you would pay to any journalist by the day. If you came to an agreement that you’re going to share the material, then I think that you know you would have to negotiate that and honour that agreement.

But I think it is a very grey area and I think even more so with talent. With other journalists it’s not as complicated as it is with talent. I think that’s a very complex problem and I think the worst example of that -and I don’t believe that ABC or SBS would ever do that- was with Channel 9, the program 60 Minutes in the Lebanon case. That was an extreme example of something that I am 100% sure we would never enter into a situation like that. But I believe that all journalists are faced with this situation and I think it’s a grey area it’s got to be dealt with.

Florencia Melgar: It has to be a case by case situation.

Vivien Altman: Absolutely, case by case and sometimes it’s quite difficult and it’s the sort of thing that I think I probably caused me more… shall I say… moral dilemmas than anything else in television. Perhaps more in television than in print but I know that it’s something that you know… that has been an issue all along the way. And I think with television especially, with talent; because you know people often won’t participate or say that they won’t participate unless you remunerate them in some way which may be a donation to a
community centre they’re working at or something… there are ways around it but I still think it’s very complex and case-by-case basis.

**Florencia Melgar:** So what do you think in general about the fact of proposing or discussing a methodology?

**Vivien Altman:** Well, it’s an interesting thing. I think you’re right; but we don’t sort of sit down and have formal conversations about it; but at the same time I’m thinking about all those students who go to university and study journalism and you know… there’s a proliferation of journalism schools in Australia and maybe that’s the same across the world, but they do discuss these issues and in terms of methodology… well I have a way of working which one might describe as a methodology and part of that way of working has certainly improved greatly by discussing with other colleagues. So when I say methodology I want to ask you… do you mean for example I read something about a story, I think it looks interesting and I think it might be worth pursuing. Is your question how do I go about it?

**Florencia Melgar:** Yes, so what do you do? When we’re talking about transnational investigative journalism, there’s another layer, so it’s going to be collaborative because sometimes you’ll be able to travel but sometimes you won’t, so you have all sorts of added challenges -from information exchange to trust building to narrow down from the topic to the story. (…) and sometimes it’s not about the story itself but about making it happen with the resources we have that are limited.

**Vivien Altman:** It’s an interesting thing because one of the critical things I think about any story is you know the research. At the same time I also think -and I’m not sure about this- that there are some good journalists who have a nose for a good story right, but having a nose for a good story is one thing but the next step is to start doing research and if it’s a research in three countries e.g., then I would look quite specifically at who else might be researching that story in each country. Probably I would try to look for that story in other countries, what has been written about, if there’s a story that has been about it, and I would re-think it. I’d come back to the personal contacts. I think it makes a huge difference and I think it’s incredibly important in building up a methodology if you have good contacts -other journalists or other academics- that you can ask who else maybe working on that story or
have similar interests and would be able to give you more context and more perspective and maybe help you assess if it is or not worth pursuing. So I think in journalism generally we don’t and it’s become even less now with social media and journalists sitting at their computers 24/7.

(…) I really think it’s incredibly important to have a good network of people and they may be academics in institutes, universities or other journalists who you trust and who you know, whose work is good and you feel you can run something past them. Plus looking at what’s being done in other countries and seeing well maybe there’s something –or nothing- that’s being done, maybe there’s something that’s been done and on the basis of that sort of form an opinion do I take this to the next step is it worth pursuing.

Florence Melgar: So based on this like chart that I sent to you, is there anything here that you think oh that’s useless, or maybe I wouldn’t put it, and then also on the other hand, things you consider important to have but they are missing.

Vivien Altman: I was just going to say in relation to the resources and the timeline… look, it that really depends on who you’re working for and the broadcaster or the print magazine and also what program you’re working for. I mean, it varies so much and I think that’s one of the things that, you know, I’m not interested in news I mean news is just a reproduction of what happened in the last 24 hours.

If we’re interested in investigative journalism the resources thing is huge and that might mean identifying which contacts are worth talking to but that’s I guess you know skyping, calling. I think maybe mailing and saying what you know it’s the identification isn’t it of those that are relevant and also available. I find people are very busy and that is a huge problem everybody everywhere are incredibly busy so you’ve got to find a way to get access to them and then maybe talk about collaboration. Because for example one thing that I noticed is often when I contact people they’re very happy to have one phone conversation and then unless there’s something specific in it to them they just don’t have the time or the interest and I think it’s got to be reciprocal so I think it is really important to negotiate something.
For example I think sometimes there are stories that we can do internationally about events or things that are happening in other countries that maybe they are not in the position to do because of their resources and maybe sort of issues to do you know political issues or issues to do with sensitivity of the story so it may be in their interest to be involved in one way or another or at least to have their name on the story although in some cases that’s not the case.

I remember working a couple of times in Iran and the people we work with specifically didn’t want their name on the story so you’ve got to be very sensitive to the local conditions and also sometimes it can be even difficult talking to people because you know that’s another issue: all those issues to do with security and sensitivity, sometimes it’s not convenient for people to talk to you on the phone so it might be that you need to think this is happening increasingly… where you actually need to find someone on the ground that you can work with who may go off and do work for you and of course you can’t do from Sydney Australia.

Florencia Melgar: After that I call it protocol agreed… a code of ethics or a code of practice or some basics. Doing investigative journalism and being an advocate is very common other parts. The third conversation I think is really important to have it at the beginning and be very explicit instead of at the end to manage expectations as well right?

Vivien Altman: I think that’s a really important issue because you know in the context of Australia investigative journalists are respected, advocate journalists are not, there is a real line that’s drawn between that, and people will say ‘oh she’s too much of an advocate journalist’ and I think that’s really interesting that you say like and I know in many other parts of the world you have not just an investigative but also a journalist who you could describe in our terms as an advocate journalist and that’s a big question you know because I think that’s also a question we have to think about, knowing where that person is coming from could this sway what their political position is you also have to take that in mind in countries where politics is very polarised and I’ve come across so many good journalists in other parts of the world who I think are excellent investigative journalists and not just advocacy journalists.
So I think it depends there’s many different contexts that you have to be aware of. I mean there are many instances where you don’t know very much about the person that you’re talking about but with journalists and investigative journalists you often can look at the work that they’ve done previously. Maybe it’s to do with having worked in international journalism for 25 or 30 years I have a network of people I would want ideally not always the case to be able to ask someone about this journalist before they actually spoke to them. Now that’s almost a privilege, isn’t it? Because most people we’re not in that situation so I guess would I talk about it at the beginning? I think it’s pretty important to draw up the rules from the beginning as going with the flow sounds a bit loose to me; I think I would opt towards- if I’m going to call up a person and say I’m doing this this and this… would you be interested in doing this business? I think I’d tend to be pretty upfront from the beginning and I think it’s fairer to them and also I think it’s a better practice if people agree to be involved or not agree to talk because they’re informed about who I am and what I’m doing and what my interests and expectations are.

Florence Melgar: You start with a hypothesis or a question or you know, and then once you have the team that has to be reviewed because you know with other countries maybe probably your question your story will change you know so you start working on another hypothesis, because the investigation initially is suggested from your point of view and you’ll have input from the rest. So I think we have to be flexible to not just impose our first story.

Vivien Altman: Absolutely, I couldn’t agree more but I think that happens all the time doesn’t that you have an idea and you start to investigate it and you realise that you know what your idea was might have been is not anything… I mean, you discover as you go… it’s a process and I go in with some ideas but I’m usually surprised along the way and I’m certainly very open. I mean that’s the whole process of journalism isn’t it? not going in with a fixed idea but actually being open to what you find along the way that’s why you research and certainly I think my experience with other journalists and other countries… I feel really privileged I’ve worked with so many really competent intelligent people who have different perspectives to mine but simply enrich and maybe change the course of the story depending what we found out.
Florencia Melgar: One of the things that I’m not sure if we do enough is background and research on the open sources in all countries but maybe I think it’s something really rich… investigating with other colleagues because going into the open files of the government or you know… accessing information that is public here and maybe you don’t know how to find. Even language wise. You know who’s who you know I think that would be a lot of trouble. Sometimes we get into a lot of trouble with things that are actually public so I think that could be a first step that sometimes we don’t do.

Vivien Altman: I agree, I absolutely agree. The thing is… I think that’s a big issue because that’s where collaborating with journalists who live in that country could be enormously useful. I mean it might well be language –that’s a huge thing- as if you don’t speak the language (which you know in many cases one doesn’t) we are relying on other people which in fact can be okay but certainly there is the limitation, and two, like you say, that’s where one would rely very much on collaboration because in many cases someone wouldn’t be aware where it is and how to look for it and that was a very specific example with the Zygier case in Israel there was certainly information which I needed to get about a gag order which had been taken out of case… I mean had I tried looking for it but I had no idea really how to find it and it was through contacts, through a particular lawyer who agreed indirectly to help, who obviously was based in Israel he was able to navigate someone who spoke Hebrew through that database. I could never have done that because I don’t speak Hebrew and I didn’t know where to look.

Florencia Melgar: The next steps are pretty straightforward: exchange information, systematise it. After you have all the [information available from] open sources, then you have another hypothesis and you go to the field work, the research itself and you know more data, interview sources and gather information. I’m thinking of the validation of the sources and the verification of the information. Is there are different understandings maybe… about what verification and validations are.

Vivien Altman: I think that’s really difficult, I mean I’m just thinking about a couple of examples that come to mind. One is when we tried with Foreign Correspondent to go to Vietnam and I wanted to do a story on the environment and it was impossible to find anyone to work with because it wasn’t going to be a story that the Vietnamese government was going
to like. That was one thing, but also what really comes to my mind is having been in lectures in tutorials with some postgraduate students from countries such as China, where you grow up in a culture which is very different and you don’t have that questions, you don’t even know which questions to ask because I believe that governments in power should be held accountable so there are big cultural differences and the political differences. I’m not quite sure how you deal with that. Because I think it’s quite complicated: you can’t force people to do our kind of investigative journalism if we know they might be thrown in prison if they do it.

Florencia Melgar: And then you have all the legal checks, how the publication will impact, all the people involved in the investigation….

Vivien Altman: Absolutely. And let me just mention there Iran. We did a particular long-form story in 2004 in Iran and we worked with a fantastic local producer who was a print journalist as well and also our main talent was a blogger challenging the regime. When we left both of them were arrested and put in jail and they both got out eventually and of course we were incredibly…

We were really worried, and you know… in a case like that… what do you do? You contact all the organisations that you possibly can and you try and contact the family and ask what we can do. Are we supposed to try to get them out of the country and get them asylum. We just we felt very strongly that before we went into this story they were certainly very aware of what they were doing and the sort of possible impact for them but nevertheless...

I think those situations…they were very informal. They were kind of quite mature and sophisticated I think. You have to be enormously careful with the people that you are going to work with in other countries because I think sometimes you know… we leave [the country] but they stay behind and they often have to bear the ramifications. I think that’s a real responsibility and one that you know people sometimes don’t take nearly seriously enough.

Florencia Melgar: One of the things that surprised me in the last conference of investigative journalists in Latin America was to discover that in twelve years ten
presidents in Latin America had to step down from the position or they were put to jail as a consequence of investigative stories. I think the impact is extraordinary but we don’t hear about those stories. That makes me think what the real stories from Africa are (...),

Vivien Altman: I think what happens is that generally journalists –and it’s a time thing and also laziness- go to the same people. We do live in a small country but there’s so many interesting people and what we do is give legitimacy to the same people and we don’t give legitimacy to all these other informed and interesting voices and in this country there’s a lot more pressure now to diversify but we tend to go to middle aged men in suits.

It’s so lazy and traditional and we are aware about it much more than they were I think. There’s been quite a lot of pressure for example on the ABC because that’s a publicly funded institution and I think there is a sort a shift going on I suppose.

One of the problems is that historically most journalists in this country have come from particular kinds of backgrounds, middle class white backgrounds and so that becomes reproduced in the sorts of people that they go to get commentary from so it’s a huge problem, it’s a structural problem, it’s a class and race problem. I think that media organisations have to put -and I’m not quite sure how you do this- but they have to put structures in place which means you’re recruiting processes are completely different because until the institutions change and you have people who represent a more diverse class and race background and also the people you know, we have to stop being so lazy using the same people because we’re going to have the same problem. I mean, you look at any program on television and it’s all the same people.

I’d say it’s interesting that a lot of traditional media has shut down and there’s huge shifts going on in media across the board but there have been a lot of new start-ups and also online publications and I think that’s really the interesting part of what’s going on in the media and I was just sort of thinking about publications like El Faro in El Salvador. I mean, their work the investigative work is excellent. I don’t read, they do investigations and I’m also thinking there’s a website in in the states called Narratively and what they do is basically long-form
investigative stories and I think there is a bit of a shift back against the kind of celebrity you 30 second news grab. I think people are actually interested in more analysis and more depth.

Florencia Melgar: News are based on the feeds we receive. And who sent you those feeds, who decided? So already this editorial is based on somebody else’s editorial.

Vivien Altman: How do we change that? Because that’s the key question, isn’t it? And I agree with you 100%. I think it’s hugely problematic and in fact I just noticed today this is just one tiny example that for economic reasons the ABC is cutting down on a large number of feeds, particularly in certain areas is going to impact on the quality but that said I mean and in fact I think one of the ones they are cutting out was AFP so you know it very well may mean that all of our sources that we use at the ABC -which is our biggest public broadcaster- are going to be sources from English-speaking networks and that in itself is a problem. It’s about a particular vision of the world, a particular view world so I think it’s a huge problem I think there was a kind of a hope and a feeling that things sort of really changed in Australia at a particular time maybe it was the sort of times of Keating and you know a long time ago now but people who had more of a vision, more cosmopolitan and modern and now we’re just honestly…I really I think it’s in a way what we are today as Australia is in a sense maybe a reflection of just how conservative and old-fashioned we are.

Florencia Melgar: You know the ISO 9000 quality control standards. We were thinking, would it be possible to apply that [quality control] to investigative journalism. That will [also] be in the interest of the journalists (…) because if you are a freelancer [and your work meets the standards] you get a kind of logo, like Twitter with authentication, for example…

Vivien Altman: I think it’s a good idea in theory but I’m not sure in practice. In theory it’s a great idea but it’s more realistic to think that you have these organisations in each country like for example we have the MEAA and if you’re a member of MEAA then you’re supposed to adhere to certain principles and standards. I wonder whether it’s more practical to think about it where you have organisations but those organisations belong to something that you’re going against.
Florence Melgar: If they adopted, this standard, for example, the MEAA would be the one who runs it.

Vivien Altman: Yeah, I mean, I think one of the things that’s interesting about that is as we know, media organisations have shrunk and the media is going through a lot of changes. We have lots of people working as freelancers and it’s much more difficult for them. There have been a lot of stories about how difficult it is for freelancers who go into high-risk situations because they don’t have the same protections that [hired] journalists.

Or you know… media workers who work for big organisations who will go to any lengths to get a story and they don’t have the proper protection so they’re the people who are more vulnerable and who need the recognition but you don’t have the formal structures for that recognition.

Florence Melgar: Vivien thank you so much.

Vivien Altman: Okay, I hope you’ve got everything that you need.