

Investigative Journalism: How reporters do better research

28 EDITORS AND FREELANCE JOURNALISTS LEARN THE LATEST METHODS UPON THE INVITATION OF KAS AND BIRN MEDIA NETWORK

This year, KAS Media Program South East Europe once again supported the week-long Summer School of the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN). It took place from 23rd to 29th August in Durrës, Albania, and brought together Journalists and prominent experts. The participants from South East Europe, Germany, Austria, Georgia, and Jordan acquired knowledge about investigative interviews, storytelling, and strategies for data analysis.

Seminar host and Reuters editor **Blake Morrison** opened the summer school. He gave practical examples how to compose an article. Applying simple structures on an investigative article, however, is often problematic. The participants realised this during a group discussion with **Philipp Grüll**, Journalist at "Politikmagazin Kontrovers" (Bavarian TV), and **Besar Likmeta**, editor-in-chief at BIRN Albania. The discussions focused on handling sensitive information, the difficult access to governmental information and threats against journalists.

Following this discussion, the participants developed initial ideas for investigative projects related to the region. Under the coordination of **Lawrence Marzouk**, editor at BIRN Kosovo, the three best stories were chosen at the end of the summer school.

Iggy Ostanin, a young journalist who works for the internet platform Bellingcat, demonstrated an innovative approach of investigative working methods. For his

research, he solely uses social media and open sources on the internet to uncover interrelations.

Numerous exercises are integral part of the BIRN summer school. Among other things, the participants learned how to find mistakes in investigative reports. According to Morrison, maintaining a critical view and distinguishing between assumptions and evidence are important qualities for investigative journalists.

Computer software simplifies the analysis of large data sets

Exercises in yet another discipline of data journalism were instructed by **Mar Cabra**, International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ). She explained how collecting and analysing big data sets is being simplified on the basis of computer software and how visualisations ensure better understanding among readers. Cabra also broached the issue of precautions for investigative journalists and gave advice for more security on the internet.

Joachim Dyfvermark, investigative reporter and producer at the Swedish TV, emphasised the importance of regional and trans-regional journalists' networks. According to him, the media's future lies inter alia in the dissemination of information via social media. He provided a practical guide on how to create investigative video documentations. "Tell stories, unmask the conflict, don't show research work." Self-

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marketing, especially for new web-projects, should be taken into account.

On the last day of the summer school, seminar host Blake Morrison said: "Contribute your responsibility, your influence and your passion to your work. Accumulate and systematise information and don't lose sight of what you're looking for. And remember: whatever you do afterwards, it can affect us all."

Research grants for the three best story ideas

The participants took this appeal with them – as well as solid know-how, practical examples and inspiration for future projects. Three project ideas for investigative stories developed by participants were awarded research grants by an expert jury, consisting among others of **Christian Spahr**, Head of the Media Program South East Europe, and **Jelena Ćosić**, project coordinator for the BIRN summer school.