

Journalists learn how to successfully investigate data

LEADING EXPERTS IN DATA JOURNALISM AND CORRUPTION REPORTING AT THE SUMMER SCHOOL FOR INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING ORGANISED BY BIRN & KAS

For the eighth time the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN) organised the BIRN Summer School for Investigative Reporting with support of the Media Program South East Europe of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. 32 journalists from 16 countries got together from 20th to 26th August in Mlini (Croatia) in order to learn the latest trends in data journalism, in-depth online research as well as storytelling.

The Summer School was opened by **Gordana Igrić**, BIRN Regional Director, lead trainer **Blake Morrison** (Reuters) and **Christian Spahr**, Head of the KAS Media Program South East Europe. This year participants came from South East Europe as well as Canada, Luxembourg, Ukraine and Czech Republic to Mlini nearby Dubrovnik.

At the beginning, Blake Morrison explained how investigative stories are presented in the best manner, for example when it comes to topics like organised crime.

'Behind a nameless system, you need to find people who are accountable for what they have done', said Morrison. It is important to focus stories on persons. Additionally, he explained how to develop research ideas, how to ask sources in a responsible way and how to succeed in separating assumptions from evidence. The participants had the opportunity to discuss their concepts in one-to-one sessions with Morrison.

Christiaan Triebert and **Henk van Ess**, members of the research network Bellingcat, gave hints on how publicly available data can be used for research purposes. 'Data from different online platforms can help with fact checking', said Triebert. He introduced different possibilities of geolocation, for example how photos can be verified or locations can be pinpointed precisely in order to check claims. 'We have to examine the claims of governments. That is why the verification of statements is so important', he emphasised.

Henk van Ess explored the topic further and referred to numerous online tools and research options for Google and Facebook. With these tools he showed how people who are difficult to locate can be found in a short time – like, for example, a Daesh terrorist. His most important tip: 'As soon as you got something relevant on your screen, save it!'

Excel sheets and business reports can be important sources

Anuška Delić, journalist at the Slovenian daily newspaper Delo and former participant of the Summer School, returned as a trainer and showed the participants how they can easily use excel sheets for data analysis. In addition, she explained how different software tools help collecting and analysing huge amounts of information.

Award-winning journalist **Miranda Patručić** from the Organized Crime and Corruption Project (OCCRP) presented the well-known investigative project 'Panama Papers' and

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explained to the participants how they can successfully analyse companies business reports, in order to find hints of corruption. 'A good story doesn't necessarily need a large project such as the Panama Papers. A good research makes a good story', she encouraged the participants.

How data can be collected and structured was shown by **Ana Petruševa** (BIRN Macedonia) and **Pavle Petrović** from the Serbian investigative network KRIK. Amongst other things, they presented award-winning databases showing public construction contracts in Macedonia and assets of politicians in Serbia.

Lawrence Marzouk, editor at BIRN, explained how initially insuperable obstacles can be overcome. For this, he used the example of an investigative project dealing with illegal arms trade. 'Best you start your research with the most obvious and then work through the core of the crime step by step', explained Marzouk.

Three story ideas win research scholarship

On the last day, the journalists presented research ideas that were developed during the Summer School. Previously, Marzouk and Morrison had demonstrated how to successfully pitch story ideas.

Three proposals have been awarded with a grant of 1,000 up to 4,000 Euros. The decision was made by an expert jury, including **Jelena Ćosić**, project coordinator of the BIRN Summer School, and **Christian Spahr** in an advisory function. The first prize has been given to a team of reporters from Serbia and Kosovo that is aiming at investigating illegal deforestation in the northern part of Kosovo.



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