

Beyond borders

The collaborative newsrooms of the future

In the digital age of big data and bigger leaks, what can New Zealand journalists learn from cooperative projects between rival newsrooms?



By Talia Shadwell

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“I still feel a certain duty now to keep up her investigations, follow up what she worked on. To show people that are threatening journalists that if you kill one of us there will be hundreds of us basically finishing their investigations.”

Frederik Obermaier

Suddeutsche Zeitung investigative journalist and Panama and Paradise Papers collaborator, on the death of independent Maltese journalist and blogger Daphne Caruana Galizia.

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Introduction

Detroit's decline from jazz-era auto capital of the world to bankruptcy commanded global attention.

When I told *Detroit Public Television* journalist Scott McCartney I was planning to photograph the city's notorious abandoned Brush Park mansions, he used the phrase "disaster porn".

By the time of my visit in July 2017, the once-great Michigan metropolis was no longer a city in free-fall. However a legacy of ruin remains for citizens living in a Detroit whose crippled social and civic infrastructure still affects their daily lives. Its visual iterations — the crumbling urban real estate and vacant art deco buildings frozen in time — made for an easy metaphor.

Yet it seemed to me that for some local journalists, the world's gaze on Detroit had felt fetishistic; their dispatches fleeting vignettes of a reality the city's reporters would continue to live in long after the visiting press filed out of town.

Local newsrooms faced a challenge: how could they continue to cover Detroit's problems, to hold its powerful to account; but do so without shattering hope in a place that had so little of that particular commodity?

The dilemma brought them to the question that underpins this thesis: what place, if any, did the maintenance of conventional rivalry between newsrooms have in serving Detroit's news audiences during the city's time of crisis?

The rise, fall and rise of Detroit

McCartney works out of the *Detroit Public Television (DPTV)* offices, which shares a building space with a museum that documents the rise and fall of Detroit. He is regional editor of *The Detroit Cooperative*, which he joined two years after its 2014 conception.

Its funders, including the Ford Foundation, the Knight Foundation and the Coalition for Public Broadcasting, backed the project to follow Detroit's progress — initially for a 10-day run — to chart the city's first year following bankruptcy.

It was "something the local media just wasn't going to be able to do — it was just too big of a project," explains McCartney.

In the beginning, the project was structured of five news outlets, pooling their resources to provide post-bankruptcy coverage that McCartney characterises as thoughtful in tone: "It was more of the deep dives, more of the holding the feet to the fire".

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What kinds of stories interested the Cooperative? McCartney gives the example of a story of the Detroit man who walked 21 miles to work each day.¹ In an age of viral reporting, it was an obvious human interest story — it neatly packaged Detroit's woes, and it duly whipped around the world.

The project's mandate was to burrow deeper — what did the man's story expose about Detroit's dysfunction?

"Everybody did the story — it's a fantastic story — but we do more of the in-depth, systemic look at it," explains McCartney. "Why would one person have to walk 20 miles to go to work? Why couldn't he take mass transit? Why can't he take a bus... What about car insurance — could he not do that because he couldn't afford a car? Because he can't afford car insurance?"

We really get into the depths of things where most commercial media can't; because they don't have the time and they don't have the resources to do that, where we actually have that ability where we don't just tell you the story. We find solutions or things that have been done in other states, in other countries, other cities — that have worked".

Reviewing a multiple-newsroom collaboration

As the project stretched into a years-long collaboration, it broadened its scope; also looking at major issues affecting Detroit, such as public spending, and it most recently concerned itself with revisiting the 1967 Detroit riots on the events' 50th anniversary.

The reporters involved in the project were sourced from other newsrooms too, and they agreed to dedicate about a quarter of their time to the project — the rest was spent on their own work for their media organisation. Over time, the project extended, roping in more reporters and outlets.

The funding model was not centralised to the project — rather, it was tagged to particular outlets and topics, says McCartney: "The funding is kind of complicated because we have profit and nonprofit [media partners], we have funders who are funding some of us and not others, we have three or four different funders who fund all different things. So it's a real kind of tightrope trying to figure out who, what, where, when, and why — I would have set it up differently".

McCartney continues to lead the project. But he says it suffered from a lack of clear mandate for story output, for division of labour, and in its ultimate direction. He describes its focus as fragmented.

¹ Mullin, Jethro and Gillman, Stephanie, 'Donations pour in for Detroit man who walks 21 miles for his daily commute (CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2015/02/03/us/detroit-man-walks-21-miles-for-daily-commute/index.html>, February 4, 2015), Retrieved: February, 23, 2018.

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“There needs to be checks and balances through this — there needs to be full participation from all partners across the board and equality throughout both [in terms of the level of] contribution from every aspect of the co-operative — whether it's contributing to the stories, contributing to the social media, the websites, to projects and people and things”.

However his belief in the philosophy behind the project is firm. McCartney describes the cooperate as allowing the Detroit media time to do what some complain is an endangered practice amid the tension inherent in the fast-paced online journalism age: shoe-leather reporting.

“Unfortunately with the changing landscape of media — just the way things were going, you didn't have the beat reporters anymore... community reporters being reporters, you know, getting into the community and not just talking with the local officials. We're talking with people on their doorsteps — people that are really there and making the difference themselves.”

“[The Detroit Cooperative is] a living organism that continues to grow every day... I'm a year and two months into this and now I'm starting to feel that we're getting traction, that we're really starting to move now — but because of what it was, and the way it was, and the way it was set up; it took that long just to kind of get there.”

Why collaborate: From altruism to practicality

The concept of journalists working as a pack is nothing new. Journalists have been documented engaging in the practice of sharing tips and comparing notes across rival lines since the 1970s, if not earlier — whether to ensure mutual accuracy in pool reporting or in a reflection of camaraderie during major news events.

Studies have noted that this was particularly common in busy police and science news beats where journalists would form tacit agreements that it was not in their best interests to out-scoop one-another, or to make errors that could affect access-privileges for the rest of the corps.²

At an organisational level, newspapers have been sharing content since at least the 19th century, around the time reporting emerged as a distinct occupation.³ According to Graves and Konieczna, as advertising revenue grew, so did the competitive nature of reporting; marking a shift to the modern orthodoxy in which news outlets strive to provide better offerings than their rivals.

² Graves, Lucas and Konieczna, Magda. 'Journalistic collaboration as field repair' (*International Journal of Communication* (9), 2015). 1971.

³ *Ibid.*, 1970.

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Reporters also tacitly relied on rivals' reporting for cues — but these practices, which Graves and Konieczna characterise as self-preservation practices rather than overt collaboration — were “background” techniques, and not cooperation that was promoted or celebrated at an organisational level.⁴

Their study charts contemporary collaborative efforts, by observing news-sharing practices in American investigative news nonprofits and fact-checking groups that shared their content with newsrooms, between 2011 to 2013. The researchers concluded that the organisations were engaged in what they termed “field-repair” — finding that the non-profit newsrooms were motivated to share their work in the self-appointed spirit of “saving journalism.”⁵

Graves and Konieczna suggest that an apparent uptick in high-profile collaborations in the sophomore decade of the 21st century could be linked to technological advances, making communications within and between newsrooms more efficient and sophisticated; and therefore more appealing to editors.

They also point to the nonprofit investigative newsrooms emerging in the same era, characterising them as respondents to a perceived “crisis” of journalism. The researchers explain a theory that these organisations also consider themselves to have a role in an industry in need of repair. Approval of that ethos, suggest the researchers, possibly explains how the new generations of non-orthodox nonprofit newsrooms and fact-checking outlets are able to attract the benefactor support that many wholly depend upon on to fund their operations.

Deliberately or not, the new media players are largely online, and they appear to be plugging gaps in the economic void left by traditional news outlets struggling to remain profitable. Their openness to cooperation, alongside the emergence of philanthropic funding models for established news outlets has shaped a collaboration eco-system, the researchers suggest.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 1971.

⁵ Ibid., 1977.

⁶ Ibid., pp 1978-79.

Defining “collaborative journalism”

A 2017 Montclair University Center for Cooperative Media study identified six models of collaborative journalism in practice, categorising them into three overarching categories: they were either one-off, ongoing, or open-ended collaborations.⁷

For instance, for a one-off project, media partners created content separately and shared it with one another, while maintaining editorial independence. Sometimes this transformed into an ongoing effort — for instance; in the case of the San Francisco Homeless Project which will be explored later in this research.⁸

Stonebly’s study assessed the subjective success of these exercises, and found that in one-off projects where partners created content separately and shared it in a one-time, finite project, the process tended to hold benefits including greater visibility for smaller media partners and in leveraging an issue. Furthermore, maintaining editorial independence meant less chance of a clash of newsroom cultures. However, finds Stonebly: “Those projects where decisions are not made in advance about who will produce which content tend to run into trouble”.

She found successful collaborators had trained themselves from the outset to think about framing stories in a way that benefited all of their partners. The best models had a centralised organisation system, where someone managed the workflow and oversaw communications, and worked best when the participants were both trusting and willing, and all partners were open to learning new practices and processes from one another.

Stonebly defines collaborative journalism as: “a cooperative arrangement (formal or informal) between two or more news and information organisations, which aims to supplement each organisation’s resources and maximise the impact of the content” and should not be confused with citizen, participatory or public journalism that solicits its content from the public.⁹

For this research I would extend the definition of journalistic collaboration models to include those partnering with independent institutions, such as the example of the London School of Economics (LSE), which participated in *The Guardian’s* 2011 Reading the Riots project.

⁷ Stonebly, Sarah. ‘Comparing models of collaborative journalism’. (Center for Cooperative Media, Montclair University, New Jersey). June 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

Why collaborate?

Seldom is there so neat an explanation for collaborating as the one offered by *WNYC* public radio's vice president for news, Jim Schachter.

The network wanted to investigate immigration agent Carlos Davila, who had been selling ID cards that he claimed would shield immigrants from deportation.¹⁰

This was a story that mattered. But there was a catch: *WNYC* airs in English. The people most affected by Davila's actions spoke Spanish.

"I thought, for the story to land with maximum impact we need to make sure it reaches a Spanish-language audience," says Schachter.

The station saw that the core journalistic interest in pursuing the story, aside from addressing the system that allowed him to flourish, was to alert Davila's potential victims, Schachter says.

WNYC approached *Telemundo*, an *NBC Universal* American Spanish-language television network channel. Together, their investigation raised questions about the legitimacy of government-accredited immigration agents who were being linked to scams as they filled a gap left in the dearth of lawyers for low-income, often illegal immigrants.

Crucially, those immigrants and their networks were able to watch and listen to the story in their own language.

They were also interested in whether their audience theory would prove correct, says Schachter. They wanted to see if they could engage Spanish-speaking audiences to give the story maximum impact. Part of that process concerned choosing mediums—and they thought partnering with a TV network would have the most impact, because it had high engagement and because it was a natural platform to tell a story in multiple parts.

It got a stronger social media following in Spanish than in English, and they were pleased to see versions of their story run on radio, on television, and in print in the *New York Times*, says

¹⁰ Fertig, Beth. 'Felon has federal approval to represent immigrants. Now he's selling this'. (Retrieved February 27, 2018: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/felon-has-federal-approval-represent-immigrants-and-now-hes-selling-this-id/>). May 8, 2017.

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Schachter: “The idea of finding which [medium] to reach an audience is just central to what we do”.

Another driver for collaborating likely factors in the station’s ability to recruit donors: visibility.

By collaborating with other players, the network affixes the *WNYC* brand to different platforms — this is often supported by the outlets they partner with, who will generally include *WNYC* branding on their stories, even in print, says Schachter, who pulls out a copy of a newspaper article featuring the station’s badge prominently atop the copy.

There is funding available from non-profits but most of the funding comes from *WNYC*’s own budget. Funders often want to see evidence of collaboration in the past, says Schachter — and the network does have a history of openness to it: They were involved in Electionland and in Documenting Hate with *ProPublica*.

Electionland was set up to track voting problems across the US during the 2016 election, describing states passing laws that limited citizens’ access to ballot boxes and citing President-to-be Donald Trump’s repeated claims during campaigning of a rigged election, as the project’s *raison d’être*.

The project also crowd-sourced information from the public, appealing for updates about people’s voting experiences in a number of languages. It offered a pop-up newsroom of more than 700 journalists during the crucial stages of voting, it also encouraged citizen journalists and any interested newsrooms and freelancers to take part; the pop-up newsrooms would pass them leads and tips on voting problems in their area.¹¹

Schachter offers a different take on the definition of collaboration, explaining that when *WNYC* sees a story it likes, it interviews the reporters and editors about the stories on the station. They like it because it’s celebrating their reporting on a widely-subscribed public radio station, and *WNYC* likes it as they get a bite of the apple too.

The way he sees it, notes Schachter happily, from his NYC office; everyone in town works for him.

¹¹ ProPublica ‘Electionland’ (Retrieved February, 2018: <https://projects.propublica.org/electionland/about/>)

Special focus: The United States philanthropic funding model

A long trail led *ProPublica* reporter T. Christian Miller to the woman whose story of rape was at the centre of a troubled sexual assault investigation. He was desperate to report her story — but when he called her lawyer, he received a piece of news that would make most reporters cringe in empathy.

The woman's lawyer told Miller: "I don't know why you are bothering with this. I'm already in contact with another reporter, Ken Armstrong".

When Miller told his editor that Armstrong, then a *Marshall Project* journalist, was onto the story too, there was a moment where they considered: "the sort of hell-for-leather foot race that often results when two news organisations discover they are exploring the same landscape".¹²

Instead of competing, they did the opposite. Their editors backed the reporters to collaborate.

The final investigation Miller and Armstrong collaborated on; 'An Unbelievable Story of Rape', is compelling not only in its storytelling, but in demonstrating just how close the newsrooms came to following the deeply-ingrained journalistic instinct to "rush out" competing stories when the whiff of a rival's interest becomes apparent.

On a podcast for *Longform*, Armstrong recalled his realisation that his initial agreement with Miller that the pair should join forces was the right one: "I won't forget this: when T. and I talked on the phone and agreed that we were going to work on ['An Unbelievable Story of Rape'] together, T. created a Google Drive site, and we decided we'd both dump all our documents in it.

And I remember seeing all the records that T. had gathered in Colorado, and then I dumped all the records that I had gathered in Washington, and it was like each of us had half of a phenomenal story. And in one day, by dumping our notes into a common file, we suddenly had a whole story".¹³

The non-profit newsrooms of tomorrow

The backstory to the Pulitzer Prize-winning collaborative investigation is certainly not unique in its outcome — as is already noted here; newsrooms have collaborated in some fashion throughout history.

¹² The Marshall Project 'About that unbelievable story (Retrieved February 27, 2018: <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2015/12/24/about-that-unbelievable-story>) December 24, 2015.

¹³ Long form Podcast #201: 'T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong' (Retrieved: February 27, 2018: <https://longform.org/posts/longform-podcast-201-t-christian-miller-and-ken-armstrong>). July 13, 2016

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A salient element of their cooperation for this research is that both reporters were working in a relatively young news model: *ProPublica* and *The Marshall Project* (*TMP*) are not traditional news outlets- both are independent, non-profit newsrooms producing journalism backed by philanthropic funding.

New York-based *TMP*, for example, focuses solely on reporting on the criminal justice system, and thus it attracts philanthropists that support its mandate.

Every case study considered in this research was supplemented by philanthropic funding, suggesting external support is a common feature of large-scale collaborations, which are hungry for time and resources.

Yet, where the other cases covered in this research concern investigations instigated by newsrooms attracted off-philanthropic support for their specific projects; nonprofit independent newsrooms like *TMP* and *ProPublica*, by contrast, maintain ongoing funding in order to operate.

For instance, as at December 2017, *TMP* listed 27 foundations and individual funders that financially support its journalism on its website.¹⁴

The project operates as an investigative newsroom with an exclusive focus on crime stories. *TMP* is not concerned with reporting individual criminal cases in the news cycle as a traditional mast-head would. Its stated goal, instead, is storytelling that focuses on how the criminal justice system works, says deputy managing editor Tom Meagher.

The stories *TMP* produces are almost always long-form, they are time-intensive, and frequently data-focused.

TMP is a prolific collaborator — Meagher estimates it has worked with about 80 news organisations. Its investigations sometimes feature exclusively online on its own website. However it proactively seeks opportunities to work on stories with external news outlets. The industry perception of the quality of *TMP*'s output is suggested by its history of partnerships: it counts legacy mast-heads such as the *New York Times* among its collaborators (*TMP*'s editor-in-chief Bill Keller is a *NYT*-alumnus).

Such partnerships can be initiated by either side, explains Meagher. When *TMP* wants to organise a collaboration, the newsroom will usually send a fully worked-out pitch to the publication it wants to work with.

¹⁴ The Marshall Project website. (Retrieved December 12, 2017. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/funders?ref=menu>)

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Unlike a conventional news-sharing model, which requires publications to engage in payments and swaps to reproduce each others' content: the publications *TMP* works with do not pay for the material and have the opportunity to be involved in the planning of the story. Story partners are expected to contribute in other ways: providing their own editors' and reporters' time, adding to and polishing the story for publication, and sometimes splitting expenses incurred during the investigation, says Meagher.

The benefit of collaboration with established outlets appears to be a symbiotic relationship: *TMP* is able to spread its investigations in publications offering a wider audience reach, while *TMP*'s small newsroom can also draw on its partners' resources to finesse a story – like borrowing their staff photographers.

Its stories are not always collaborative — sometimes an outlet will run a piece authored by a *TMP* journalist, engaging only a shared editing process before publication. Sometimes a newsroom may wish to add some of its own reporting to an original *TMP* piece, says Meagher. “They didn't want to feel like their reporters didn't have a role in a major story”.

This requires a high level of trust and cooperation, says Meagher: “What we don't want is for them to add reporting in that we haven't been involved in; usually it is our own reporting, or co-reported”.

TMP reporters are all based in New York City, with a newsroom of nine reporters, as at July 2017, as well as one contributor for data projects, interns, a digital team, a multimedia editor who contributes photography and video-editing, and a group of regular freelancers who each produce one to three major pieces a year.

TMP is engaged in in-depth investigative journalism — with reporters given space to spend as long as six to nine months on a story. However, they are likely to contribute about 20 less-intensive pieces per year each while they are working on longer term projects, says Meagher.

'The Next To Die'

The Marshall Project's Next to Die project exemplifies its collaboration style. The project recognises that, while it is easy to find records of who has already been executed in the United States, there is no database of scheduled, upcoming executions. It has filled that gap by keeping a countdown of upcoming executions, generating stories about cases along with partner newsrooms around the States, with the US nonprofit Investigative Reporters & Editors organisation helping to recruit newspapers into the project.

The project faced an immediate challenge in finding data to help the reporters track upcoming executions — there was no centralised government recording database, and the team soon realised

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the project was going to have to build their own, along with help from the Death Penalty Information Center's resources, says Meagher.

The project's stated mission was to cast a spotlight on the death penalty issue; its statement emphasising it was not an advocacy exercise. The scale of the data, and the number of stories required resources beyond the *TMP*'s reach. Meagher says the view was that newsrooms in the states associated with death penalties would offer expertise and access to sources, as well as previous local knowledge of the cases that his newsroom in NYC could not offer.

"In my mind the best people to work with on this would be local reporters on these stories who have sources and understand the agencies".

TMP coordinated the newspapers' submissions, usually around 500-600 words, that fed into the project. An execution countdown widget was created on the site, heralding the date for the "next to die". This was coordinated with social media, then *TMP* queued up automated tweets attached to the project which reported the countdown to an upcoming execution.

Still, the scale of the data and communications required for such a project which focused on the machinations of the justice system — prone as it is to postponements — and to appeals that must be diarised and followed up. All this meant they had set themselves up with a database where maintenance was going to prove a constant challenge.

What if there was a new development while a reporter charged with covering that case was on leave? Who would monitor and update public data as it was released?

TMP solved this problem by developing Klaxon: a free, open-source monitoring tool journalists and researchers can programme to send them alerts when there is an online development concerning key terms that interest them. It meant a news story, judgment or update to a government online data concerning the cases they were following would not go un-missed. Klaxon sends an email or pings an alert into the reporters' Slack channel discussions. *TMP* can oversee the alerts, and act as a central organiser, allocating responsibility for updating stories and the database without having to rely on reporters personally and proactively checking for updates.¹⁵

TMP is not protective of its scoops. It is a willing and frequent collaborator motivated to place stories with partner newsrooms around the US: "We mostly want to get our stories in front of people," explains Meagher. "We have found there is a lot to be gained by working with other places. It is worth being open to it and looking for opportunities".

¹⁵ The Marshall Project 'The Marshall Project launches Klaxon' (Retrieved February 2, 2018 <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2016/09/26/the-marshall-project-launches-klaxon>) September 9, 2016.

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TMP is interested in producing investigative journalism that has an impact, but does not analyse web traffic as a measure of success, says Meagher: “How we do measure each story [is if it] influences legislation or politics”.

The motivation for collaborations like *The Next to Die* is on educating readers about a specific issue; the death penalty. That means: “Getting it in front of an audience, finding people who are not aware of or following the issue, being able to expose them to how criminal justice and capital punishment works”.

Matchmaking collaborators

Montclair University Center for Cooperative Media director Stefanie Murray is creating a database of collaborative newsrooms in the United States to aid journalists and editors looking to form partnerships. She views nonprofit newsrooms as important players in the collaborative ecosystem.

“There are several different types of organisations that are becoming much more important in the media landscape of the United States — especially with all the change in the industry — and they are built to collaborate: like a *ProPublica*, like [training and journalist-connecting hub] Solutions Journalism Network, says Murray.

“There are many organisations like that popping up and, also, there's been a huge growth in nonprofit news organisations in this country. And non-profits are much more open to collaboration than for-profit companies, just inherently. So as we see a rise in the number of nonprofits across all sorts of different geographies and subject areas, as well as some big leaders — big power players like *ProPublica* — it's pushing this conversation to the forefront. Because they are very open to collaboration and they are built to do it”.

Graves and Konietscha suggest that the uptick in high-profile collaborations with nonprofit newsrooms will continue because their existence is linked to technological advances, and because they are viewed as addressing a perceived “crisis” in journalism.

Communications within and between newsrooms are increasingly more efficient and sophisticated, which creates a fertile environment for online nonprofit investigative newsrooms to emerge and attract funding.

The researchers suggest the nonprofit newsroom market will continue to flourish because they are growing in the economic void left by news outlets struggling to remain profitable.

Where there is competition for external funding, the researchers suggest questions could be raised in future about editorial independence — not in terms of influence on reporting, but in news as a

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vehicle for corporate branding, such as the promotional language newsrooms use to promote philanthropy-backed projects and how they choose to highlight their donors' investments.¹⁶

Security in the age of the big leak: The Panama Papers

In a poignant scene at German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung's* (SZ) building in Munich, *Vice HBO's* documentary captured 400 journalists from newsrooms around the world meeting to plot an investigation.¹⁷

The camera pans between journalists as they pass around a microphone to call out their votes on a deadline: "We would have preferred the beginning of July, because the Germans usually try to be ambitious," suggests one, to appreciative titters, before the group settles on November 5, 2017. This was to be the date of the release of a series of stories that would soon become known as the Paradise Papers, the sequel to the high profile Panama Papers investigation.¹⁸

SZ investigative journalist and Panama Papers co-instigator Frederik Obermaier was at the meeting. He had, once again, found himself fibbing to his colleagues who were questioning why hundreds of the world's top investigative journalists were suddenly materialising at the newspaper's headquarters.

He told them the journalists were visiting SZ to discuss the Investigative Consortium of Investigative Journalists' (ICIJ) spin-off from the Center of Public Integrity. He gave them a tale about how the consortium had wanted to meet with journalists who had worked on the Panama Papers – the investigation into the offshore wealth industry he and colleague Bastian Obermayer had led in 2016. He disliked lying to his colleagues, but secrecy was paramount, and: "It kind of worked, in my opinion".

When I visited Obermaier's Munich newsroom in July 2017, he rain-checked. He emailed apologetically (and, I thought, somewhat enigmatically) that he and Obermayer were away "on assignment outside the country."

¹⁶ Graves and Konieczca, 1978-79.

¹⁷ Vice HBO 'The true story behind the secret nine-month Paradise Papers investigation' (YouTube: Retrieved February 27, 2018. <https://youtu.be/r8mdNahdo4M>) November 14, 2017.

¹⁸ Vice: The True Story Behind the Secret Nine-Month Paradise Papers Investigation (HBO), YouTube: Retrieved December 13, 2017. Timestamp: 8.40-9.22.

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Speaking over Skype in the weeks after the Paradise Papers investigation had been published in November 2017, Obermaier confirmed: he had been abroad on secret business for the investigation when I visited, something he could not reveal to anyone not involved in the ICIJ-led collaboration.

The Paradise Papers involved 96 media partners working together to investigate the contents of 13.4 million leaked files, which contained revelations about powerful figures' legal, but arguably morally questionable, offshore wealth.

To reveal the existence of the leaks to anyone outside of the ICIJ partners' network was not only risky for the continuation of the project; it would be potentially catastrophic for individual journalists, explains Obermaier.

"Every participant was well aware of the fact that if something leaks out during the investigation; that it is not only ruining an investigations project — which is a pity, but the world keeps on turning — but that it means basically bringing, potentially, a source into danger and it potentially brings other colleagues into danger; because we had colleagues that were doing their investigations in a very dangerous environment".

In the aftermath of the Panama Papers investigation, keeping its follow-up a secret was inherently difficult, says Obermaier.

"We all know that journalists, including me, like to speak about what they're doing — especially when they have drunk one beer or two. So I think this was one of the most difficult parts of this project: to keep it secret, to stick to these rules... to encourage our colleagues to be as cautious as from day one [once they had already been working on] this investigation for six months, even if their family is asking, even if their colleagues have been asking 'what are you working on, why aren't you publishing anymore?' So this was very hard".

The investigative unit's newly-attained Panama Papers reputation meant they were under additional scrutiny and had to come up with a decoy story to explain their publishing hiatus. Obermaier's colleagues were naturally curious, and asked if he "had something": "It's not an easy thing — to lie to your colleagues."

Obermaier says they cooked up varied explanations — telling some they were working on a new infrastructure for longer-term projects, and telling others that they were working on investigations connected with the German elections.

They had a handful of clued-in colleagues, performing a lesser role in the Paradise Papers, who continued to publish unrelated stories during the nine-month investigation to maintain the charade: "And that helped to give at least the impression that some of us [were] still working in daily news".

Securely investigating major leaks

When *Süddeutsche Zeitung* suddenly found itself with 11.5 million confidential documents detailing Mossack Fonseca's clients' offshore wealth dealings on its hands — which would become the basis for the series of stories later known as the Panama Papers — it engaged the ICIJ's support.

The ICIJ then allocated the leaked material for scrutiny to trusted investigative reporters around the world, including to New Zealand partners *RNZ* and *TVNZ*, along with independent investigative journalist Nicky Hager. The first round of stories were published by the partners in April 2016.¹⁹

SZ's journalists had previously been involved in massive offshore leaks investigations, and knew they had to anticipate ways in which governments or non-state actors might try to infiltrate their investigation, which resulted in some unorthodox security methods, recalls Obermaier.

"We had bought several very expensive computers to basically process this big amount of data and we had it in our special secured room but, still, we were afraid that somebody might [tamper] with our technical equipment, might add something. So we then put nail polish on all of the screws because we learnt from our security expert that with glitter nail polish [an infiltrator] would not be able to basically open it without leaving any traces. So that was the reason why I went buying glitter nail polish and my girlfriend is still making fun of me".

They didn't only have to worry about external breaches — they decided to hide the existence of the leaks from the rest of the newsroom to insulate their investigation as tightly as possible, which was a challenge in a newsroom composed of glass internal doors.

They covered their office's door with cartoons and clippings, concealing their activities from curious eyes.

"We had to move our rooms several times in the past two years because we we made some mistakes and we learned, for example, in one TV documentary it was visible in which part of the building our rooms are — so we decided to move them. So it's a constant struggle of keeping security up and it's also part of the truth that we are not perfect. So we make mistakes and we have to learn our lessons".

¹⁹ The Guardian: 'What you need to know about the Panama Papers.' (Retrieved February 27, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/news/2016/apr/03/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-panama-papers?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other) April 3, 2016.

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The team also approached external IT security experts, but in vague terms as they were unable to reveal what they needed to protect. Obermaier says the ICIJ took the lead in advising all Panama and Paradise Papers partners of how to protect themselves and their data.

This also meant personnel security for some newsrooms — including *SZ*. They had additional security installed at their headquarters and at the newspaper's front desk, and also informed the police, who had a presence around their building on the day of publication.

"This was a process," says Obermaier. "There were cases where ICIJ had to remind partners about using encryption for everything. But it was amazing to see how partners dealt with the whole situation, because there were partners involved that do not have the financial means to basically put up a high-level security structure, bring in consultants or stuff like that".

But ICIJ provided help – offering lessons on how to deal with PGP-encrypted data communication: "I think they did an amazing job because they really had a big team to watch over. But they have also learned from their previous projects. I think ICIJ... currently, is the one media organisation that has the most experience in organising such a big collaboration, but also in maintaining security of such collaborations".

Recruiting for global investigations

The levels of editorial trust and security required for the collaborations meant partners had to be carefully selected — and team-players, Washington DC-based ICIJ research editor Emilia Diaz-Struck says.

"We want journalists who are not lone-wolves, who are open to collaborating. Because if you're partnering with journalists who are not open to collaborating you won't be able to have a project like this [the Panama Papers]".

"Working with that many people, you don't want to affect their reputations... you want to get things right: not only for you, but for your collaborators."

One of the ICIJ's key roles as the central organiser on the Panama Papers was providing access to a secure platform: Global I-Hub. The platform was seed-funded by the Knight Foundation in 2014 in the wake of the Offshore Leaks project.

Its development gave Panama and ultimately Paradise Papers investigations journalists around the world a secure virtual space to communicate with one another and share sensitive information and documents, which reporters told me was dubbed the "Facebook for journalists" for the way in which they could post about their leads in I-Hub, and allow other reporters to comment on it.

Co-ordinating right of reply

To ensure the security of the Panama Papers investigation and the safety of the individual reporters involved, the team relied on carefully co-ordinating legal processes in different countries, and on timing the points where seeking a right of reply was necessary.

For instance, Obermaier describes how timing a request for an interview with a subject of an investigation had to be carefully planned for journalists in countries where there was a risk of retaliation.

In some cases, the benefit of a cooperative team meant larger outlets were able to make the approaches to interviewees on the at-risk journalists' behalf, as a protective measure.

"This is also something I've learned in these projects: if you sit together with journalists from all around the world you will realise that there's different levels of danger," explains Obermaier. "I [learnt], for example, from our Russian colleagues who explained to me that for them it's of course a big danger if you approach people too early requesting a comment. Germany would do so in such a big project, like, four weeks before publication. But for our Russian colleagues this would mean basically four weeks facing the danger of being closed down, or heavier [consequences]".

The size of the collaboration and the involvement of very high-profile media partners gave Obermaier a sense of security that was likely shared by *SZ*'s collaborators, he says.

There were threats to some colleagues who worked on the Panama Papers in Turkey, he recalls. Then Daphne Caruana Galizia, a Maltese journalist and blogger who was not part of the Panama Papers team but who did follow-up on their expose, was killed in October 2017.²⁰

"I still feel a certain duty now to keep for all to keep up her investigations, follow up what she worked on," says Obermaier. "To show people that are threatening journalists that if you kill one of us there will be hundreds of us basically finishing their investigations".

²⁰ Henley, John. The Guardian 'Daphne Caruana Galizia murder: 'phone signal sent from sea set off bomb' (Retrieved February 28, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/19/caruana-galizia-trial-mobile-phone-sent-from-sea-detonated-bomb?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other) December 19, 2017.

Journalists working with academics — Reading the riots

"I still to this day don't class it as a riot, I think it was a protest," recalled a young man from Tottenham as he described five days of unrest across the United Kingdom to *Guardian* and London School of Economics (LSE) researchers.²¹

A tour of British tabloid coverage leaves a reader with no illusions on the mastheads' views of the five days of chaos that swept the UK in August, 2011.

"Anarchy," "yob rule," "rampage," the headlines screamed from above the fold. The rioters were roundly condemned and barrels of columnist ink were spilt speculating on the motivations of the hordes who vandalised and looted British neighbourhoods.

The fatal police shooting of Mark Duggan in Tottenham in August 2011, which occurred in a climate of longstanding tensions between law enforcement and black and ethnic minority (BAME) communities in the area was widely agreed to have been the catalyst for the anger on the streets. But the reasons for the rioters' behaviour were far from understood, recalls the *Guardian's* former Special Projects editor Paul Lewis.

He had hit the streets as a reporter during the riots and digested the scenes first-hand for readers. Amid the chaos, he saw an opportunity.

"There was a dearth of information, or even evidence-based knowledge about why they even happened," he recalls. "I think people understood why the spark had happened: which was the police shooting in Tottenham... people knew what the incentive was for it to start. But you know the spread, and the looting, which spread across London and spread to other [areas] of the UK was unprecedented in modern times. We hadn't had unrest like this since the '80s".

Lewis describes the media coverage of the riots as becoming something of a Rorschach test: pundits saw their own worldview reflected in the riots, and reached for the narrative they wanted to explain the crowds' behaviour. "Basically they were determining the cause on what it looked like to them on television."

"From memory it was everything from single-parent households, to the Conservative PM David Cameron [suggesting] predominantly that this was just a criminal element that was exploiting lawlessness".

²¹ Lewis, Paul. The Guardian and London School of Economics 'Reading the Riots'. (Retrieved February 28, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/dec/19/caruana-galizia-trial-mobile-phone-sent-from-sea-detonated-bomb?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other). P. 24.

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“None of these arguments really held true — people don’t just *en masse* go out and riot in this way for absolutely no reason or simply because they are criminal opportunists. That might go some way towards explaining some of what happened, but certainly not all of it.”

Lewis was interesting in finding an explanation and approaching it methodologically. He took an interest in a study by Philip Meyer, the architect of an approach called precision journalism formulated in the aftermath of the 1967 Detroit riots.

Meyer had been at the *Detroit Free Press* during the riots that had led to 43 deaths. Afterwards journalists put their heads together, and, in collaboration with the Michigan’s Institute for Social Research they investigated the underlying causes of the riots: choosing a quantitative survey method to seek answers from rioters about their motivations.²²

Lewis contacted Meyer, who told him he needed resources, money, and a sound academic partner.

So he called Professor Tim Newburn at the LSE and told him his idea to use social sciences research techniques to find rioters and ask why they thought they behaved as they did.

Newburn says he was immediately intrigued: “Well, you know you’re bound to present a rather odd view of the riots if the people you speak to are the rioters.”

“Our view at that time — the reason for doing that — is that theirs are the silent voices: everyone else has had an opportunity to tell their story, the police have no shortage of opportunities to be interviewed over the subject in a variety of inquiries by their own organisation and others. The police were very visible, as were lawyers as were, actually, the communities themselves, to a degree. But the obvious kind of missing bit was the rioters — no one was talking, really, to them”.

After having coffee with Lewis, Newburn approached the LSE’s management asking for rapid-fire approval to take part in the time-sensitive collaboration.

“I just went to see people and told them what I was doing — I decided to go for it really. One of the big differences between this place and many [other universities] was I got ethical approval for the research over the weekend”.

He went to see the Deputy Director and Provost of the University, who approved it by chairman’s action (“I think he thought it was great, I think he thought it was really exciting”).

²² https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/dec/09/riot-theory-relative-detroit-england?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

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The partners secured grants from the Joseph Rowntree and Open Society foundations and began an accelerated qualitative research project looking for themes and patterns in rioters' accounts of why they behaved like they did in the five days of unrest.

"The argument was to do something that would be quicker than a traditional form of academic research... which can take months if not years to get research funding: there's protocols, the whole process," says Lewis. "To do something that was fast-tracked — faster than Tim would usually do it or would be historically comfortable with — but quicker, and longer, than how a journalist would normally approach this".

The collaborators sought to mimic the Detroit riots study, but instead of closed survey questions, sought to use "grounded theory" — qualitative style methodology which is open-ended and looks for patterns.²³

The first phase of Reading the Riots was completed in three months, built from confidential interviews with hundreds of people who were directly involved in the riots across six cities.

Working with non-journalists

The *Guardian* and LSE hired people with experience in interviewing and, while the researchers provided some training, they avoided strict interview scripting and were relaxed about style, Lewis says. The some thirty interviewers they recruited including a boxing instructor and a counsellor, for example, and priority was given to people who had connections to the communities believed to have been involved in the riots and were able to find rioters and convince them to take part.

The non-media interviewers were crucial in making the first approaches in recruiting rioters. The partners knew many of the people they wished to speak to would have committed crimes and, based on the assaults on journalists documented during the riot, were thought likely to harbour some distrust towards the media even though the project was offering anonymity, says Lewis.

The LSE's status lent the project the protection of academic privilege, adds Newburn.

"We were certainly concerned because we were interviewing people who clearly were admitting to criminal nuisance but hadn't been arrested, so we were really concerned that there was— albeit, an outside possibility — that the police might get it into their heads that they should just come and impound the material".

²³ The Guardian (Retrieve February 27, 2018: https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/dec/05/reading-the-riots-methodology-explained?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other) December 5, 2011.

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As part of the process, they had to be clear with the people they were interviewing — some of whom had committed criminal acts they had not been arrested or charged over — that they could freely and anonymously discuss their offending without fear of their accounts being passed on to authorities. However that had its limits — for both journalistic and academic ethics — and they were warned that there was a limit to their candour; that if they admitted to involvement in crimes like child molestation the researchers would not protect them, says Newburn.

The partners were confident that it would be viewed as a bad public relations move for the police to seek a search warrant to raid the research notes at the newspaper: “I thought the chances of them doing that at the *Guardian* headquarters were pretty slim, to put it mildly,” says Newburn. However, they ultimately decided to keep the documents at the LSE.

“Basically we just kept it all here so we anonymised it and kept it here... because I was confident that the reputational damage of raiding the university — the social research data — was just too great a risk for the police”.

The data stored at the LSE was anonymised: no one’s names or addresses were kept with the interview recordings, and the transcripts had personal information redacted. Those assurances made it easier for the research team to recruit their interviewees, Newburn believes.

They were also concerned about veracity. The speed of the project meant it was difficult to assess every single claim.

One of the ways the project dealt with verification was by contemplating the rioters’ accounts from a detached height. The researchers described searching for themes rather than concerning themselves with specific personal allegations: Newburn gives the example of, say, rioters claiming their teeth were knocked out by police.

Unlike a conventional journalistic story about such an incident, the study was not focused on uncovering allegations about which specific officers assaulted which particular rioters and vice versa. In most cases, in the melee, the rioters had no way of identifying which officers they interacted with anyway, he suggests.

“We were doing the research very quickly but, even still, it was six weeks, seven weeks at least after the event when we were going to interview people. How do you know they’re telling you the truth? That was the subject of a lot of the criticism of the study: it was kind of, ‘well, people would say that wouldn’t they’. I think the answer to those questions comes down to social science, again, rather than journalism”.

With those concerns in mind, Newburn recommended that the project’s interviewers did not ask leading questions, particularly about the police, in keeping with social science questioning principles.

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“We allowed those things... to the extent that one can, naturally, to emerge on the basis that if people then [mention police themselves] then they are a bit more reliable.”

The recorded interviews were then transcribed by the interviewers and transcription services, then coded and analysed by Newburn’s academic team.

The researchers flagged particular transcripts related to a specific theme, like social justice, or looting, that were transferred into a coded spreadsheet that they could use to tease out quotes and examples, and touch find details to illustrate the findings.

Working with interviewers who were not reporters was illuminating for Lewis, who says observing their techniques made him question journalistic interviewing conventions.

“I learnt a lot since this. I’ve actually changed my interviewing methods since doing it , because I think a lot of journalists can be not the best interviewers. We don’t have a lot of time, we don’t really have an idea of what we want the source or interviewee to say... we can ask binary questions, whereas the whole kind of method we saw our researchers use was much more open, [and included] prompts, and allowed the interviewee to lead the interview as much as possible”.

The *Guardian’s* journalists took the lead in interviewing police officers for the other half of the project. They seemed largely interested and supportive of the idea of understanding the riots, says Lewis: “I have never before seen and haven’t since seen such extensive interviews with police officers of their experiences on the front lines of riots.”

Meanwhile, Manchester University academics were analysing a database of more than 2.5 million riot-related tweets, exploring and eventually debunking speculation in the press and political corridors about the role of social media as a sinister, and galvanising force for the riots.

While using a social sciences framework to mine for themes gave the journalists confidence in identifying the reasons for the riots- they were equally concerned with not being seen to justify the behaviour.

“And so we were quite cautious in the way we presented the findings, and also how we analysed the findings: that these were explanations that people were giving about why *they* believed what happened, happened,” says Lewis. “And what we found was — and I remember sitting down in a meeting with Tim and the analysts and they were coming back very strongly to us and saying — a deep-seated and long-standing resentment about policing in this area — and that was a significant driver for a lot of people”.

Newburn was thrilling on the launch of the project and picked up a copy of *The Guardian* at a service station on the first day of publication. He was immediately uncomfortable with the headline (‘Blame the police: why the rioters say they took part.’”

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Newburn chose his moment to bring up this grievance. He had been invited to be a guest speaker at *The Guardian's* editorial meeting, and so it was there that he offered his review.

"Anyway, the deputy editor at the time says, 'anything you'd do differently?' And at that point I made some pretty critical remarks [about] that headline. You could just feel the air being sucked out of the room."

If Newburn regretted not asking to see a front page proof, he regretted his own reaction more.

"They'd just pumped huge resources into a project. They had gone out on a limb to trust the university, an academic, to do various things. It had all been — by almost any measure you care to use — really successful, and then what does the academic say? First opportunity he's just rude, just plain rude, you know. Which I was."

Lewis, speaking in San Francisco where he was West Coast bureau chief for *The Guardian*, noted some of the external criticism of the study focused on the decision to use an oral history-style approach: using qualitative, not quantitative methods.

"I just don't think you'd get the nuance," he says of the accusations. "We had people talking about why they set police cars on fire — and I don't think quantitative research can give you that answer."

Case Study: The SF Homeless Project

The *San Francisco Chronicle* newspaper has long taken an interest in the visible homelessness problem in the city, with reporter Kevin Fagan, in particular covering the issue for around 20 years.

His account of working as a lead investigator on the project offers insight into the amount of time invested, how a grassroots project begins, as well as the personal motivations for reporters to take an interest in collaborating with others on an issue that they could expertly cover alone.

The *Chronicle's* editor Audrey Cooper and a radio station partner, *KQED*, organised a meeting between, initially, about 40 of the city's media outlets to discuss the idea of a large-scale collaborative project investigating homelessness in the city, and exploring solutions.

Fagan, as a veteran of homelessness coverage, was appointed lead reporter on the issue.

"San Francisco is a lovely city but we have a terrible split between rich and poor. Terrible," he explains of the background to the project. "Real estate prices, eviction crises that go on among the lower-income people. Homelessness is pretty much number one on the list every year of people's complaints, so Audrey said, 'why don't we get all the organisations together to do one big blast, one day of homelessness coverage?' "

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"Audrey and her assistant just started emailing everyone and I started spreading the word to the TV, radio stations other newspapers. We compete against each other and a lot of the smaller papers, the little alternative weeklies, and so on, usually take a stance that we're the stodgy white guy big paper in town... that's just kind of a dynamic when you have a big mainstream metro and you have alternative weeklies: they're supposed to kick us in the crotch whenever they can. But then we all got together and talked.

A lot of us know each other — there's a common goal of wanting the situation to get better, because as reporters most of us believe, and I firmly believe, you are supposed to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. One of the catch phrases is 'we're supposed to be working for the common good' and so 40 organisations just sat in the room."

The project took shape as rolling coverage, with stories hosted on the *Chronicle's* paywall-free landing page *SFGate* from 2016.

The newspaper had put Fagan and a team of about six reporters on the project nearly full-time: "A lot of us were freed up for, oh, a couple of months. And in between it was just me ... even while you're doing a project I liked to bang out a daily now and then to kind of refresh the palate.

The partners marked the project with a six month, and then a 12-month update. Fagan believes the project was well-received: "I think the general impression was that it was a good thing to do – put that many eyes on the problem... I think it did help push the needle, at least of awareness. Because I found everywhere I've been – and I've been a lot of places in the world as a reporter, and just as a guy who is a reporter paying attention — and the general attitude is that are homeless people are bums who gave up on themselves, they're just lazy or whatever, or they're just hopelessly lost in their addiction and 'why should we help them'.

At least that's that's certainly the view of a lot of people in America and I think that you soften somewhat here [in San Francisco] because when you look at the complexity of homelessness as much as we were able to in that project, with 80 different organisations putting eyes on it, [you see] that homelessness is much more complex, much more involved than just someone 'giving up' on themselves".

The timing of the project was aimed at capturing public dialogue about the city's visible homelessness issue at a time when there was clearly a measure of political will to address it, says Fagan: "The city is already moving in a progressive direction and gets criticised all the time for spending too much money on homelessness. I'd like to think we had some influence."

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Crucially, the newspaper used its resource to promote its partners' stories, making a landing page on *SFGate* for the object and linking off to traffic on others' sites, including in the follow-up Beyond Homelessness campaign.²⁴

"The *'Gate* is a hugely read site so it was good for them, it turned readers to their sites and it was a bit of a gift but it was a collaborative effort — we were all in this together. I helped other organisations with their reporting — we had a Slack channel for awhile with all of us talking and that got very involved — I preferred just talking to people on the phone".

Fagan regularly watched the website traffic, and although the project was well-read, he notes it suffered the same competition for eyeballs with clickable content as regular, daily beat reporting does.

"The stuff that gets read most on the *'Gate* usually is, what? 'The ten greatest ice cream chains in our area?' And then your very-involved thing that took two months to do on homeless technology is not even on the list".

Infrastructure and organisational challenges

Montclair University Center for Cooperative Journalism project leader Tim Griggs told Harvard University's Nieman Lab news centre in 2016: "The tremendous financial pressure on the industry right now makes collaboration essential... where you find resistance to collaboration is where you're finding news enterprises hastening their own demise".²⁵

As at November 2017, the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project (OCCRP) was offering to share access to a document cache known as the Gupta leak with journalists in select areas around the world.

They were being urged to request access to the files, an international money laundering and bribery scandal involving figures allegedly in South African president Jacob Zuma's orbit.

In a style that appears typical of similar offers to share large data troves, the organisation and its collaborators the *Daily Maverick*, and non-profit *amaBhunghane* cite altruism in their reasoning for sharing the information, rather than treating it as an exclusive story: "The releasing partners feel

²⁴ The SF Homeless Project (Retrieved February 28, 2018: <http://projects.sfchronicle.com/sf-homeless/>)

²⁵ Hilton, Ricardo 'Collaborate or die: A new initiative wants to make it easier for national and local outlets to work together (Retrieved February 28, 2018: <http://www.niemanlab.org/2016/09/collaborate-or-die-a-new-initiative-wants-to-make-it-easier-for-national-and-local-outlets-to-work-together/>) September 28, 2016.

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that the data needs to be accessible to journalists widely given the potential for collaboration to expose the full extent of the wrongdoing.”²⁶

How will journalists in future access and share information around stories like the Gupta leak, or collaborations between newsrooms on social issues, or even between a pair of reporters from different outlets, investigating a rape case together?

The current methods are imperfect, and can impede the speed and flow of inter-newsroom collaborations, says Heather Bryant, a Stanford Knight fellow, who is building an online platform for journalists to communicate in and manage content and production in together.

“One of the challenges that happens is when you actually start trying to share stories back and forth, plan projects back and forth. The newsrooms are using on average between four to seven different external services to manage the logistics of collaborating and talking to each other and sharing things with each other,” she explains. “That’s a bit of a nightmare for people who are already doing a difficult time-consuming job to also be like: ‘there are three more logins that you have to go to every day’.”

Most of the collaborations Bryant saw had participants working in communications and sharing platforms like Slack and Google Drive, and reporters were organising meetings and planning between themselves using online calendars .

Some were using project management tools like Trello, and similar application, Asana. None of them are designed specifically for editorial work, which leaves space for developments like hers, says Bryant.

She is working on an open-source platform that creates a virtual newsroom where reporters and editors can manage all tasks involved in a collaboration.

“You can invite that other organisation and they can see the things that you’re working on, you guys can have shared conversations, you can have all the documents you need, you can actually have the texts of the stories to feel like a web article or in a radio script and they can be actually found together versus: one in the Google Drive here and [one in] someone’s inbox over here.”

Bryant has been mapping collaborative partnerships and talking to journalists involved, and has noticed that mismatched resources are a frequently-cited challenge. She also spoke to some partners whose collaborations never came to fruition.

²⁶ OCCRP press release (Retrieved February 28, 2018: <https://www.occrp.org/en/40-press-releases/presss-releases/7240-guptaleaks-to-be-released-to-journalists-worldwide>). November 10, 2017.

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"I think the challenge that they had to recognise was that you cannot find two organisations or three or four, however many partnerships, that are ever going to be evenly-matched in their resources. Somebody is going to have fewer people or they're going to have less money, or they're going to have other things that they have to do... so this question comes up of what is fair to expect them to do, what is fair to be expected of us if we're the more resourced newsroom. Are we comfortable feeling like we're doing more work than they're doing?"

Oxford University's Reuters Institute for Journalism hosted a workshop on collaborative journalism in 2017, which included journalists who had worked on high-profile investigations such as the Panama Papers, the Swiss Leaks and the Luxembourg leaks.

"Collaboration can greatly enhance investigative journalism, but it's also clear that to make collaboration work it has to be a win-win proposition for the different entities or individuals, as opposed to collaborating," says the institute's director Professor Rasmus Kleis Nielsen.

The demands of participating in a multi-newsroom collaboration are challenging, he adds.

"At a practical level, there is a lot of infrastructure that needs to be in place for a collaboration to work smoothly, and in particular if the information is sensitive this requires encryption and a level of IT-proficiency that not all news organisations have, and is not always equally distributed across those news organisations that have it".

"I think one of the key things that in particular the team at the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists have very successfully done is to begin to build a back-end infrastructure for collaboration so they don't have to reinvent the wheel every time they want to work together. Now they have secure communications and places to share files and the like where people can be confident that there won't be someone who is less worldly about these things somewhere who compromised the entire operation by leaving something unencrypted or using an insecure channel."

Collaboration does not always have to focus on high-IQ, complex leaks, says Nielsen. Cooperative models sometimes addressed a pervasive problem in the way newsrooms deployed their resources

"It's very clear that historically there's been a hell of a lot of competitive waste in the journalistic profession and news industry that's been driven by the fact that organisations compete for attention and advertising revenues and hence are not collaborating, understandably," he explains.

"But by not collaborating they are duplicating each other's effort similarly. Journalists compete with other journalists, sometimes internally within an organisation... collaboration is very hot because people are rewarded individually in an organisation."

"Competitive waste in this sense is simply the inefficient allocation of very scarce resources that leaves [the media] in a situation where when a major American political party have their presidential nomination at a convention there will be maybe ten thousand journalists there

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reporting something where there will be no surprises and everyone is reporting the same thing. Or, when thirty Chilean miners are stuck down a hole there will be literally a thousand journalists filming a hole in the ground in ways that one might hypothesise doesn't always add an incremental value to the story."

"These are not evil things or stupid things; they have been individually rational for the people involved, for the organisations involved. But from a public interest point of view it's a very inefficient allocation of resources in the situation where the resources that are invested in professional journalism are evidently declining in almost every market we know around the world. This is a very serious problem and also an area in which there is room for improvement."

Conclusions: What's next for cooperation in journalism?

Journalism cooperatives interrogate power and crises, they share data in the pursuit of exposing uncomfortable truths, and in some cases; they find constructive solutions to a problem.

The reporters involved in the Panama and Paradise papers formed the world's largest scale investigative journalism effort to date. They abandoned competitive orthodoxy in favour of collaboration with rivals, and were able to share resources and make use of partners' talents, local knowledge, and mediums, to tell the best stories on a scale that could not be ignored.

However the natural journalistic instinct to investigate was not the only driver behind in the collaborative projects I encountered.

Collaborations also respond to a crisis; highlighting a public interest issue and applying pressure on those holding power. The common refrain from the journalists and editors I spoke to was that the more voices together, the better. Advocacy journalism was a driving force behind the investigative and solutions-focused reporting work in the San Francisco Chronicle's Homeless Project.

At *WNYC*, editors asked themselves where the public interest in a story lay, and decided collaboration - and a second language - would put a story in front of the audience who needed to know about it.

In collaborative projects, data journalism, and technological finesse triumphs - such as in *The Marshall Project's* Next to Die project, and in Electionland.

In all cases, pictures are emerging of prototype newsrooms of the future where boundaries between rivals blur. What seems clear is that unconventional newsrooms - the non-profits and the constant collaborators - will become key players in the news ecosystem.

Independent nonprofits such as *The Marshall Project* are already a feature of the news landscape in the United States with growing influence and connections - and these players are emerging around the world.

Further research would be required to explore whether no-strings-attached sponsorship alternatives are forthcoming in New Zealand's philanthropy market. It is difficult to compare to the donor

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economy in the United States, which has a rich, though competitive, menu of philanthropic sources offering funding that the American projects explored in this report possible.

These projects all shared philanthropic funding sources as a common factor. In New Zealand, imitating such projects would likely depend on editorial will, and also on the ability to access public funding, such as from NZ on Air or from donors in overseas partners' countries (in the case of a collaboration with an Australian media partner, for example).

In considering funding for collaborative projects, it cannot be ignored that the model is reaching its zenith amid an environment of declining resources for the industry. Graves and Konieczka predict a risk that in the future, collaborative arrangements will become a necessity to plug an economic gap, rather than as a means to innovate or recruit outside expertise to tell a story. A world in which your daily political news is brought to you by McDonald's sounds dystopian, but is it really that farfetched?

Neilsen highlighted the present threat to newsroom resources: the issue of "competitive waste." The concept will be familiar to any reporter who has covered a high-profile court case, or jostled in a media scrum – where every reporter's story is ultimately a facsimile of his or her rivals'.

There is an argument to be made that forward-thinking newsrooms should be considering how they can collaborate to redirect their best troops away from over-saturated coverage, and onto longer-term shared projects.

The reporters and editors who shared their experiences with me told compelling stories of benefiting from reporting in a new medium, of borrowing local expertise from other newsrooms, and of the power in forming a chorus across rival lines to draw attention to a public interest issue.

A collaborative mindset is an instinctive one. A newsroom open to it will consider whether a story can be told better by drafting in outside help. But newsrooms need support to do that: the challenge lies in a change in philosophy on rivalry from the top down, as much as does in the age-old question of how to fund good journalism.

Once that instinct sets in, New Zealand newsrooms can find new partnerships to realise their full potential, and tell stories that may have otherwise never been told at all.

APPENDIX- Pointers for newsrooms considering collaborations

Before you start

- Assess the security risk of the project – are all partners equally aware of dangers to sources and participating journalists?
- Outline expectations of the division of time and resources. Consideration should be given to whether larger newsrooms can afford to contribute more staff and editing work.
- Are you collaborating with journalists in other countries? To ensure maximum reach, consider whether there are major political or sporting events in your media partners' countries that require reconsideration of the joint timing of publication.

Seeking expert help

- Consider approaching a journalism organisation with experience of managing the type of reporting you wish to do – or an institution like a university that could provide a methodology.
- Journalists and editors in New Zealand are urged to propose international projects to the ICIJ, either as an individual or on behalf of a media outlet: "It doesn't matter how big your country is, how big your media outlet, if you are interested in doing an investigation with global reach," the ICIJ's Emilia Diaz-Struck says.

Securing funding

- A long-term collaborative project could be a drain on resources. It is worth considering that some topics, while newsworthy, may not ultimately be rewarded with a wide audience or in advertising investment.
- Consider applying for public or philanthropic sources of funding to offset the project's cost.

Legal considerations

- Consider the risk of legal injunctions that will halt all partners' planned publication date: are you willing for one publication to publish ahead of another due to conflicting legal advice or different perspectives of risk?
- In major, multiple-outlet projects, consider whether you should assign a journalist from a more prestigious outlet, or from another country, to make the approaches for right of reply; to add gravitas to the encounter, or to reduce risk to vulnerable partners in a potentially hostile setting.

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— In multi-country investigations, identical stories may need to run with changes when published online in different outlets, to reflect the defamation and libel laws of the jurisdiction.

Security and technological considerations

— Do your reporters need additional training on how to protect sources, data, and one another?

— Leading newsrooms are investing in bespoke information sharing and content management systems to ensure sensitive investigations are impregnable. Are your systems sophisticated enough, and are they compatible with your media partners' so that you can easily track changes during crucial editing and correction processes?

— Do your reporters have equal technological and security knowledge to their counterparts? Ensure they are aware of the risks of handling shared documents and have platforms to communicate securely between newsrooms.

Platform planning

— Can all partners afford for the project to be freely available, or does it need to be presented as premium content behind a paywall?

— Will matching stories run under different sites' branding online, or will you create a bespoke site that redirects audiences to a shared landing page?

— Do you need to consider pushing to social media in unison, or creating a new home for your project to be promoted and followed?

Following up

— If the project does not come to fruition, discuss who has the rights to investigative notes and other material sourced by your reporters and still accessible to your media partner.

— If it does, consider the challenges posed by staff leave and turnover: Consider investing in a centralised notes and alert system, and assigning a project leader or reporters responsible for keeping abreast of new dates and legal challenges that could require future updates to your content.

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I am a New Zealand journalist and University of Canterbury alumna, and former Dominion Post reporter, now living in London and working for the *BBC*-funded Local Democracy Reporter wire service.

The \$12,000 in funding enabled me to travel to the United States, Germany and the United Kingdom to conduct interviews with journalists, editors and academics, and to learn from industry figures, in order to share their knowledge with New Zealand newsrooms.

I used the funding to attend the Investigative Reporters and Editors 2017 conference held in Phoenix, Arizona. I also visited the Detroit Journalism Cooperative headquarters in Michigan, WNYC and *The Marshall Project* in New York City, the Montclair Center for Cooperative Media in New Jersey, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Stanford University and *The Guardian's* West Coast bureau in California, as well as the International Consortium for Investigative Journalists in Washington DC.

I also travelled to Europe, visiting the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* newsroom in Munich, the London School of Economics in London, and the Oxford University Reuters Institute For the Study of Journalism in Oxford.

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