



STRATEGY 2023-2025

**MEDIA AND
JOURNALISM
RESEARCH
CENTER**

NOVEMBER 2022

FOCUS

The Media and Journalism Research Center is planning in the next three years to focus on fighting media capture and declining trust in journalism wherever this work is needed.

Our belief is that the best way to support journalism today is by studying it, doing it, and funding it. In the next three years, we choose to do all three.

First, we plan to study the actors and forces that influence journalism, hence mapping of media ownership and funding, trends in policy and regulation, and the influence of tech companies on journalism will be our research focus.

Second, we plan to earmark time and resources for journalistic production projects where there is such a need. Those could be launching news platforms covering topics close to the center's focus or working with media outlets on joint reporting projects.

Finally, we aim to boost our rapidly growing engagement with donor organizations in assisting with channeling funding to media outlets and journalistic initiatives that need such support.



MJRC

MEDIA & JOURNALISM
RESEARCH CENTER

CHALLENGES

MEDIA CAPTURE

Media capture continues to be the most formidable challenge faced by independent media and journalism.

During the past three years, attacks on the media intensified and capture by political and business circles, often connected with state authorities, worsened. The model of capture described in our studies whereby groups of powerful oligarchies and state bodies take control of and use regulatory mechanisms, state media, public funds, and privately owned media to promote and protect their interests continued to replicate across borders. In some countries, the effects of media capture have been devastating.

The number of independent media has dwindled. Some got bought by oligarchs, others had to shut down as it became impossible for them to operate in highly captured environments where access to public funding is denied and advertisers avoid contracting independent media fearing repercussions from the authorities. It is for all these reasons why we believe that media capture remains the biggest threat to quality and independent journalism, which is a base for an informed citizenry that can participate in society as well as a key factor ensuring accountability of those governing.

MEDIA DISTRUST

Disinformation platforms, be they websites created for pecuniary purposes or government-funded propaganda portals, have inundated the media ecosystem in the past decade. An equally daunting challenge is the proliferation of the state-controlled media model. Our research on state media shows that some 84% of nearly 600 state media across the world lack editorial independence.

In recent years, social networks have introduced, with mixed results, policies and measures aimed at wringing out toxic content from their platforms. Some governments earmark hefty funds to empower NGOs and media to fight disinformation.

Yet, despite these efforts, false news and propagandistic content is still in large supply, denting the public trust in journalism and media. Moreover, data asymmetries are a growing challenge contributing to media power asymmetries as well.

POLICY CACOTOPIA

The last few years have seen an upsurge in policy activity that affects media and journalism. On the one hand, in their attempt to adjust corporate policies to today's realities, tech platforms have engaged in a sustained dialogue with the expert community and civil society. On the other hand, governments have been more active than ever in adopting laws and policies that protect independent media and journalism.

Yet, the media environment has not improved. On the contrary, in many countries, the space for independent journalism continued to shrink as a result. The reasons are manifold.

Even the most progressive and forward-looking policies seen in recent years tend not to achieve the desired effect. The EU, a leading policymaking force, has introduced in the past few years a spate of legal provisions that aim to make social media accountable for content floated on their platforms, to ensure personal data are handled adequately and to protect independent journalism. They garnered praise from media experts and policy mandarins.

Nevertheless, many governments in Europe not only flout these rules, but misuse them to justify a string of regulations that hurt independent media. Elsewhere, governments use disinformation as a pretext for closing the space for free media and for imprisoning journalists.

We live in a media policy cacotopia. Policies are bad, misused or abused to further limit independent, critical media.



RESPONSE

Acknowledging that these challenges are huge, we plan to contribute to tackling them through a combination of **research, journalism, and funding.**

RESEARCHING JOURNALISM

Research has been the center's biggest strength and will continue to remain so. We will continue focusing on the study of power in media and journalism segmented in three categories: regulation, financing, and technology. In most of our future research projects, we also want to preserve the comparative approach that makes our studies unique.

In the future strategy period, we will conduct research as follows: applied research and academic excellence.

Applied research

The applied research work will mainly consist of projects mapping media ownership, tech companies and sources of funding journalism. In more concrete terms, we plan to focus our research on a). comparative studies, and b). impact and media sustainability analysis.

Multi-country comparative research

Media Influence Matrix

Designed by the center's director, Marius Dragomir, this project entered a new phase in 2022 thanks to a newly developed collaboration with Observacom, a prominent Uruguay-based policy think tank, which cooperates with the center in expanding the project to Latin America. In the coming years, we also plan to publish our first studies covering countries in Sub-Saharan Africa and MENA region.

State Media Monitor

Comprising data from 157 countries, the State Media Monitor has become the go-to source for analysis and information about state media, largely used by regulatory authorities, policymakers, tech companies and journalists. In the coming years, we plan to annually update the study and include more countries.

Global Media Ownership

Within the next three years, we plan to launch Global Media Ownership Monitor, a digital platform hosting the largest database of media companies in the world, with information about their ownership, financial performance, links with other companies, government bodies and politicians. The platform is envisaged to be the source of data for a series of ownership-focused studies that we aim to publish in the coming years.

Impact and media sustainability analysis

As part of our applied research work, we will continue to focus on studying the impact that economic trends and policy changes have on the media.

On the one hand, building on existing work we conduct for media development organizations and funders, we will continue studying journalism business models, the role of the private sector in the media and trends in revenue generation. Part of this work consists of due diligence for investment funds and media corporations.

Second, building on our policy-focused research and engagement with policymakers, we will seek to amplify our regulation mapping work, with a focus on the impact of regulations on media independence.

Academic excellence

Experts in our community are recognized for their academic excellence, a major strength of the center that we will strive to preserve. Through our academic affiliations, we plan to contribute to several major academic research projects and books planned in the coming years. One key project we are part of is Public Service Media in the face of the platform ecosystem conducted by the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), which is planned to be conducted during the next three years.



DOING JOURNALISM

In the next strategy period, we plan to continue engaging with media outlets and journalists in running joint projects.

With external support, we want to increase journalistic content about the topics the center focuses on, published on the digital platforms curated by the center's experts: Media Power Monitor, which covers stories about media, journalism, and technology; and the newly launched family of Substack publications.

The main purposes of the journalistic work conducted through the center are to make our research more accessible to more people and to give writers and experts covering media-related issues a platform to publish their non-academic work.



FUNDING JOURNALISM

Our engagement with donor organizations has been growing fast. As a result, we are developing a new line of work consisting of journalism support. Using grant money from philanthropies, we offer financial support to journalistic initiatives that operate in captured media environments, an effective model of disbursing grant funding to small media outlets along with technical assistance.

The funds are primarily aimed at supporting media outlets in improving their engagement with the audience and, where possible, their sustainability.

This new and growing line of work is providing the center with firsthand experience in understanding the vicissitudes that independent media are faced with in difficult contexts, which is extremely valuable information for our research.

At the same time, we recognize that journalism could in the past handle most of the challenges that we describe in this strategy, but cannot do that today. Hence, given the current attention deficit, we want to pay more attention to identifying new means of informing citizens about their new rights (including the right to self-determination with regards to what content to be exposed to).



STRATEGIC GOALS

Thanks to new partnerships and cooperation agreements that made possible the establishment of the Media and Journalism Research Center, we plan in the next strategy period **to enlarge the Media Influence Matrix to a total of 65 countries.**

Using data and information collected through our research, we plan to finalize by the end of the strategy period **a new assessment tool to measure the state of journalism on a country-by-country basis.** We envisage this tool to be an index that will measure the conduciveness of local environments to independent journalism.

Using our experience in supporting journalism as well as our research on impact, we plan in the next strategy period **to refine and release an Impact Measurement Matrix, a new tool to measure impact of media outlets** at various levels and in specific contexts.

By the end of the strategy period, we plan **to launch the Global Media Ownership Monitor database**, and we envision **the State Media Monitor database to be expanded** to cover all the countries in the world.

We plan in 2023 **to initiate a book project focused on journalism-relevant issues** that would consist of contributions from authors within our Expert Community.



RESOURCES

FUNDING

Two-thirds of the center's budget comes from philanthropies focused on media and journalism, with the rest generated from research services conducted by the center for organizations including media development groups, investment funds and academic institutions.

The center does not accept government funding.

As a social enterprise, all the profits earned from our activities are reinvested in research projects.

PEOPLE

Media and Journalism Research Center is run as a research hub with two main bases, in Santiago de Compostela and Budapest, and works with experts in more than 40 countries.

The center continues most of the research work and projects designed by its director during his time at the Center for Media, Data and Society, a research center that operated as a CEU unit until 2022.

Media and Journalism Research Center is in talks to expand its academic affiliations and expects to announce associations with four more universities by the end of 2023.

STRENGTHS

Experts in our network are highly reputable researchers and journalists with long experience in managing comparative research or teaching journalism-focused courses. Work by our experts is featured in universities, mainstream media and at hundreds of conferences and workshops internationally.

Organizations ranging from think tanks to universities to foundations are constantly seeking expertise from the center.

AUDIENCE

To achieve the goals set out in this strategic plan, we aim to work through partnerships and larger research networks.

Our target audiences are academics, policymakers, journalists, and activists.

We also engage with private media and technology companies.

At the same time, we want to continue to make research more accessible to the general public through journalism, outreach, and literacy programs.

As in the past, we strive to make our work relevant for the following audiences:

Journalists

The journalistic community is and will remain one of the key audiences for our research and policy work. In the next strategy period, we will increasingly work with unions and associations of journalists that work to build the conditions enabling journalists to do their jobs.

Students and scholars

This is a key audience of the center, particularly students actively involved in research and journalism projects.

Media development sector

Much of the media development support is affected by the challenges described in this strategy. In highly captured environments, support for media outlets or individual journalists loses much of its value.

The media development sector needs a new theory of change focused on identifying, through research and analysis, the right entry points where the sector's limited resources can achieve maximum impact.

We work with several key media development groups, offering our research to design impact measurement tools and methods.

Media investors

Recognizing that the new realities in media and technology require a more nuanced due diligence approach, actors in the investment community have been showing interest in our research, which, in their opinion, helps them understand areas of risks and opportunities as well as identify media outlets vulnerable to capture that need investment and financial support.

Regulators

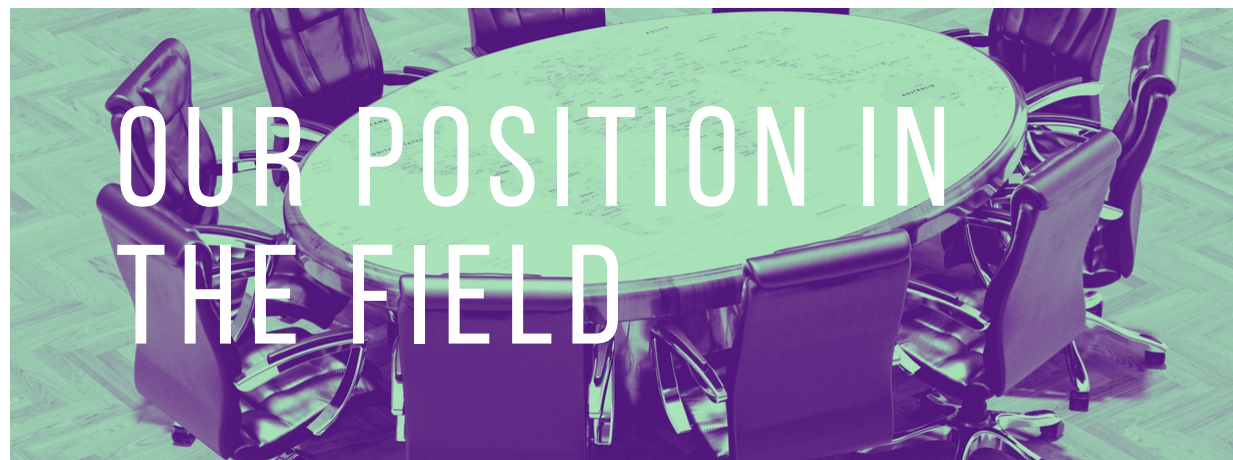
Due to the increased regulatory complexities brought about by technology and the new forms of control that are proliferating at a fast pace, methodologies used by regulators to assess markets and content need to be revamped.

Our research takes stock of these latest developments, analyzing the impact of past and upcoming forms of regulation.

Advocates

Evidence shows that, unsurprisingly, advocacy projects not anchored in solid data and research are, in most cases, failing. Bad strategic planning and unrealistic expectations have also been identified as important reasons for failure.

We believe that the research we produce can serve both advocates working on media and technology, and NGOs who need to understand and use media in their work.



**WE WILL FOCUS ON
FIGHTING MEDIA
CAPTURE AND
DECLINING TRUST IN
JOURNALISM
WHEREVER THIS
WORK IS NEEDED.**

The center's work stretches across the world with a focus on under-researched societies.

We work through an international network that is expanding through partnerships and comparative projects in Southern Europe, Latin America, Southern Africa, and Southeast Asia.

We are also part of a network of academic and civil society institutions in Spain where the center has established a presence.

The center also retains strong links in Central and Eastern Europe where we plan to establish a new academic hub to further bolster our position in the region.



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**GOT ANY
QUESTIONS?**

FIND US AT
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