



How to Start a Local Indie Journalism Publication in Finland

Sami Lindfors

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ABSTRACT

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In this thesis, the author studies how to start an independent publication for local journalism and ways how the project can also provide income. Last decade hit hard on the media economy due to the disruption caused by the social media sites and other significant internet companies.

The change of how people consumed news content, especially on the internet, forced the media companies in Finland to reorganize their newsrooms, and it has led to even less journalists working for newspapers. The change also meant change in the local news sector, as many newspapers had to reduce their publishing times and, in some cases, even shut down entirely.

This change has left a need for active local reporting when larger news companies might lack consistent coverage in the area.

Since internet has provided a low-expense platform for publishing, it also means it can help individuals to keep reporting on local events.

In this thesis, the author writes from a perspective of trying to make a local indie journalism publication profitable, and studies other similar projects where independent journalists have developed their own local news publications.

Setting up an indie journalism publication is easy due to the reduced cost of media tools, but the author finds that creating sources of income via the website can be rather complex and hard without organization behind it.

This thesis finds that there are a variety of modern options, such as crowdfunding, to create revenue, but most projects have struggled mostly with organizing the work to maintain the sources of income.

Therefore, it can be said that creating revenue from indie journalism is possible, but it needs organizing the financial work apart from journalism, and courage to continue the work in a difficult field of entrepreneurship.

CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	6
1.1	What was Reunamedia?	6
1.2	What is indie journalism?	9
1.3	The goal of this thesis	9
1.4	The structure of this thesis	10
2	BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISM.....	12
2.1	Technical history of media	12
2.1.1	Writing skill enabled information to travel	12
2.1.2	The printing press and the beginning of mass media	12
2.1.3	Radio and TV made the stars	13
2.1.4	Digital presence and revolution of access to information....	14
2.2	The story of journalism	14
2.2.1	Proto-journalism	15
2.2.2	Serving the elite	15
2.2.3	Political press and the age of liberalism	16
2.2.4	The ideal of objectivity	17
3	TRADITIONAL NEWSPAPER ECONOMY	18
3.1	The first cycle: market of needs	18
3.2	The second cycle: the needs of the advertisers	18
3.3	Where does the cycle begin?	19
3.4	The brief history of Finnish media economy.....	19
4	The 21 st CENTURY MEDIA ECONOMY DISRUPTION.....	21
5	GLOBAL VS LOCAL – INDEPENDENT LOCAL JOURNALISM EMERGES	23
5.1	Examples of independent local reporting in Finland.....	24
5.1.1	Torikokous	24
5.1.2	Kaupunki	26
5.1.3	Kokemäkeläinen	27
6	WAYS TO FUND INDEPENDENT LOCAL NEWS	30
6.1	Advertisement	30
6.1.1	Banner advertisement	30
6.1.2	Native advertisement.....	32
6.2	Subscription system by crowdfunding	33
6.2.1	Crowdfunding by Mesenaatti service	33
6.2.2	Patreon.....	33
6.3	Grants	34

7	WAYS TO FUND LIVING AS AN INDIE JOURNALIST	36
7.1	Entrepreneurship.....	36
7.1.1	Private entrepreneur.....	36
7.1.2	Limited liability company.....	37
7.2	Association.....	38
7.3	Cooperative.....	38
8	TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIE JOURNALISM.....	40
8.1	Computer and internet connection	40
8.2	Camera	41
8.3	Audio.....	41
8.4	Website, the publishing platform	42
9	DISCUSSION	43
	REFERENCES	45

1 INTRODUCTION

Finland has extraordinarily many newspapers per capita: a global comparison from year 2000 shows that when compared by daily newspapers' (published at least four times a week) circulation per capita, Finland comes in third by 445.11 per 1000 people. (Nationmaster, 2018.)

However, those newspapers are mostly owned by three corporations: Sanoma, Alma Media and Keski-suomalainen. In recent years as the printed papers have suffered a decrease in subscription thus lost income from both unsubscribers and decreased ad sales, many journalists have been laid off and job openings have been a rare sight. That has meant that journalists have had to be innovative in practising their occupation.

The local newspapers have faced serious financial difficulties in the last decade which has resulted in less local-focused journalism in rural areas and emphasized larger, national and regional newspapers operating in cities. They are sometimes criticized for being slow to cover events in communities and politics in remote areas.

The topic interests me as I've worked as a journalist for many years in both large newsrooms and independent journalism project Reunamedia.

I will use Reunamedia as an example of local indie journalism that experienced ways to become economically sustainable publication from scratch.

1.1 What was Reunamedia?

I was part of a Tampere-based local journalism group Reunamedia from 2015 to the end of year 2018. In Late 2018, I was the editor-in-chief of the project and the last one to operate the non-profit organization behind the publication.

Although I was involved in Reunamedia, the project was also studied in Tuomas Macgilleon's master's thesis (2016). Both personal experience and Macgilleon's master's thesis are used to describe Reunamedia.

Reunamedia started publishing in January 2015. Its aim was to make journalism from the perspective of a 20–35-year-old person interested in culture topics, especially urban culture and counterculture. One of the main foundations was to give a voice for those who are not visible in mass media, such as people struggling with mental health issues and social injustice.

Locality was present in Reunamedia’s reporting in geographical sense. Reunamedia’s articles and subjects were mostly about Tampere area, but also from around Pirkanmaa region. Sometimes, especially on individual columns, themes could be about national-level subjects but could include a Tampere or Pirkanmaa perspective within the text.



PICTURE 1: Screenshot of Reunamedia website in 2016 via Wayback Machine.

Reunamedia did not see itself as a competitor to the leading regional newspaper Aamulehti or to public broadcasting company’s local Yle Tampere. Reunamedia’s articles would however compete with slower, more in-depth journalism. Reunamedia’s written articles were 3000 to 10 000 characters long, compared to typical 2000–4000 characters in newspapers (MacGilleon 2016).

When Reunamedia launched in January 2015, a crowdfunding campaign was launched simultaneously on Mesenaatti.me service. Campaign’s goal was to receive donations worth 6000 euros or 1500 euros minimum. Reunamedia collected 1845 euros.

Reunamedia also received 10000-euro scholarship from Åkerlund foundation for publishing local journalism.

Reunamedia had also planned to fund its publishing partly by native advertising. Reunamedia's first native advertisements were about Tampere Silent Film Festival. Reunamedia also helped a local camera company in their communications and PR, receiving camera equipment to use in reporting.

In 2017, Reunamedia also worked together with Pirfest ry, an organization founded to promote Pirkanmaa region festivals, to publish a video series of 28 episodes about how freedom of speech was present in 27 festivals during the year. The videos were published on Pirfest website but some also in Reunamedia's site.

In 2016, three members of Reunamedia received a scholarship of 15000 euros to work on a documentary film about Tampere and Ylöjärvi based punk band Abduktio.

Reunamedia makers also would sell their expertise in form of lectures and workshops.

Reunamedia had also planned selling banner ads on its website, but it was considered as secondary type of income as banner ads aren't considered valuable at least in smaller websites.

Reunamedia announced end of its publishing in Autumn 2018. Members of Reunamedia have been working as freelancers or full-time reporters for other media companies and there were no successors who would continue Reunamedia's work.

We made plans as a group to provide income and salary in some forms: maybe have editor-in-chief work full-time and others could write on freelance-basis and receive income that way, or even hire multiple writers in case an advertising solution and thus a sustainable income could be established.

In the end, we did receive funding which helped us build the website platform and finish projects during the three active years. However, we were privileged to receive work offers from established mainstream media companies in Sanoma, Alma Media and Yle providing much more stable working and economic conditions, that Reunamedia was decided to shut down in November 2018.

Our practice will not disappear in vain but are in practice in Finland's journalism spectrum every day.

1.2 What is indie journalism?

I base my research on an idea of "indie journalism", which isn't a term used in media research but as I have not found other terms that fit the description of Reunamedia or projects similar to it.

We in Reunamedia used indie journalism to describe our independence from media companies or any other organizations or companies. Journalism is considered independent and newsrooms are separated from marketing departments, but Reunamedia was considered free of ownership. We considered ourselves as a group of individuals working independently but in democratic manner.

Indie as a word is often used in popular culture in similar manner. Indie music is considered a genre of its own although being an abbreviation for the word independent. It has, however, an aura of belonging to young people expressing themselves without artistic suppression by record companies.

In similar way, I describe Reunamedia, the other similar projects and those local journalists wanting to report their local events independently, indie journalism.

1.3 The goal of this thesis

Although Reunamedia shut down, the main dilemma still exists: what kind of solutions there are to independent local journalism economically sustainable and provide income for its makers?

I wanted to investigate options that help independent journalists to get economic stability for their work even if they are not working for a news company but running a media of their own.

Running a news website is relatively low-cost these days, but the work behind even the shortest article might take time, and there should be payment for that effort.

I hope that this thesis could provide a simple road map for different funding scenarios for those who are brave enough to help their local democracy and community by running their own local news website.

There were lessons learned that could provide insight to those with similar ambitions and visions towards local journalism.

In this thesis, I'll go through the importance of having local news platforms, what kind of projects similar to Reunamedia have existed, how they have approached economic issues and discover ways for an independent local journalist to work and have some economic stability reporting local events to the people.

1.4 The structure of this thesis

I believe it is important to understand the basics of journalism's history and the way journalism has developed throughout history. I will first cover the changes in journalism considered purpose and its considered audience throughout times, how technology shaped journalism as a business and how the age of internet has again lead journalism in new forms of practice.

Then I will study the traditional structures of media economy as it is the basis to understand the basic methods of shaping indie journalism as a business.

In chapter 5, I will study briefly three similar indie journalism publications to Reunamedia and how they utilized their resources to publish local journalism and to make money off their work.

In chapter 6 and 7, I will study methods of setting up a small media business, which ways one can organize money flow and what type of organization a professional media business requires.

Creating indie journalism requires basic tools. Those will be introduced in chapter 8.

2 BRIEF HISTORY OF MEDIA AND JOURNALISM

To understand the topic better, it's important to understand how media and journalism have developed to its current form. It's also important to separate the history of media platforms and journalism as the first includes many forms of communication, journalism being just one.

Risto Kunelius (2009), a professor of journalism and communications, has categorized history of journalism by two aspects: the technical revolutions and how new technologies enabled new approaches to sharing information, and the evolution of how the target audiences have been taken into consider throughout times.

2.1 Technical history of media

Throughout the history, the way people have shared information and knowledge has changed by new innovations. Innovation after innovation, publishing has become more and more available for everyone. (Kunelius 2009.)

2.1.1 Writing skill enabled information to travel

Written language started to develop approximately 5000 years ago. It was a way for the elite to maintain power as those who could read had the access to information. (Kunelius 2009, 32.)

Written language also enabled maintaining rule across empires. Before written language, information, commands, and news were all delivered from mouth-to-mouth leading to misinterpretations. Writing everything on paper made it easier to deliver messages and reduce the misinterpretations on the way. It also enabled cultures to unify. (Kunelius 2009.)

2.1.2 The printing press and the beginning of mass media

The printing press revolutionized written language when it was invented in 1440's. It brought democracy to the use of language as printing became cheaper, faster,

and more efficient thus more people had access to same information and knowledge. The idea of existence of objective information emerged in philosophy. (Kunelius 2009, 37-38.)

This is considered to be the start of mass communication, delivering information to mass audience (Kunelius 2009, 37).

One example is Martin Luther's reformation letters in the beginning of 16th century. Luther's manifesto was printed on paper and his thoughts spread quickly throughout Europe. The printing press is considered to be the beginning of mass communication. It enabled information to spread even further but simultaneously emphasized the authority and status of the publisher because of unidirectional nature of publishing. (Kunelius 2009, 37.)

The printing press had an important role in the birth of nationalist ideologies as via books it was possible to live and relate to specific languages and cultural uses of language and habits. It enabled the feeling of belonging to a larger community than the physically present local community. It became possible to build identity on more abstract concepts and ideas. (Kunelius 2009, 40-41.)

2.1.3 Radio and TV made the stars

Samuel Morse's patent from 1830's revolutionized mass communication. The telegraph made it possible to spread information globally faster than ever before. That started the electric revolution of media. (Kunelius 2009, 44.)

The beginning of 20th century brought back the importance of spoken language, the ability to give speeches as people gathered around their radios to hear the news. Historical figures like Adolf Hitler and Winston Churchill among others were the first masters of the new age of speech and held many memorable speeches on radio. (Kunelius 2009, 44.)

Although visual communication was important throughout these revolutions especially in religious contexts, its role became more and more evident as photography techniques started to develop in 19th century. By 20th century, photography had big impact to press and mass communication. (Kunelius 2009, 44.)

This development preceded the revolution of visual communication as television (TV) was invented and quickly became the centrepiece of living rooms. Photography held the idea of objectivity, portrayal of reality, and moving image emphasized that idea. It also gave more possibilities to those who could master performing and deliver certain images. Speaking on TV gave opportunity to include physical expressions with tonal changes thus giving more control over the audience's interpretations. (Kunelius 2009, 44-45.)

The age of TV also introduced segmentation of the audiences as advertisers wanted to reach certain groups.

2.1.4 Digital presence and revolution of access to information

The last decades of 20th century introduced computers and several mobile devices which yet again revolutionized mass communication. Information started to travel even more and faster than ever before. Although more people had access to the same information source thus democratizing information, it was also easier to edit and manipulate information in digital platforms. (Kunelius 2009, 50.)

Mass communication changed drastically as Internet era enabled everyone to communicate to masses because website platforms are considerably cheaper than for example printing presses or radio equipment. It became even more easy for people to build identities on different interests as there was easier access to publications relevant to one's interests. (Kunelius 2009, 50-51.)

2.2 The story of journalism

Technical innovation revolutionized the way information could be saved, spread and delivered. Journalism has always been a form of mass communication, but

the way it has been used and who was its audience have changed throughout times.

Kunelius (2009) mentions four phases of journalism: the types of proto-journalism, elite press, political press and commercial press.

2.2.1 Proto-journalism

Even before the printing press was invented, there were forms and ideas of journalism existing in late-Middle Ages. People heard the news, learnt about events and lessons in forms of ballads and poetry. There were also short booklets that historians could call newsletters, including stories of crimes and even human-interest type of articles. (Kunelius 2009, 58.)

As trade routes developed, traders started to need even more information about events that affected the economy. In 1560s, short newsletters were copied by hand and they spread all the way to London. As printing press became more accessible, printing newsletters became easier and more common alongside of religious and political books. It became important to traders to get news of price developments in different market areas and speculations of changes in customers' demands. (Kunelius 2009, 58-59.)

2.2.2 Serving the elite

In the beginning of 17th century, printing newsletters started to standardize and become regular. The first weekly newsletters printed under continual brand started to grow in number in the first decades of 17th century in the most active trading cities in the Netherlands, Britain and Germany. (Kunelius 2009, 59.)

The first audiences for early forms of journalism was 'the elite', defined as successful merchants based in the busiest trading cities who were becoming wealthier. Their need of information formulated the content in the first newsletter publications which at this point can be described as newspapers. The content was fact-based and mostly foreign news as the merchants needed information of the events in other cities and trading routes. (Kunelius 2009, 60.)

At this stage the first regulations for journalism emerged. The rulers of different countries wanted to control what type of information was allowed to spread. They saw democratizing information more as a threat than as a possibility in fear of uncontrollable publicity. The authoritarian idea of freedom of speech is used to describe the era. It's based on the idea of moral, political and aesthetic authorities that are necessary to control publishing. Printing presses worked under licences granted by the state but also censorship and trials were used to control what was published and what was not. It was considered to be possible for censors to be able to determine the quality of content in publications. The system eventually collapsed due to increasing volume of publications. The number of censors needed to control publishing made it practically impossible to hold standards to the censorship process. (Kunelius 2009, 60.)

2.2.3 Political press and the age of liberalism

As governments started to lose control of publications and censorship programs weakened, the idea of free press started to emerge. The economic growth and the shift in political hegemony towards liberalism started to show in newspapers which began to criticize censorship and press licensing system. For example, the First Amendment of the constitution of United States of America from the year 1789 states that the Congress cannot legislate laws that would limit the freedom of publishing and expressing opinions. The free speech should be independent from state's control. (Kunelius 2009, 62-63.)

Liberalism meant that both freedom of speech and freedom of the press should be independent from governments and should be left for markets to decide, which publications could stay profitable and which opinions and arguments were closest to the idea of objective truth. (Kunelius 2009, 63.)

By the 18th century, the newspapers had become strong political devices which were able to spread ideas, experiences, create movements and assemble political movements. The newspapers could create so-called Imaginary Communities in which the readers could identify themselves in. Reading certain newspapers,

they also knew that there were others who would read the same texts and most likely share same ideas. (Kunelius 2009, 63-64.)

This development also meant a shift from fact-based writing towards opinion-based content. Editorials and opinion columns appeared on newspapers, such as culture critics and causeries. (Kunelius 2009, 64.)

It became common for newspapers to affiliate with political parties and journalists to represent the party ideology. In Finland, by the mid-19th century the connection between political parties and newspapers had established and standardized. (Kunelius 2009, 65.)

2.2.4 The ideal of objectivity

The technological development that started in the early 19th century made it possible for newspapers to increase their circulation and overall printing volume. This accelerated the liberalistic idea behind newspapers and newspapers started to differentiate from political parties and instead focus on reaching as many readers as possible. To enable maximized profits for the owners of the newspapers, it became apparent that newspapers couldn't exclude different political views anymore. Newspaper became a product which was on the markets like any other product, trying to become popular among consumers. (Kunelius 2009, 67.)

Newspapers started to attract all consumer segments by lowering the price as non-political newspapers were not receiving party funding anymore. Other method was shift to more objective reporting. Newspapers started to sell objective and neutral information and separate opinions from facts. (Kunelius 2009, 67-69.)

Earlier, newspapers were a public platform for debate but mostly for the people who had access to the newspaper or supported the party behind the newspaper. Now the newspapers became a public platform for, theoretically, everyone. People with different views could participate in exchange of ideas and debates by reading one newspaper and writing for opinion pages. (Kunelius 2009, 58-70.)

3 TRADITIONAL NEWSPAPER ECONOMY

Kunelius (2009) explains the economy behind mass communication by drawing two cycles, two mechanisms. These mechanisms have been the foundation for traditional media companies and are relevant for independent publications too.

The two cycles create an economy in which the first one births the second one: as the first becomes successful, the other becomes profitable too. (Kunelius 2009, 80.)

3.1 The first cycle: market of needs

The first cycle starts from the company. This is historically the first mechanism that became profitable for the newspaper owners. (Kunelius 2009, 80-81.)

In this cycle, the market is based on the needs of the consumers. When people buy books, subscribe to newspapers or subscribes for streaming services, they participate in the first cycle. The decision to buy a product might satisfy a need for entertainment or information, for example. (Kunelius 2009, 80-81.)

The expenses in this cycle are the staff salary and marketing the product. The company producing the newspaper or other media product must hire staff to create the content for the product. There's a need for writers, editors, graphic designers, web designers, photographers, news agencies among many others to make a product that interests consumers. (Kunelius 2009, 80-81.)

The second expense in this cycle comes from marketing the product for the consumers. (Kunelius 2009, 80.)

3.2 The second cycle: the needs of the advertisers

In the second cycle, the success of the first cycle becomes of interest for companies wanting to advertise their products. When the media product – whether it was a newspaper, a TV show or an internet service – becomes successful and has gathered an audience, other companies might be interested in marketing

their products on the platform. The advertisers pay the media company for the advertisement places on the media product and its reach among the consumers. (Kunelius 2009, 81.)

In this cycle, it's necessary for the media company to hire marketing staff who are able to analyse the audience segments, their needs and behaviour and overall interests. From that data the company is able to sell the ads for different companies wanting to reach customer segments the media product is able to reach. Besides the size of the audience, advertisers are also interested in the purchasing power of the audience segments. (Kunelius 2009, 80-81.)

3.3 Where does the cycle begin?

It is not self-explanatory where the cycle begins. It is common to think the cycle starts from the media product: a quality newspaper attracts audience and customers thus it interests advertisers. Everyone is interested in a quality product. (Kunelius 2009, 83.)

Other way to look at the cycle is that it starts from the needs of the consumers. It is thought that the products compete on the markets about which one satisfies audience's needs the best. (Kunelius 2009, 83-84.)

There's also an argument that the cycle starts from the interests of the advertisers. In this model, the product is formed to reach certain audience segments where it's beneficial to sell advertisements. An example of this model is the way so called 'soap operas' were born: the program concept was created to reach housewives and to sell advertisements of, for example, cleaning products. (Kunelius 2009, 83-84.)

3.4 The brief history of Finnish media economy

The Finnish media economy started to generalize in the late 19th century in the age of political press. The Finnish papers were tied to political parties at the time.

Because the communications networks were underdeveloped, it wasn't in the interest of newspapers to compete on the national markets. Local and municipal newspapers were founded all around Finland. (Kunelius 2009, 84-85.)

Finnish media started to commercialize and aim for increasing profits after the World War II. Circulation competition was municipal, resulting typically in one leading municipal newspaper which had most subscriptions in the area thus became interesting for advertisers. These newspapers could improve their products and services thanks to increasing profits and rising circulation, but on the other hand the newspapers with fewer subscriptions became slowly unprofitable and started to rarefy printing thus decreasing the quality and service for the subscribers. (Kunelius 2009, 85.)

In 1950 there were 19 cities in Finland with only one newspaper published in the area. In 1989 the number was 51, but by 2001 there were only 6 cities with one newspaper. Regional competition has weakened and leaving people with fewer choices on newspaper markets. (Kunelius 2009, 85-86.)

4 The 21st CENTURY MEDIA ECONOMY DISRUPTION

The World Wide Web (WWW) was invented by Tim Berners-Lee in 1989. During the 1990s, the availability of computers enabled more and more people and organizations to develop their own websites on WWW. Finnish television news channel MTV3 was one of the early online news pioneers in Finland, publishing their own news website in 1995. It reached 11 000 people in its first month online. (Lindfors 2019.)

In December 2019, MTV3's website reached over 3,4 million people. (Fiam 2020.)

The change in media ecosystem and economy has been drastic since the beginning of 21st century as internet and social media platforms developed quickly. It became easier than ever for individuals, organizations and companies to communicate to masses and control the messages they want to publish. (Seppänen & Väliaverronen 2012, 129-131.)

Johanna Vehkoo (2011) writes in her book *Painokoneet seis! (Stop the Press!)* that the main reason for the economic difficulties in Finnish newspapers was slow adaptation to the age of internet and social media. Finnish newspapers were still heavily print-oriented when the global economic depression hit the world in 2008. But the statistics had already shown that the young are using internet to find information instead of printed newspapers. From 2000–2010, the circulation of all newspapers in Finland had decreased by 14 per cent. (Vehkoo 2011, 28-29.)

According to Finnmedia, the organization that represents most media companies in Finland, the reach of printed newspapers was 94 per cent in Spring 2011 and lowered to 74 per cent by Autumn 2018. Meanwhile, the reach of news via mobile phones raised from 8 per cent in 2011 to 49 per cent in Autumn 2018. (Finnmedia 2020a.)

As the media companies started to optimize their finances, many journalists were laid off in the process and newspapers had to try to keep up the same quality and speed with fewer staff. In 2009, 189 journalists were laid off in Finland and nearly

100 accepted negotiated retirement packages. By doing this and continuing with this policy, the media companies have been able to maintain good profits for the owners, but by the expense of maintaining the quality of the newspapers. (Veikko 2011, 28-32.)

According to Finnmedia, there were over 5800 journalists working in print media in Finland in 2002. In 2016 there were 4386 journalists in Finnish newspapers and projection is that there will be 3000 journalists in newspapers by year 2025. (Finnmedia 2020b.)

Finland's largest newspaper Helsingin Sanomat told in 2018 (Lassila 2018) that it reached its first year of increased number of subscribers in 25 years in 2017. Kaius Niemi, the editor-in-chief of Helsingin Sanomat, told that it was taken as a positive sign that the increase came mainly from the youth subscribing to the newspaper's online content, meaning that they are willing to pay for journalism even in online age.

5 GLOBAL VS LOCAL – INDEPENDENT LOCAL JOURNALISM EMERGES

Local journalism has not been studied a lot, although it is one of the most traditional forms of journalism. One reason might be that it is also hard to define local media and publications: what are the geographical definitions, subscription types, publishing frequency and so on. What defines local news publishing is that local publications tend to exist in variety of concepts. (Kurunmäki, 1995, 44.)

The expectations for local reporting was studied in Netherlands by conducting questionnaire for audience. What people expected from local news was divided in seven points: to offer reliable, bi-partisan and relevant news of local interest; to enhance local social integration; to offer inspiration and good examples; to represent local groups; to enhance understanding between different social groups; to serve as a local memory; to enhance feeling of communal integration. (Nielsen 2015, 11.)

What people expect from local media is that it reports from geographical areas which is not covered typically, or sometimes at all, by larger media companies. It is expected that the people have access to publications that covers events, crime and political decisions of their own community. (Ojajärvi 2014, 12–13.)

Journalism itself is described as the watchdog of democracy. Journalists follow what happens in politics and analyse the effects of decisions made in governments, whether they were national or local. The ideal is that the citizens have a right to get information and facts to form their own opinion on politics and events. (Heikkilä 2001, 33.)

If the larger media companies don't cover local politics often enough, it can be argued that the citizens are in risk of being unaware of decisions affecting their lives.

Local media tends to work with less resources than larger media companies. That is why they don't try to get scoops of national scale but to find more depth in topics. This find was done by comparing printed versions of media of different scales, but it describes also online reporting. (Aldridge 2007, 63.)

Because local reporting cannot compete with fast news, it finds its stories from the local community, from the people. Local journalism can be described as the pioneer of human-interest type of reporting. (Hujanen 2000, 84.)

5.1 Examples of independent local reporting in Finland

Tuomas MacGilleon (2016) studied Finnish local and hyperlocal online news media in his master's thesis. He studied the motives and concepts of four independent local online media: Torikokous in Jyväskylä, Uusi Inari in Inari and Kaupunki in Oulu. He also studied Reunamedia in his master's thesis.

I use MacGilleon's findings in this chapter to study similar projects to Reunamedia but left out Uusi Inari because of its pop-up nature. Uusi Inari published articles for one month in 2015 (Uusi Inari 2015). The projects that aimed to have a permanent presence in media field are more relevant for my thesis.

Only Kaupunki is still active as this thesis is being written in Spring 2020. Torikokous closed in December 2015, and Reunamedia was shut down in late 2018. (MacGilleon 2016; Reunamedia 2018.)

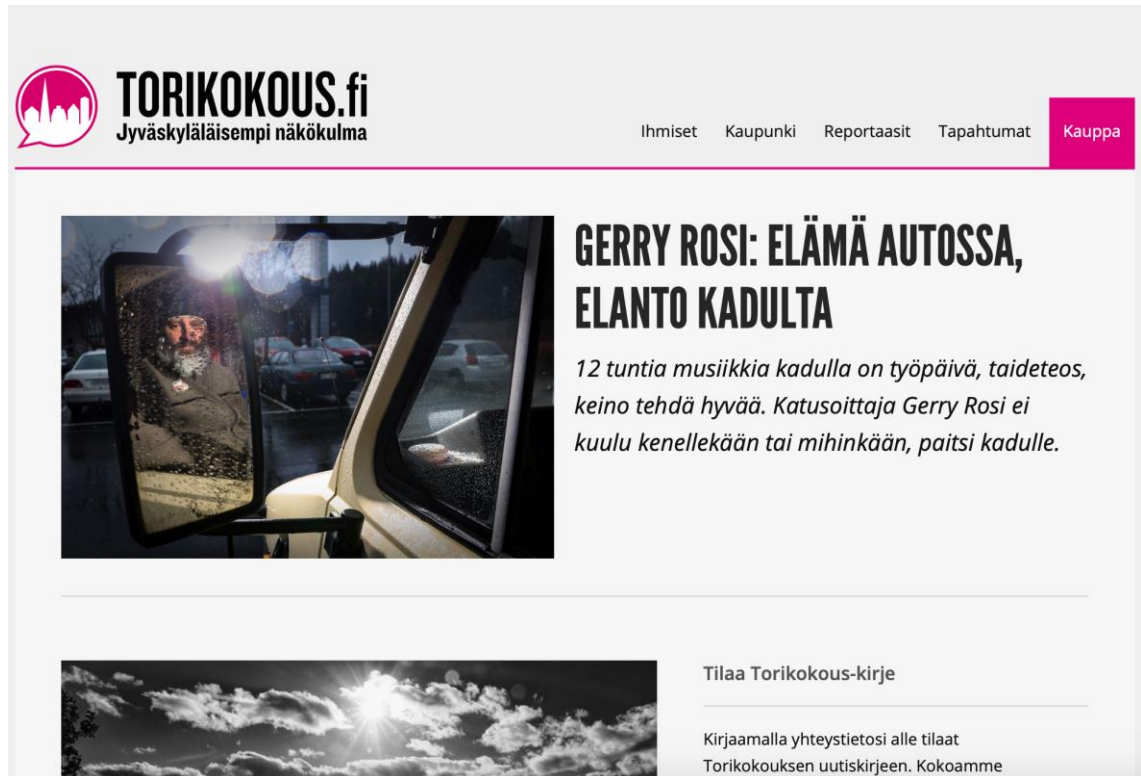
One example of indie journalism is Kokemäkeläinen, a newspaper and news site founded by a 12-year-old resident who wanted more local news for the local people.

MacGilleon's interviews were conducted when the publications were still active, or when there had been only little time since their closure. That is why his interviews which cover the motives and financial plans give great insight to what independent local publications consider beneficial for their existence.

5.1.1 Torikokous

Torikokous was founded in Jyväskylä in May 2014. Torikokous was founded as an objection to local journalism provided by established media in the region. It

was not meant to challenge the news companies, but it was still considered a competitor by the other media companies. (Macgilleon 2016, 100.)



PICTURE 2: Screenshot of Torikokous website in 2015 via Wayback Machine.

Torikokous focused on publishing more in-depth articles and long form stories than competing in reactive, fast news. Other aim was to create a workplace that provides salary for the creators. (Macgilleon 2016, 100.)

Macgilleon (2016) studied that Torikokous published pieces mostly about culture, events and local politics. Torikokous wrote critically about Jyväskylä city council's budget, city development and local enterprises.

There were nine people working in Torikokous. They tried to sell advertisement banners on their sites, apply for grants from different foundations and crowd-fund their work by offering different subscription models, and selling merchandise. (Macgilleon 2016, 101.)

Torikokous ended its operation in 2015. In Macgilleon's (2016) interview, the main reason for "calling it quits" is the unpreparedness for creating a sustainable revenue model. Focusing on selling advertisement and working on journalism in the

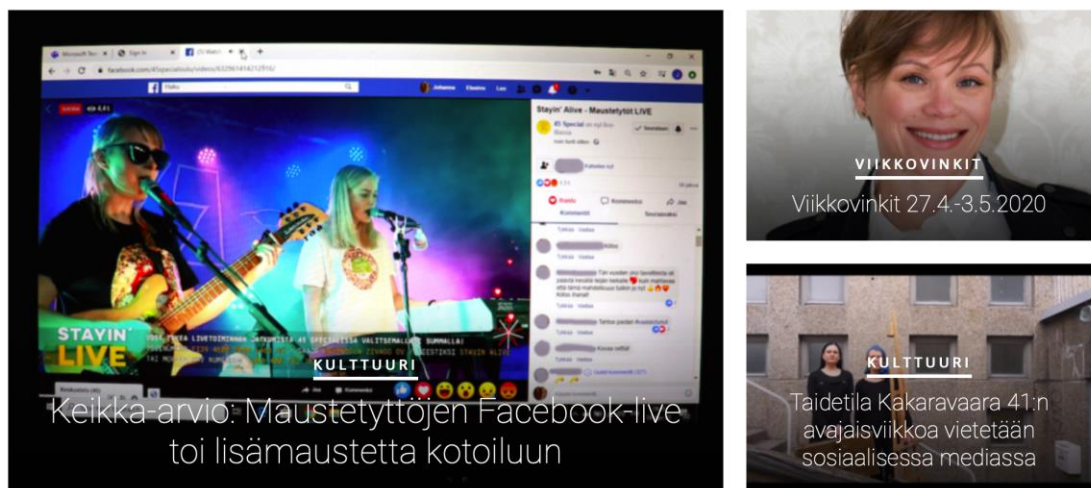
same time wore people out. Most people working in Torikokous had families, which meant economically unsustainable project forced people to seek employment elsewhere. (MacGilleon 2016.)

5.1.2 Kaupunni

In MacGilleon's master's thesis (2016), he studied that Kaupunni covered mostly local culture topics. The locality was present geographically as the interviews and topics were written from Oulu perspective. The people interviewed are from Oulu or live there, the events take place in Oulu, or the topic is considered from Oulu resident's perspective. Kaupunni focused in urban lifestyle, which is why MacGilleon describes Kaupunni as hyperlocal publication (Radcliffe 2012, 6) because Oulu is geographically larger area than its city area.

KAUPUNNI

Uuden aallon paikallismedia Oulusta



PICTURE 3: Screenshot of Kaupunni website in 2020.

Kaupunni's name itself is already showing its hyperlocality. The word is modern Oulu dialect for word "kaupunki", city, based on a famous mistyped graffiti "paska kaupunni" famous in Oulu centre. Oulu dialect was present also in the names of

different story types and columns. For example, “Kavulla” column is Oulu dialect for “kadulla”, in the streets.

Kaupunni aims to be a new wave urban publication for people interested in culture and urban lifestyle. In MacGilleon’s interview it is described that the makers of Kaupunni felt there was no competition for their topics. Kaleva is a large, regional newspaper covering topics from Northern Ostrobothnia region, and three local newspapers covered mostly local news. Kaupunni was founded to cover topics which others do not cover, according to the interview. The founders felt that the other medias did not cover the topics the founders would have liked to read. (MacGilleon 2016.)

In Kaupunni’s first post (2015) it is described that the three founders aimed not to make profit, but to create paying jobs for the trio running the site. The financial plan was to sell banner advertisements, but also to sell ads in subscription-based newsletter and by publishing native advertisements in co-operation with companies that share same values and outlook with Kaupunni. Native adverts on the site and on social media feed would be marked with hashtag #yhessä (together). (MacGilleon 2016.)

Kaupunni also had a crowdfunding campaign on Finnish Mesenaatti.me online service. Their aim was to collect 60 000 euros or 10 000 as minimum. However, they only received 394 euros thus failing the crowdfunding campaign. They felt that there was not enough effort to promote the campaign thus it did not receive enough attention online. (MacGilleon 2016, 43–44.)

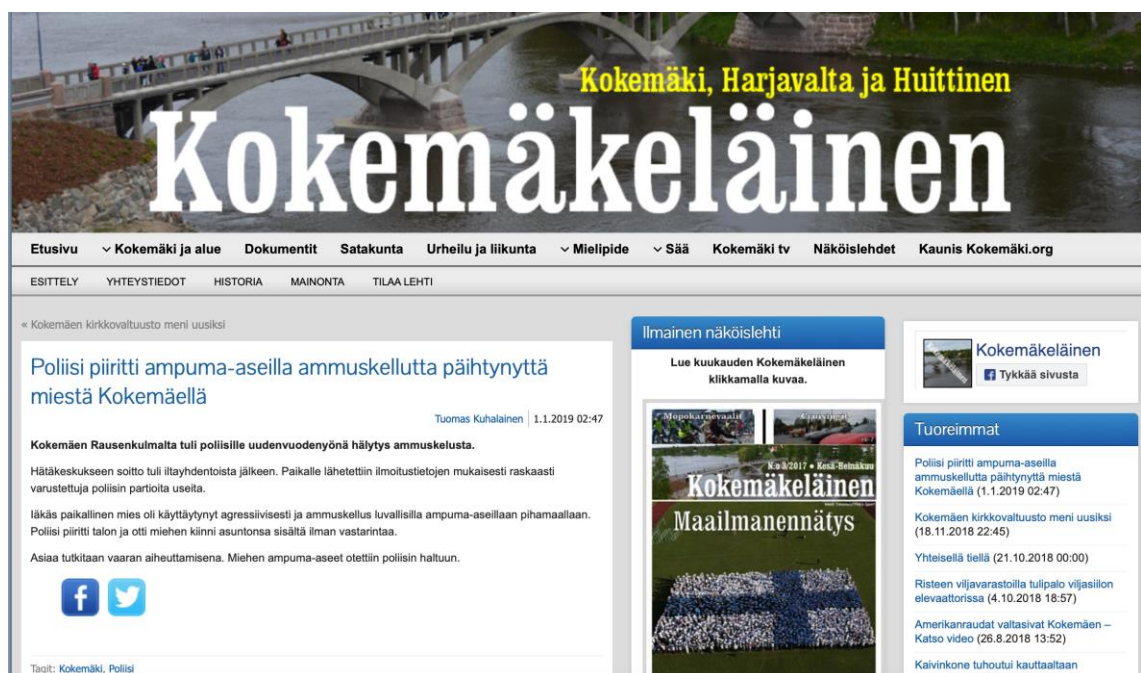
Kaupunni also has planned to fund its publishing by applying for scholarships, and by selling Kaupunni products such as Oulu-themed colouring book and other items. (MacGilleon 2016, 43–44.)

Kaupunni is still active and publishing articles on its website.

5.1.3 Kokemäkeläinen

Kokemäkeläinen is a true example of a local resident without journalism background to found a local news publication. In 2013, then 12-year-old Tuomas Kuhalainen started Kokemäkeläinen newspaper and kokemakelainen.net website to publish news articles about events that took place in Kokemäki, Harjavalta and Huittinen area. (Pelkonen 2015.)

Kuhalainen printed a newspaper by every two weeks and published articles also on the website. Kuhalainen spent days at school, then used his spare time to be the editor-in-chief of his publication. (Pelkonen 2015.)



PICTURE 4: Kokemäkeläinen published news with hyperlocal interest.

According to Kuhalainen (Arola 2015) the website was clicked approximately 10 000 times per month.

Kokemäkeläinen sold advertisement slots on both printed paper and on the website. Kokemäkeläinen print paper was delivered in Kokemäki, Harjavalta and Huittinen areas, but in Helsingin Sanomat interview (Tyttö 2015) Kuhalainen said the printed paper had “handful” of subscribers.

In interview with Journalisti (Arola 2015), Kuhalainen said the income from advertisements and subscription covered the expenses of making the paper.

Kuhalainen said that once he turned 15, he would register a company to publish Kokemäkeläinen.

Currently the latest published article on Kokemäkeläinen website is from January 2019.

6 WAYS TO FUND INDEPENDENT LOCAL NEWS

Founding independent news sites is important for democracy. Journalism has become the fourth estate which acts as the watchdog for government. Having many voices on the market serves the citizens as more perspectives are available on topics. (Kunelius 2009.)

There might be cases where smaller and remote cities or towns don't have proper news coverage on their local government. This might happen because there are no hyperlocal or local newspaper, and larger municipal newspapers don't cover the areas news often enough. Lack of news from the community limits people's ability to be active citizens and be informed on decisions that affect their lives.

6.1 Advertisement

As mentioned in chapter 3, advertising has been a core source of income for media companies in many ways.

However, advertising industry has developed as has media itself, creating new forms of marketing which can be utilized in creating a media outlet.

6.1.1 Banner advertisement

The first so called banner ad was published in 1994 by American telecommunications company AT&T. The banner ad on HotWired.com included a text "You will click here" or "Have you ever clicked your mouse right here". 44% of those who saw the banner actually clicked it. (Lafrance 2017.)

That ad and its conclusions lead to the revolution of online advertising and banner advertising has been visible on websites to this day. (Lafrance 2017.)

Banner advertisement is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as follows: an advertisement that appears across the top of a page on the internet or in a newspaper.

Banner advertisement is similar to advertisement in newspapers as there are slots on paper where companies can have their advertisements to be seen, and it works in similar way on the internet.

One challenge in selling banner advertisements online is to make sure their visibility to viewers is secured, but so that banner advertisements don't take too much space and attention from the actual content. For example, Finnish news site MTVuutiset.fi calculates viewability, click rate and customer satisfaction of the website's use to adjust their banner advertisement sales. (Ruuth 2019.)

There are two major issues to take into consider when reaching for income with banner advertisement.

The easiest way to get banner advertisement on the website is to activate them automatically if one's publishing platforms enables it. Wordpress has several plugins for that (wpbeginner 2019) and other sites have similar solutions that work with Google Ads.

However, seeing random advertisement can seem distracting in the eyes of the audience, and this is especially a risk if the content is (hyper)local journalism. Banner advertisement tend to become beneficial only with high visitor rates as their value generates by clicks. Less clicks can be anticipated if the ads on the site don't match the audience's expectations. (Peterson 2019.)

The click rate varies from industry to industry, but according Volovich (2019) the rates varied between 0,37 per cent and 2,19 per cent in 2018.

Finnish pioneer journalists-turned-bloggers Satu Rämö and Hanne Valtari wrote in their book *Unelmahommissa* (2017), *In a dream job* in English, that they consider banner advertising unbeneficial as they don't turn to revenue unless traffic is large and people tend to use browser plugins that block banner advertisements on websites. However, they still have them as banner advertisement is most used form of advertisement on the internet and they are budget-friendly to both publisher and the advertiser. (Rämö & Valtari 2017, 269–270.)

Rämö and Valtari write that they still sometimes do sell banner advertisements themselves, making a contract directly with a company. This way they have control over the products advertised in the banners thus making the banners more relevant to the audience that visit the site with certain expectations of its content. (Rämö & Valtari 2017, 269–270.)

6.1.2 Native advertisement

“Firstly, native advertising is always advertising, not intended to bamboozle the consumer into the publisher’s contents (Mäkinen 2016).”

Mäkinen (2016) writes that the aim of native advertising is to offer consumers entertainment and information in forms of narratives, and by attracting customers’ attention the advertiser can introduce their products in relevant contexts.

In native advertising, the publishing platform is important to the advertiser because they want to reach certain target groups, and the style of the media platform affects the style of native advertising also. (Mäkinen 2016.)

It’s become common in Finland that companies start to publish their own media to promote their brands in form of infotainment. However, native advertising can be found on newspapers too, as many papers’ circulation reach many types of audience segments. (Tuomivaara 2015.)

It’s still important to remember that the native advertisement is advertising and not journalistic content (Mäkinen 2016). Finland’s Consumer Protection Act states that consumers have right to know clearly when they are exposed to marketing content and that the marketing content must be correct. Misleading information and untruthful content are against the law. (Finlex 2008.)

In native advertisement, the native looking advertise piece is paid by the advertiser. Advertorial is a similar case where the advertiser, for example, lends a product for the media for its content and although favors and material are exchange, there’s no money transaction. (Farnworth 2014.)

However, Consumer Protection Act still forces to disclose ads. Finnish Council for Mass Media also investigates possible breaches of good professional practice in case non-disclosed advertorials. (CMM 2008.)

6.2 Subscription system by crowdfunding

As mentioned in the history chapter, subscriptions have been the most important source of income for Finnish media outlets throughout the history. In the past, subscribing to a newspaper meant that one pays to receive a printed paper delivered to one's home – nowadays accompanied by access to papers' digital platforms.

Starting work in indie journalism online removes the necessity to cover printing costs, but there are plenty of ways to set up a subscription mechanism online to receive income for one's work.

6.2.1 Crowdfunding by Mesenaatti service

Mesenaatti is the first online crowdfunding service in Finland and currently country's largest. It was founded in 2012. (Mesenaatti 2012.)

Multiple independent journalism projects have received funding from Finns via Mesenaatti.

The first Finnish media ever to receive crowdfunding through the service was Huili magazine, which focuses on ecological lifestyle. The magazine was originally owned by energy company Kraft&Kultur, but the company decided not to publish the paper anymore in 2012. A new, independent company was founded to publish Huili, and it received 9355 euros from its Mesenaatti campaign – the original goal was to receive 5000 euros. (Mesenaatti 2013, Huili 2016.)

6.2.2 Patreon

Patreon is a crowdfunding service founded in 2013 in USA (Hern 2018).

The service was founded because the founders Jac Conte and Sam Yam wanted to create a way to monetize the connection between Youtubers (people who create content on regular basis on the video service) and their fans. It has since evolved to be a platform for variety of content creators from web comic creators to writers like Jordan Peterson. (Hern 2018.)

Patreon allows user to give access to published content however user decides in settings. For example, some content might be restricted to “higher-tier” subscribers who donate more, some may be public for all. (Patreon 2020.)

However, because Finnish Money Collection Act (Finlex 2006) requires the transaction to be complete – one should receive compensation for the money given – it’s important to make sure the setup is legal in Finland: those who pay must have subscriber-only product in return. (Minilex.)

The advantage of Patreon compared to other online crowdfunding services is that it provides continuing transaction model opposed to one-time donations provided by the other services.

6.3 Grants

One way to finance independent journalism is by applying for grants from public or private funders.

For example, private foundation The Finnish Culture Foundation supports culture, arts and even news as long as the project meets the assessed criteria for a grant. The Finnish Culture Foundation has both central fund and regional funds, the latter is to support local projects. (FCF 2020.)

The Finnish Culture Foundation Pirkanmaa fund granted 15 000 euros to Reunamedia to make a documentary film about Tampere region-based hardcore punk band Abduktio. Reunamedia received also 20.000 euros from private Åkerlund Foundation in 2015 to launch the project.

There are many foundations and funders which can be potential funders for independent journalism. Online database service Aurora – www.aurora-tietokanta.fi – provides an easy-to-use interface to search for open applications and registering to the service lets user to receive email notifications when certain funders open their application periods.

However, applying for grants can be hard work especially if one writes application letters for multiple foundations. Kaupunki's founder felt that working with applications, Excel files and organizing everything is such time-consuming work there should be one person or employee focusing only in those, letting others focus more on creating content. (Macgilleon 2016, 96.)

7 WAYS TO FUND LIVING AS AN INDIE JOURNALIST

In order to make a living of working as an indie journalist, one must decide the form the work is done in. An enthusiast could work as indie journalist without registering a company or an organization, but it becomes legally hard to get income since it usually requires legal work.

There are multiple ways to arrange one's employment and each have their own legal aspects. In this chapter I will go through the options that we considered as options in Reunamedia, and what forms other example projects decided on, but will not go deeper into the legal aspects as they vary a lot depending on the details how a project would be organized in different occasions.

7.1 Entrepreneurship

The Finnish Patent and Registration Office (2020) is the institution where one registers a new company or a new organization (called TFRPO from now on).

They have provided a clear sheet of information on different types of entrepreneurship models in Finland, what each mean for the founder and what responsibilities the founder and others involved may have – and what type of capital requirements there are.

There are more types of entrepreneurship available in Finland, but these two types are the most common ones used by individuals or small groups, and they were the ones considered by Reunamedia after receiving consultation from experts in the field.

7.1.1 Private entrepreneur

If one works alone, the easiest solution is to register as a private entrepreneur (TFRPO 2020): it's the way for independent entrepreneurs who sell their skills in their fields of work. It's the most common form of entrepreneurship among freelance journalists in Finland (Freet.fi 2020).

Registering as a private requires only one person and 60 euros for Trade Register handling free to start up a private trading business (TFRPO 2019a).

According to Accounting Act (1997), the law requires all entrepreneurs to arrange accounting accordingly. Private trader is allowed to keep single-entry bookkeeping, which requires less details of transactions than double-entry bookkeeping – however, if a private trader's profit exceed 100.000 euros and the revenue is larger than 200.000 euros, double-entry bookkeeping is required.

7.1.2 Limited liability company

Registering a limited liability company (LLC) was one option we discussed with people involved in Reunamedia. LLC is a good option in case there are multiple people involved in doing indie journalism and trying to make some revenue with it.

To start up an LLC, the group must enclose a board for the company, a managing editor and an auditor for TFRPO, and how will the company deal with shares. There are many ways to organize an LLC and further instructions are found on TFRPO website. The registering fee is 380 euros. (TFRPO 2019b.)

There are many differences in legal aspects towards financial responsibilities in LLCs compared to working as private entrepreneur. A private entrepreneur is personally liable for company's debts with all personal assets, but in LLC the company is the legal entity responsible for its debts with its assets. (Suomi.fi 2020.)

In LLC, it's easier for multiple persons to run a business and it enables hiring people in case the company succeeds well.

However, in LLC there are more complex legal responsibilities regarding employees, such as organizing health care, report wages and employer's contributions and many more. (Vero.fi 2020.)

7.2 Association

Reunamedia was registered as an association, and so were the other projects used as an example in this thesis and in Macgilleon's master's thesis (2016).

It was an easy solution as there were multiple people involved, it allowed applying for grants, have a mechanism to organize finances and assets and to make legal contracts, for example hiring a project-based web designer.

Unlike other journalism associations formed around indie news sites, Reunamedia was registered and accepted as a non-profit organization.

As the name suggests a non-profit organization legally binded to a non-profit purpose. A non-profit organization must set its rules to promote ethical, spiritual, material or societal good for citizens. Reunamedia promoted press freedom and provided information without paywalls, free to everyone, which was accepted as a non-profit cause. Compared to other forms of associations, it lessened the restrictions regardin taxation, such as value-added taxation. However, Reunamedia could not create revenue or profit and money that came had to be invested or used in ways provided in the rules of association. (TFPRO 2020c.)

It takes at least three persons to start an association.

Having a non-profit organization made it easier for Reunamedia to apply for grants, as the purpose of Reunamedia's work was detailed already for the TFPRO and we had a bank account for an association to keep proper accounting for the use of grant money.

7.3 Cooperative

One option to organize work in Reunamedia was to register a cooperative. It is considered a combination of entrepreneurship and association as it emphasizes collectiveness.

Finland is considered to be the “most cooperative country in the world” as there were over 4 million memberships in Finnish cooperatives in 2011 and they had a total turnover of over 30 billion euros. (Pellervo 2020a.)

This is due to the fact that Finnish agriculture has been organized traditionally in producer cooperatives. There are also banking cooperatives and consumer cooperatives that are popular in Finland. However, the cooperative as a business model has become popular also in creative sector as people who do their work as freelancers could come together and register a cooperative. (Pellervo 2020b.)

Cooperative Center Pellervo (2020b) describes cooperatives in following way:

“A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social and/or cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise. Its purpose is to offer to its member’s services and commodities as affordably as possible and to secure the members well-being.

It is an economical approach based on equality and justice which signifies that it has a democratic governance system. In the co-operative model the service-users own the service-providers.”

A cooperative allows a group of people to work normally as freelancers through the cooperative “company” but instead of being legally seen as entrepreneurs, they are treated as employees for the cooperative.

We in Reunamedia considered this option because many of us did freelance work aside of working in Reunamedia, so this form of business model would’ve allowed that perfectly and it was considered a positive thing to be legally recognized as employees instead of entrepreneurs.

The board could emphasize in cooperative’s rules that the purpose of the cooperative is to publish an indie journalism publication as well as support the memrs’ economic well-being.

8 TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR INDIE JOURNALISM

Journalism itself does not require much: one must be eager to talk to people, to learn about different topics and have patience to put all pieces together.

However, when setting up a publication to inform people, there are certain technical requirements to help the process itself, to record necessary elements for the story and to have them available for people to read.

I am not going into details of which gear specifically are needed but rather what types of tools should be considered. For example, there are a variety of digital cameras from multiple manufacturers in many different price ranges so it all comes down to one's budget in the end.

The classic combo of having a pencil and a notebook is an essential part of journalism. But for technical suggestions for setting up a workflow for indie journalism, the gear equipped by Reunamedia will be used as an example.

8.1 Computer and internet connection

Having access to a computer is a must in digital workflow. It is needed to access internet services and it's a key element in setting up a website for publishing stories. Websites will be discussed later in this chapter.

With a computer, whether it is a laptop or a desktop, one is able to use software to write text, edit and store photos and video, and by accessing internet it serves as a tool to search and find information.

In Reunamedia, no shared computers were bought since everyone had their own laptop computers which they could use to work on their articles and material.

The need for internet bandwidth depends on one's needs, but, for example, most SIM card deals for smartphones include a reliable enough internet speed to both upload and download information and smartphone internet connection can be shared with any modern computers.

8.2 Camera

Reunamedia owned a small DSLR camera with a various of lenses. Some of the people involved were already working in the field of photojournalism and had their own DSLR cameras and lenses they used for their work. However, having a DSLR which could be used to take photos for the articles were considered mandatory as DSLRs provide better image quality than smartphones.

Smartphones can too be used to take pictures and photos. A smartphone can be an excellent choice when trying to keep low profile for example in public spaces, or when it is the only camera available.

Some members in Reunamedia also used specific video cameras for video work. Many DSLRs can record video, but camcorders might have specific features which ease shooting video – for example have better battery solutions for longer recording periods.

8.3 Audio

Sometimes it is great to have an interview recorded, for example to get the quotes right or to secure the fact that a discussion took place.

Smartphones have built-in recording applications which can be used to record interviews or other audio relevant to the journalism process.

Reunamedia owned also a specific recorder with XLR audio inputs which are used to attach professional microphones. A specific recorder might also have audio mixing features, such as a limiter that prevents sudden loud moments from clipping and distorting the audio.

A specific recorder paired with microphones are also great if the audio is needed in most clean manner possible. This might mean recording audio for a podcast, or if the audio is synced to a video.

Reunamedia also owned a shotgun microphone which is very directional and used to boom interviewees – meaning that someone could point the microphone towards them while they speak but the microphone does not have to be close to the speaker’s mouth to get good audio levels.

There are also microphones that can be paired with smartphones. For example, a lavalier microphone that can be attached to interviewee’s clothes thus getting good audio signal can be used in sync in video but also to use it for podcasting.

8.4 Website, the publishing platform

Because we in Reunamedia wanted our reporting to reach people, it was important to have a website that has a relevant domain name and a platform that can be modified easily with content management system (CMS), that are also used in blogs which can be updated with posts.

According to Tech Radar staff writer Jonas DeMuro (2020), the most popular options for blogging platforms are Blogger, Wordpress, Jekyll, Tumblr and Typepad.

These sites provide an easy-to-setup platform for a constantly updating website, a blog, which a news site resembles too. The website needs to be easily updateable once a story is ready to be published. They also provide assignable categories for posts, which lets one easily create sections for different topics.

Both Blogger and Wordpress offer different website templates so no coding experience is needed in starting point. They also have their own domain platforms, so it is easy to register and setup a blog site in both services. However, Wordpress can be installed in any other hosting sites and it provides more flexibility in website’s design and later monetization.

Reunamedia’s website was built on Webhook platform as we had invested in hiring a freelancer web designer to build a custom solution for us. What it allowed was more flexible design in advertisement banner placing and introducing better layouts for articles and multimedia content.

9 DISCUSSION

The aim of this thesis was to find solutions to fund independent journalism in Finland. There are plenty of ways to make local indie journalism profitable, but it also demands a lot of work.

In all example cases aside Reunamedia, the main difficulty has been the time consumed by working on grant applications, marketing and negotiating advertisements and to create content in the same time.

That is due to having a small organization, or yet working alone.

However, multiple options exist, and many people have tried to combine different solutions providing also positive examples.

There is hope that profitable combinations are found eventually, because local journalism has been around for centuries and most likely will be present in the future also.

What was learned during 4 years of Reunamedia was the importance of courage in economic sense. We are lucky to be employed in media field as respected professionals and Reunamedia played a big part in it. However, we eventually ended up joining large media companies with established positions in Finnish media economy thus providing better economic stability to ourselves.

Had we enough courage to build Reunamedia, there could be a chance Reunamedia was our employer today.

But for example, in Kokemäkeläinen's case, a young boy with ambition could provide local residents with news relevant in their daily local lives and manage to get the country's attention for his work. It encourages that by finding and connecting with the audience, and providing relevant content to them, it is possible to secure some form of local journalism with relatively low expenses and a paycheck for the work done.

First, it's important to know what journalism is and how it is produced so that people know they are reading reliable journalism. One must study the methods and ways where to search for information and how to make interviews.

Second, it's important to understand how media economy works and what are the options in setting up a business, association or cooperative. It's also recommended to prepare to sell advertisement, or to write grant applications, or to study forms of online advertising to make sure there is a plan to secure economical aspect of the publication.

Third, it is important to make list of needed equipment to be used in doing journalism pieces. Whether it is text, photographs, video, they all need some sort of equipment so that the information can be stored and published.

After that, it's a matter of enthusiasm and encourage to provide people with information of their local events and law-making that affects the lives of the local people.

What can be seen from examples from Reunamedia and for example Torikokous, the biggest challenges in setting up a profitable indie journalism publication are the amount of work that is needed to maintain different sources of income, and the courage it takes to keep continuing the work which relies positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and working through the uncertainty the project might create in life.

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