

Lesson 2

Data Journalism Practices

This lesson discusses the uses of data journalism through practices and initiatives undertaken in three diverse societies. The experiences of India and Turkey highlight the documentation of land conflicts and death of workers, while the Latin American case covers the narratives of women and the minorities. Data journalism works best when there is a collaborative engagement between relevant sectors especially journalists, researchers, scholars, activists, and development workers.

Objectives

At the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

1. Describe the importance and uses of data journalism;
2. Discuss practices that strengthen the thrust of data journalism; and
3. Reflect on the potential of data journalism in covering the plight of the marginalized.

Duration: 2 hours

Case 1. India

Documenting Land Conflicts (Shrivastava & Paliwal, 2021)

Why data journalism?

- To document land conflicts and make sense of the relationship between land conflicts and India's society.
- There are many documented cases of land forcefully acquired by state and private entities, communities displaced, and people killed due to struggles for land.
- Stories of land conflicts are hard to sell; the mainstream media only reports on highly selected cases; reporters and editors look at stories of land conflicts as "isolated incidents."

The Land Conflict Watch

- In November 2016, the authors launched Land Conflict Watch, a research-based data journalism project that aims to document the cases and stories of land conflicts in the country.
- The project defined land conflict as “any situation that has conflicting demands or claims over the use or ownership of land, and where communities are one of the contesting parties” (p. 85).
- The project developed a documentation methodology in partnership with academics working on land governance, and put together a network of researchers and journalists tasked to document land conflicts in their respective regions.
- As of September 2018, the project had about 35 journalists and researchers and documented 640 cases of land conflicts.

Documentation practices

- The project coordinates with local activists, community organizations, and lawyers to map the cases of land conflict.
- The cases and stories of land conflicts are recorded in written or audio-visual format; the materials used can be in various forms including news reports, village assembly resolutions, records of public consultation for development projects, complaints submitted by people to government authorities, police records or court documents.
- Researchers file the land conflicts data into the Land Conflict website. The compiled data are profiled on the project’s portal and social media to give heads-up to national journalists and researchers.
- The project team collaborates with journalists for investigative reports, and with national and international media to get these reports published.
- The team also conducts trainings to familiarize other journalists with the project database.
- University students and non-profit organizations use the project’s data.

Case 2. Turkey

Documenting the Death of Workers (Dağ, 2021)

Why data journalism?

- To document the working condition of workers in Turkey.
- Given the discrepancies on worker unionization and scarcity of data on workers' deaths, the aim is to document such stories and make them accessible to the public.

The Open Database

- The author together with a programmer and an editor launched Open Database of Deceased Workers in Turkey hosted by the data journalism program Dağ Medya that gathers workers' data from multiple sources, verifies them, and makes them publicly accessible.
- The goal is to raise awareness about the death of workers and recognize in public the victims and their poor working condition. The database records at least 130 deaths per month due to a variety of causes.

Documentation practices

- The project uses maps, graphs, and data in various formats.
- It continues to report on workers' deaths through media monitoring.
- The project team collaborates with non-government organizations that have existing sets of data sourced from different materials.
- Amid challenges in terms of access to data, the project makes the case for collaborative open data-sharing practices.

Case 3. Latin America

Data Projects with Women and Minorities (Vaca Muñoz, 2021)

Why data journalism?

- This will facilitate the development of digital media projects by and for women and marginalized communities in Latin America.

- Some regions and places in Latin America where forced displacement of children and teenage pregnancy are documented are difficult to access.

Chicas Poderosas (Powerful Girls)

- A transnational network of journalists, designers and developers working for digital media projects featured women and marginalized communities.
- Interdisciplinary and participatory research are used to explore cultural heritage, identity, appropriation of territories, and recognition of vulnerable women and the marginalized (p. 344).

Methods for facilitating participation

- Collaborative workshops on data journalism and associated digital media practices are conducted through the methods of analogue data collection and analogue data visualization.
- Analogue data collection uses different exploratory data-gathering activities through drawings, pictures, photographs, and posters to surface the participants' views and experiences on violence.
- Analogue data visualization uses empathetic design materials like scissors, papers, stickers, and balloons to facilitate the sharing of sensitive information among the workshop participants. Sensitive information includes visualized experiences on crime and violence.

References

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- Vaca Muñoz, E. A. (2021). Organizing data projects with women and minorities in Latin America. In L. Bounegru & J. Gray (Eds.), *The data journalism handbook: Towards a critical data practice* (pp. 345–347). Amsterdam University Press.

Further Readings

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