

# MEDIATION



Biannual  
publication  
of Fondation  
Hirondelle

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH INFORMATION AND DIALOGUE



## Helping to build peaceful societies

For 23 years, Fondation Hirondelle has been providing information to populations faced with crises, by creating or supporting media and teams of journalists on the ground. In such contexts, where the veracity of information can be vital, we pay particular attention to the verification of facts. But is that our only role? Faced with new forms of propaganda, competition from social media and the media's economic model in crisis, journalists need to better explain the specificities of their profession and the utility of their mission. Drawing on our experience in crisis and transition countries, we are launching "Mediation" to help feed this global debate on the role of media and information. This twice-yearly publication aims to be a place for discussion between specialists, actors and partners working in media and conflict resolution. In this first edition, we bring some analyses and sharing of experiences which highlight that responsible journalism can help manage crises and build more peaceful societies.

**Nicolas Boissez**  
Head of Communication  
and External Relations

*Radio Ndeke Luka reporting in Bangui, Central African Republic © Marc Ellison / Fondation Hirondelle*

## WHAT IS JOURNALISM FOR?

**Faced with record levels of mistrust, notably in the oldest democracies, journalists must succeed in convincing people of their social utility. Paradoxically, their utility is perhaps better recognized in countries that are less saturated with information.**

Why does journalism need to demonstrate its utility? The question may seem out of place, or provocative. Access to information, along with the right to seek and impart information and ideas, is recognized as an inalienable and universal right under Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations in 1948. Throughout the world, the level of public trust in journalists and media is at a historic low -- 43 % on average, and as low as 31-33% in some places like Australia, Japan, France and the United Kingdom where the media is nevertheless very structured. Confusion between information, propaganda, rumour and opinion has never been so great, including in the richest coun-

tries that have the best education systems. Social media have given the illusion of free information for everyone that does not need professionals to produce and verify it.

Given this situation, many journalists are also asking themselves about their responsibilities. They see Donald Trump's election to the US presidency and the Brexit vote as key examples of popular votes

that were not enlightened by knowledge of the facts that the media are supposed to relay. In this context, several ideas have emerged to help restore the legitimacy that journalism seems to have lost in the eyes of the public. Ranging from "constructive journalism" put forward by the "Constructive Institute" and the university of Aarhus (Denmark) to a "mission for journalism in times of crisis" proposed by British newspaper *The Guardian*, they aim to revitalize the media by revising their ethics. This debate is very current in the countries of the North saturated with information, but is it destined to remain there? Wouldn't the debate be greatly enriched by media experiences from societies where pluralist, factual information remains rare, even precious, such as in countries in crisis or democratic transition? ■

## Interview

## A CALL FOR “CONSTRUCTIVE JOURNALISM”

**Ulrik Haagerup, former Executive Director of News at the Danish public television, founded the Constructive Institute in September 2017, so as “to combat trivialization and degradation of journalism”. He gives his view on what has to change in journalism today.**

**In September 2017, you founded the Constructive Institute<sup>(1)</sup> in Aarhus (Denmark), an organization that lies at the heart of the “constructive journalism movement”. How would you define “constructive journalism”? To what kind of problems is it an answer?**

**Ulrik Haagerup:** Constructive journalism is a corrective to the mainstream culture of media that is used to telling stories on how things are going bad, stories that will generate clicks, stories that will win prizes and acknowledgement by other journalists. “If it bleeds, it leads” is a famous saying in US newsrooms. Over the last decades, the media have mainly focused on conflicts and crises, and to some extent thriven on their coverage. Just as there are “war entrepreneurs”

who start conflicts and have more economic interest in prolonging than winning them, so there may also be “war journalism” that permanently meets a public demand for sensational news and can be easily marketed. When I was Executive Director of News at the Danish public television (Danish Broadcasting Corporation or DR), I used to speak with many different people, who were all asking me something like: “why do you give so negative an image of the world?” I was first surprised, because we did not intend do so, and then I began to scan DR news. Indeed, what I saw was mainly train accidents, murders, weather catastrophes... We were used to sending crews to cover conflicts in Africa for instance, but hardly to cover various aspects of the fast-improving living standards on the continent. Our stories were exact, but put together they were depressing. And if most media behave so, that creates a growing gap between the reality and its perception by their audience. Even if in many ways the world is improving (average life expectancy has never been so high, fewer and fewer people die in conflicts, etc.), people don’t want to follow news any more. They feel that the world is falling apart, that they should read something more comforting on social networks, and that a good solution may be war. This situation is a tragedy for democracy.

**The title of your book, “Constructive News: How to Save the Media and Democracy with the Journalism of Tomorrow” (Aarhus University Press, 2017), is ambitious. How can “constructive news” save democracy?**

When I was a young journalist three decades ago, reading the media frequently was considered a mark of civilization. Now people distrust the media and the institutions at large: according to the last Edelman Trust Barometer 2018 (see page 3-4), only 43% of people worldwide trust the media, and if we look in detail, this figure is still lower in the main democracies: 42% in the US and Germany, 33% in France, 32% in UK and in Japan, 31% in Australia... Only 43% of people worldwide also trust their government, while trust in business (52%) and NGOs (53%) is a bit higher. When such a high degree of distrust towards democratic institutions is reached, people are ready for populism, as Donald Trump’s election and the Brexit vote have shown. Journalists cannot change the institutions, but they can change themselves. Now it’s time to listen to people more and to foster trust, for instance by covering how the problems we used to cover can be solved. Constructive journalism intends to do so.

**Constructive journalism is not about giving “good” news**

*Ulrik Haagerup at Global Constructive Journalism Conference in Aarhus, October 2017 © Constructive Institute*

(1) Founded in September 2017 by Ulrik Haagerup and Maarja Kadajane, Constructive Institute (“Journalism for tomorrow”) is an independent training and research organization based at Aarhus university (Denmark). It aims to help journalists and news organizations to apply “constructive reporting” through providing access to a best practices portal, a fellowship program, relevant training, and initiating rigorous academic works.

**We want to emphasize reporting that is more accurate, balanced and solution-focused**

We want to combat trivialization and degradation of journalism by emphasizing reporting that is more accurate, balanced and solution-focused. We want to concentrate on tomorrow and to inspire society, which is only possible if we manage to introduce a feedback mechanism with society.

**Could you give some examples? Which media actions have you already undertaken through the Constructive Institute?**

Let's mention two of them. First, while distrust of politicians and media is also high in Denmark, we've organized long discussions between leaders of political parties represented in the Danish Parliament and editors of the Danish media. So far, both categories of actors have expressed frustration. The politicians are frustrated that they have access to media only when they are polemical and not when they are arguing their proposals, and the media are frustrated at getting mainly PR speeches with little political substance. Now, how do we get out of this situation? We decided to conduct public meetings together, in order to find ways to improve media coverage of political life in Denmark. A second action focuses on post-conflict media coverage: after covering conflicts, how do we maintain media attention on recovering societies, processes of peace making, building security, improving health-care...? This action is led by our International office in Geneva.

**Isn't there a risk that "constructive journalism" in crisis contexts would tend to minimize "bad" news which is still part of the reality their audiences are facing?**

Constructive journalism is not about giving "good" news: once again, accuracy is one of our key principles. Besides, we are absolutely aware that climate change, the collapse of biodiversity and terrorist attacks worldwide are major problems the world is currently facing. But much media space is already given to terrorist attacks. If we give it still more, won't it contribute to feed the feeling of fear terrorists precisely want to spread in society? That's the kind of situation we try to assess.

**In your opinion, what is today the main responsibility of a journalist?**

In a recent article entitled "A mission for journalism in a time of crisis", Katharine Viner, chief editor of British daily *The Guardian*, calls the media to "develop ideas that help improve the world, not just critique it", and "to use clarity and imagination to build hope". These principles, accuracy

and search for solutions, are good ones. Based on them, it's possible, like *The Guardian* and other innovative European media do, to publish long investigative stories that are read until the end by a large audience interested in reading a full article, not only in clicking a title. This way of publishing is good for business. It's good for journalism. And it's good for democracy. ■

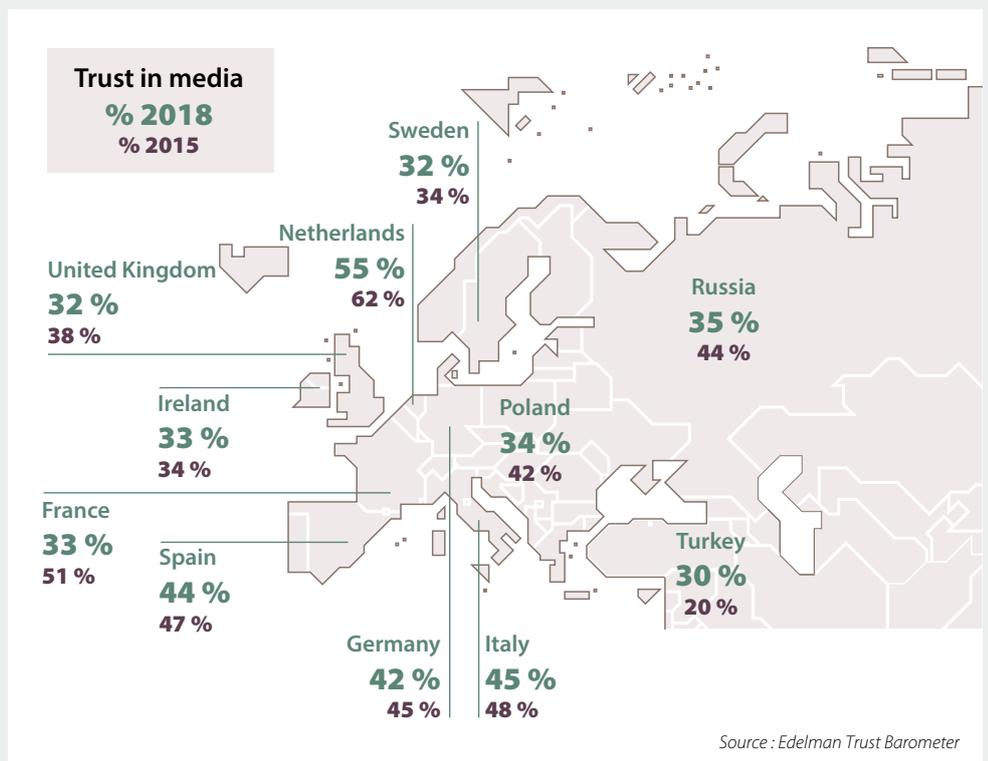
**The Guardian: "A mission for journalism in a time of crisis"**

In "A mission for journalism in a time of crisis", a long article published in November 2017, Katharine Viner, chief editor of British daily *The Guardian*, depicts the main missions of journalism since the early 19th century in England. After twenty years of digital revolution including ten years of social networks, she questions the media ability to go on challenging powers and being trusted by the public. As a conclusion, she writes:

"We must 'live the questions now': constantly examining our assumptions, our biases, how the world is changing, what it means. To do this, we will follow five principles: we will develop ideas that help improve the world, not just critique it; we will collaborate with readers, and others, to have greater impact; we will diversify, to have richer reporting from a representative newsroom; we will be meaningful in all of our work; and, underpinning it all, we will report fairly on people as well as power and find things out. (...)

It is a searching time to be an editor, a journalist and a citizen – but also a privilege to be grappling with these questions, with a possibility of helping to turn this era into something better, to turn this moment to 'beneficial account', as our founding manifesto proclaimed. And to do what has been the mission of the *Guardian* since 1821: to use clarity and imagination to build hope."

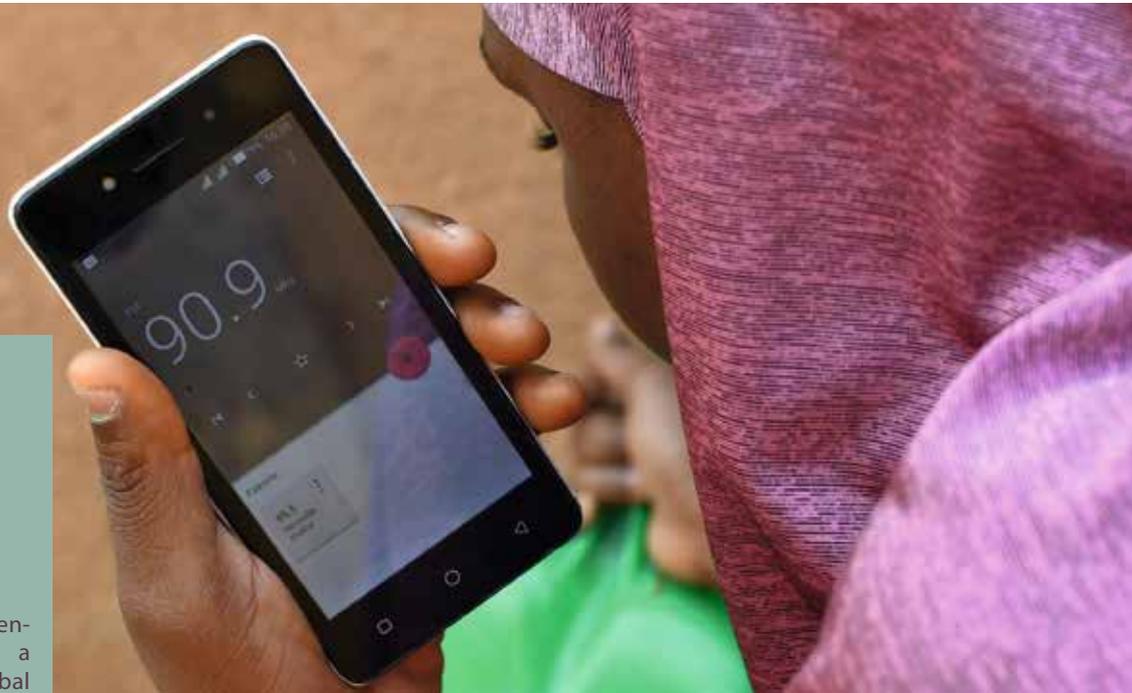
**2015-2018: Trust in media has dropped in Europe in the last 4 years**



Big Data

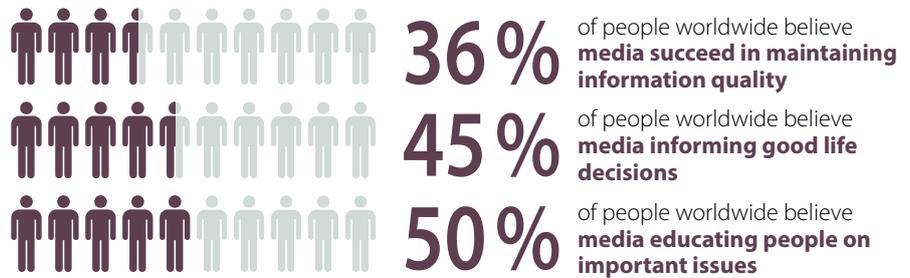
# EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER 2018: A FOCUS ON THE MEDIA

Every year since 2000, Edelman agency, based in Chicago, publishes a Trust Barometer that assesses global confidence in four kinds of institutions: governments, media, business and NGOs. The 2018 survey has been conducted in 28 countries with 1150 people aged 18 or more. At a global level, it concludes that trust in media is at a historical low level (43%). In this survey, following people's most frequent answer, media is considered at large, including newspapers, audio-visual, websites and platforms. In this context, 59% of the general population say that it is getting harder to tell if a piece of news was produced by a respected media organization, and nearly 70% worries about fake news or false information being used as a weapon. Trust in journalism (59%) remains higher than trust in platforms (51%). One remarkable result is that trust in the media is particularly low (31-42%) in most democracies, with the exception of the Netherlands (55%). In the meantime, the media is better trusted in more authoritarian regimes such as China (71%), the United Arab Emirates (56%) or Singapore (52%). ■



An inhabitant of Niamey (Niger) listening to the radio on mobile phone © Anne Mimault / Fondation Hirondelle

## Media seen as lacking in their main missions

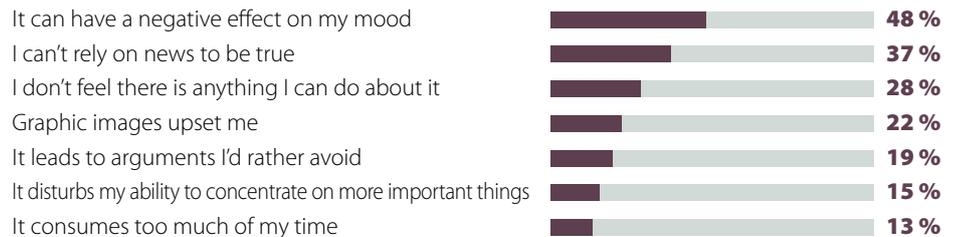


Source : Edelman Trust Barometer 2018

**50%**  
of people worldwide consume news less than weekly

Source : Edelman Trust Barometer 2018

### REASONS BEHIND NEWS AVOIDANCE



Source : Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

## News media vs Social networks



Source : Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2017

Source : Edelman Trust Barometer 2018

Our experience

IN A SOCIETY  
IN CRISIS,  
JOURNALISM  
CAN REBUILD  
LINKS



Studio Kalangou reporting in Niamey © Anne Mimault / Fondation Hironnelle



Based on 23 years of Fondation Hironnelle’s experience, CEO Caroline Vuillemin analyses what is at stake with regard to journalistic production in conflict or crisis countries.

**Fondation Hironnelle has been providing information for 23 years to populations facing crises. What do you think are the most important issues in these contexts?**

**Caroline Vuillemin:** What is most often lacking in these societies faced with major crises is reliable information, that is information which can be a reference point for everyone to take decisions in their lives when all the other institutions are weak or destroyed. So this reliable information needs to be produced, because it rarely exists despite the growing resources put into digital information access, and because it helps to rebuild the trust that these societies need. In conflict societies, the media sector tends to be fragile, fragmented and polarized like the country itself. In this context, we try to

meet the information needs, while paying attention to two constraints: the need to ensure the security of the journalists, sources and all participants in our media programmes; and the need to ensure the necessary journalistic and technical skills of the people we work with.

**To meet these needs and challenges, what are Fondation Hironnelle’s working principles?**

To ensure accessibility and balance, we work in the languages of the country, with local journalists who reflect the diversity of the countries where we work. As well as factual coverage of the news, we produce debate programmes, where a journalist facilitates a live dialogue between different actors - government, opposition, NGOs and other stakeholders, who have few other opportunities to talk to each other in an environment of trust. I would call our approach “responsible journalism”. Our first concern remains to verify the information, because in conflict zones the reliability of information can be a question of life or death. We pay close attention to the way we broadcast information about violence and armed conflicts: rather than deliver it raw, we organize a dialogue around the issues with a diversity of guests who are representative of the country’s social and political components,

***I would call our approach “responsible journalism”***

which helps to calm the worrying or divisive effect that such information can have on the listeners.

**Do you think this “responsible journalism” should go beyond strict coverage of the news so as to help people act to overcome the crises they are facing?**

I am convinced that as well as establishing the facts, the role of journalism is to increase knowledge and everyone’s means of understanding, so as to allow them to act. That is not exclusive to countries in conflict or crisis. In these contexts, on the other hand, the journalism that we practice accompanies the listeners in the form of a reassuring human presence. In the Central African Republic we hear people say: “Radio Ndeke Luka is our friend”. We make it our business to give everyone a voice, notably silent majorities such as women and young people, who are often excluded from the circles of power, and religious or ethnic minorities that are under-represented in the institutions. For example, a project that we are launching in the second half of 2018 in the Rohingya refugee camps in Bangladesh aims to support these traumatized and uprooted communities by giving them both practical information to help them in their daily lives and cultural programmes that can help them relieve their suffering and share their situation, their story with other members of community. Wherever a crisis has torn a society apart, journalism can help rebuild social ties. ■

## Eyewitness

# MEDIA PLURALISM HAS BROUGHT TUNISIANS CLOSER TO POLITICS

**Ouided Bouchamaoui** won the 2015 Nobel Peace Prize as part of the **National Dialogue Quartet in Tunisia**, of which she is part, as president of the **Tunisian Union of Industry, Commerce and Crafts**. Since November 2017, she is also a member of the Fondation Hironnelle board. Here she gives her point of view on the role of media and the democratic transition in Tunisia.



Ouided Bouchamaoui © AFP

### What role have the media played during the revolution and democratic transition in Tunisia?

**Ouided Bouchamaoui:** Three moments in time deserve to be highlighted. First the December 2010 revolt in Sidi Bouzid. Before that date, information was controlled by the authorities, and Tunisians did not dare to talk. Then the riots broke out, and social networks spread the news. Tunisians rediscovered the freedom to say what they thought and go out onto the streets to demonstrate. At that time, social media were a powerful factor for unity in Tunisia: they allowed people to access the reality, whereas other media did not talk about the riots. They also allowed people to know how the revolution was unfolding in other parts of the country.

A year later, the work of the Constituent Assembly, elected in October 2011, was followed closely by the media. Journalists, intellectuals, religious leaders, NGOs, everyone was following its work and using the media to recount the debates, give their opinions, influence the public and members of the Constituent Assembly. People disagreed about many things: the place of religion in the Constitution, the rights of women, whether the military should have a right to vote. These were all issues which, highlighted and discussed in the media, also allowed debate in the cafés, in families, and finally brought Tunisians closer to politics, the law and their institutions.

Lastly, after the assassinations of left-wing political leaders Chokri Belaïd and Mohamed Brahmi in 2013, the media were able to report on a process of "national dialogue" between political parties which was nevertheless taking place behind closed doors. Conversations between the journalists and

negotiators meant the population could be informed about the progress of discussions, so preventing the political tensions from being exacerbated in the streets.

### Has the democratic transition been accompanied by a media transition?

Certainly. Before 2011, the State media imposed one-sided coverage. Today in Tunisia there is diversity of media, especially radio and on the Internet. Everything is discussed, and political opponents are invited regularly. The social networks continue to operate, for better or worse, with a freedom of expression that sometimes includes insults, and a freedom of communication that is sometimes turned into proselytism for extremist groups. But such excesses are now controlled by the government and media regulation authorities. This is a question of learning democracy, which needs to become mature: it is better to have the possibility to abuse media than not to have any.

In this flourishing but sometimes disorganized climate, the role of the journalist, in my opinion, is to produce reliable information and transmit it to the public. Not to try and influence people, but to inform them so they can build their own vision of things and be able to make choices. ■

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**Fondation Hironnelle** is a Swiss non-profit organization which provides information to populations faced with crisis, empowering them in their daily lives and as citizens. Through our work, millions of people in war-affected countries, post-conflict areas, humanitarian crisis and societies in democratic transition have access to media that speak to them and give them a voice.

## Impressum

Mediation  
Biannual publication  
of Fondation Hironnelle

Managing Editor:  
Caroline Vuillemin

Design and editing:  
Nicolas Boissez  
Benjamin Bibas / la fabrique  
documentaire

Graphic design:  
Marek Zielinski

Translation:  
Julia Crawford

Avenue du Temple 19C  
1012 Lausanne, Suisse

hirondelle.org  
info@hirondelle.org  
T. + 41 21 654 20 20

Crédit Suisse AG  
IBAN :  
CH05 0483 5041 8522 8100 5