

1. Project overview

The Moravian-Silesian region lacks independent investigative journalism for the proper functioning of local democracy. Local media struggles due to insufficient funding, often relying on advertising from influential local business figures and non-confrontational relationships with politicians. As an alternative, we'll establish "Okraj", an investigative and analytical regional newsroom. Our focus lies not in daily news but in crafting comprehensive, contextual articles. With independence, we'll provide in-depth stories covering politics, environment, minorities, social issues and more. With expertise in innovative formats like data journalism, OSINT or podcasts we will enrich our offerings. Media literacy sessions for youth and seniors will further empower the community.

2. Who will benefit from this project?

Our target group is people like us. The inhabitants of Ostrava who live and work here, possess a genuine interest in their local surroundings and a strong desire to foster positive change within the region. Demographically speaking, they are college graduates, between the ages of 25 and 50, employed or in business, or considering leaving the region for another location. It is the Moravian-Silesian Region that has been the fastest depopulating region in the Czech Republic for many years. According to the most recent population census, in 2021 there were 314 000 people living in the region of Ostrava, of which 267 000 were of working age, between 15 and 65. There were roughly 120 000 college graduates living in the entire Moravian-Silesian region in 2018.

We are aware that this is a very large group of people. At the start, we want to target the educated population because we have a chance to reach them with our content. These individuals have the invaluable opportunity to utilise the high-quality information we provide about the region to drive active transformations in the realms of politics, economics, and social dynamics, all for the greater good of both the local population and the entire region. We estimate that we could reach about 10 000 people in Ostrava in six months. Later on, we plan to expand our reach to the entire region, which has about 1,16 million inhabitants. There are many areas within the region, such as Vítkovsko or Osoblažsko, which are not covered by the media at all.

However, our initiative also extends its benefits to underrepresented communities, notably including the region's sizable yet unfairly stereotyped Roma minority. According to various data, there are around 30 000 Roma living in Ostrava. At the same time, we want to be in contact with representatives of organisations that deal with the Roma issue in Ostrava.

We would also like to focus on the local, yet frequently overlooked seniors and youth whose perspectives and concerns we aim to spotlight. If we look at the numbers, in 2022 the average age of Ostrava residents was 43,5 years. About a fifth of people living in the third largest city in the Czech Republic are over 65. We would like to reach seniors not only through offline meetings and workshops, but also on social media. According to data from the Statistical Office in 2021, 44,4 percent of households of people over 65 have the internet at home and one third of them own a smartphone. We will give these minorities a voice in our media so that their social needs are heard.

While the crux of our journalistic efforts will be situated in the digital realm, encompassing platforms such as websites, social media networks, and podcasts, we also have tangible plans for in-person educational endeavours. These will take the form of immersive workshops for students, seniors and public, all of which will tackle pertinent subjects like regional journalism and the pervasive issue of misinformation on a localised scale, including training sessions equipping participants with skills in accessing public resources for information, understanding information laws, and working with open data, fostering proficiency in evaluating information sources.

This comprehensive project possesses the potential to foster enhanced trust in journalism, fortify democratic principles, and significantly diminish the propensity to embrace disinformation and manipulative narratives. The culmination of these effects will yield substantial benefits not only for the residents of the Moravian-Silesian Region but for the nation as a whole.

3. To what extent are these user needs under-served?

The state of regional media in the Czech Republic is not cheerful. Researcher Lenka Waschková Císařová from the Faculty of Social Studies at Masaryk University in Brno has discovered that the number of regional media outlets has significantly decreased since 2009. Her findings show that [over half of the original 60 regional newspapers vanished in the past decade](#). This is due to struggles in adapting to the digital landscape, tech giants like Google and Facebook dominating advertising, and competition from municipal bulletins. These bulletins, once informative, now act more as PR tools than journalistic sources.

Another study led by the European Federation of Journalists called "[Fact Finding Mission to Czech Republic, 7th-8th October 2019](#)" highlights tough challenges for regional media in our country. Independent and impartial private outlets are rare, often used by business figures, politicians, or as platforms for press releases. Journalists face constraints, self-censoring due to reliance on advertising. Some local sites even degrade into press release platforms. Advertisers and local figures influence content, censoring unfavourable stories.

According to the continuously updated Oasis project, the Czech Republic [currently lacks any local or hyperlocal media outlets](#). Our team is cognizant of two independent local platforms, "Boskovické Ohlasy" and "Plzeňský Apel," thanks to the Association of Regional Journalists, which focus on events in the southern and western regions of the country.

There are also no reserved frequencies for regional and local broadcasting, no law on community media, and a lack of support in the country. Researcher Václav Štětka, the author of the 2021 [Digital News Report's country page on the Czech Republic](#) and senior Lecturer in Communication and Media at Loughborough University, indicates high risk due to no legislative framework for community media and weak state support. "Information deserts" might emerge, with no independent media for local events. Support for regional/local media and specific broadcasting frequencies are absent, despite a strategic plan since 2013.

The local media in the Moravian-Silesian Region look very similar. The region lacks independent media despite local offices, facing a news desert. The media landscape includes: Moravskoslezský Deník, owned by private company Penta Investments, which

belongs to billionaire Marek Dospiva; regional division of the private media company MF DNES, now owned by billionaire Karel Pražák and last ten years by former Prime Minister and billionaire Andrej Babiš; private owned TV Polar, Czech Radio Ostrava and regional branch of Czech Television (both public service media) and private owned magazine Patriot.

Unfortunately, these entities primarily deliver daily routine news and, due to their inherent nature, are incapable of sufficiently addressing political subjects and concerns. They essentially relay information provided by politicians themselves. Patriot then relies on commercial partnerships for content creation and does not cover editorial or investigative pieces. Investigative journalism is missing in the region due to financial constraints, corporate-political dynamics, and a shift from scrutinising power.

High-calibre regional journalism is vital for democratic principles at regional levels. Because of the above and the lack of investigative journalism, the needs of people who want to stay, live and work in the region cannot be met because they have no control over the local power structures. The other groups mentioned, such as the Roma or the elderly, are not represented in the current local media, which can cause problems in terms of coexistence due to low awareness. Ethical standards guide our dedication to dependable, quality journalism.

4. Describe in detail the concrete activities and outputs or deliverables of the project.

We will adopt an innovative approach to our work based on our experience in modern journalism. The Moravian-Silesian region lacks journalistic podcasts, video production and the fusion of classic journalistic work with in-person communication with the audience. That is why we are preparing these activities and outputs:

Website Development: A high quality, user-friendly, yet minimalist website is essential to the functioning of our project if we want our readers to be willing to spend time reading our articles. We are also aware of the need for an easy to use and cyber secure editing system. Our goal is also to make the website inclusive and accessible to people with visual disabilities. Therefore, we are not underestimating this part of our project and are already looking for a capable web developer to create a customised website for us. We have already approached the non-profit organisation Česko.digital, which has the possibility to provide cooperation on a volunteer basis for non-profit projects like Okraj. If we are not able to secure a volunteer web developer by the end of September, we will pay for the website, although the investment should not exceed 2 000 €. We already have good references from our friends and former colleagues and we are in touch with a few web developers that could fulfil our needs.

Branding: Our dedicated designer will craft a compelling visual identity and branding, ensuring that our project resonates conceptually and visually with our target audience. We are already working on the branding of our project, which will be ready at the beginning of December. An experienced local graphic designer will provide Okraj media outlet with all the graphic material from the logo and font to the colour palette and social media templates. This will enable us to start promoting the project to the public from December.

Investigative and Analytical multimedia online production : We're focusing on creating 10 in-depth investigative articles that shed light on crucial regional issues. Alongside these, we're producing 3 engaging podcast episodes that provide a deep dive into thought-provoking subjects. These podcasts will also offer listeners a behind-the-scenes look at how we gather information for our articles and the inspirations driving our work, drawing from the success of news podcasts in the Czech Republic. We have a lot of experience with audio content creation. Klára works at Czech Radio and Jan completed a six-month podcast production workshop as part of his university studies.

Educational Engagements: We are committed to fostering awareness and dialogue. To this end, we will organise a series of 6 engaging lectures tailored for diverse demographics—ranging from primary and secondary school students to the elderly population at local libraries and universities of the third age. We will reach at least 200 people with our activities. This goal is easily achievable for us and will add significant value to our journalistic activities. Jan and Klára have extensive experience in delivering workshops on topics such as media education, debunking misinformation and visual manipulation using OSINT techniques, digital security and information law for the public. In the last year alone, they have provided more than twenty interactive workshops and educational activities across the Czech Republic, attended by more than 1 200 people in total.

SUSTAINABILITY

One of the main tasks of the six-month pilot project of the Okraj media outlet is to ensure that it has sufficient financial and capacity resources for long-term operation. We want to achieve financial sustainability in three ways:

1. grants,
2. major donors,
3. small donors.

We consider our content to be important for everyone and in the public interest. For that reason we want to provide it to readers without invasive ads and without paywall. We want to operate without advertising also because its prices are falling and because we see advertising by local companies as one of the culprits of the current situation of local media in the Czech Republic, as we mentioned above.

We are already in direct communication with journalism support organisations and they are interested in our efforts to create a regional media in the Moravian-Silesian region. Specifically, the organisations are the Independent Journalism Foundation (Nadační fond nezávislé žurnalistiky) and the Syndicate of Journalists (Syndikát novinářů ČR). We are also going to approach organisations at the European level, such as the European Journalism Centre or the International Press Institute. They all offer different ways of funding.

We also have a pre-agreed cooperation in the field of Solutions Journalism with Transitions, an international organisation that offers mentoring and financial support and which considers it appropriate to use this journalistic format at a regional level. In October we will also apply for financial support from the US Embassy in Prague, which announces regular grant calls.

From the beginning, our readers will be able to support our journalistic work through financial donations to a transparent bank account. We will also launch a crowdfunding campaign in April 2024 to support investigative journalism in our region. The aim will be to secure our financial autonomy at least for a year ahead, ideally the funds raised could help us expand our team with an additional journalist.

Currently, we do not have any major donor whose financial support would significantly support the functioning of the Okraj. This is also our goal over the coming months. This task will be handled primarily by the Editorial Manager, who will publish fewer journalistic articles and devote part of his working hours to actively seeking financial support.

We are aware that sustainability is not only about financial resources, but also, for example, about the topics we cover or our physical and mental capacity for long-term effective work. In terms of topics, we intend to work with the Moravian-Silesian public in the form of "public-driven journalism". We will ask our readers what they want to know about the region and what interests them. As far as our efficiency is concerned, we are not concerned with the quantity of our content, but with the quality. We will not compete with other newsrooms in daily news coverage, but will offer deeper analysis and investigation. That's why we are initially planning to publish two to three texts per month, so that we will be able to manage everything without compromising quality.

5. What impact will your project have?

One of the impacts of our project is the reinforcement of civil society, providing verified information crucial for informed decision-making and bridging the gap between ordinary citizens and local policymakers.

We have devised a comprehensive methodology for gauging the success of our initiative. This entails a multi-faceted approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative metrics. By diligently applying these diverse metrics, we aim to comprehensively assess the effectiveness and influence of our initiative, fostering continuous refinement and evolution in our pursuit of impactful regional journalism:

Social Media Reach Analysis: The project will also include the promotion of the newsroom and its content on the social networks Instagram, Facebook and Twitter. We plan to hire a professional to manage our social networks, with whom we will come up with a pre-prepared publishing plan and using graphic templates that will be created together with the visual identity of the project. We will publish posts regularly, always at least once a week. We will pay for advertising for some of the posts and pages and will closely monitor the reach and engagement metrics of our social media posts, enabling us to assess the extent of our digital impact and resonance among our online audience.

Google Analytics for Articles: Utilising Google Analytics, we will meticulously track and analyse the performance of our articles. This will provide valuable insights into reader engagement, user behaviour, and the extent to which our content resonates within the digital sphere.

Thanks to Google and social media metrics, we can verify whether we have managed to reach our primary target audience. We would consider it a success if in the first six months of the project's operation we reached 10 thousand people from Ostrava with the demographic profile we mentioned above. Another success for us would be if each text had about 10 thousand visits from real users. As regards the mentioned minorities, we will consider the publication of several texts with issues that concern them as a success.

In-Person Engagement and Feedback:

We will listen to local people and give them the opportunity to get involved in the creation of our media by discussing their needs and asking them about topics we could cover. We will hold meetings with local communities to discuss regional journalism and its importance to the functioning of local democracy. We will go to representatives of minorities, the Roma, Vietnamese or Ukrainian community, who often don't get space in local media. These meetings will take place from January 2024 and we will invite experts such as Lenka Waschková Císařová, an expert on regional journalism from Masaryk University in Brno.

We will organise workshops for students and seniors. The participation numbers and feedback garnered during in-person activities targeting both students and seniors will serve as a tangible gauge of our project's effectiveness in connecting with these key demographic segments. The insights we gather will illuminate the project's real-world impact.

Mentions in External and National Media: A crucial measure of our project's broader influence lies in its recognition within other media outlets and the national discourse. We will closely monitor and assess our visibility through mentions and references in external and national media.

6. What technical assistance, mentoring or support do you need to achieve the impact you want?

- **Graphic Designer:** To collaborate with our editorial team in forging a compelling branding, we will also be collaborating with graphic design experts who will prepare templates, layouts, and guides for the utilisation of our newly crafted visual identity. By infusing our project with conceptual and visual resonance, our work will yield an impactful presence.
- **Editor:** A meticulous person tasked to carefully fact-check and proofread our published content. His/her role is pivotal in ensuring accuracy and maintaining the highest standards of quality.
- **Social Media Manager:** An established expert to help us increase the reach of our content on various social media platforms.
- **Technical Support Specialist:** Proficient in website creation, administration, and fortification against potential cyber attacks. His/her expertise will safeguard seamless functionality and protect against online threats.
- **Marketing Consultant:** An experienced professional to provide valuable insights in optimising our project's visibility and reach. His/her guidance will bolster our outreach efforts.
- **Legal Advisor:** An indispensable resource for navigating the legal intricacies inherent in journalism. His/her counsel will ensure that our work adheres to ethical and legal standards.

- **Collaborations with organisations** like the Association of Regional Journalists and Lenka Waschkova Císařová will enrich our endeavour. In partnership with regional newsrooms and experts across the Czech Republic, this role will facilitate knowledge exchange and experience sharing.
- **Financial Consultant:** An experienced financial professional who can help us with a business plan.
- **Accountant:** An important person who helps us with the necessary financial and tax checks.

7. What is the timeline of the project?

Zde jsme podrobně rozepsali měsíční harmonogram po dobu čerpání grantu. Od financování po spuštění webovek a včetně plánovaných článků.

8. What is the track record and expertise of your organisation or your team of journalists? In relation to this specific project, and to local and regional journalism and/or news deserts?

We are a collective of experienced journalists who have extensively covered regional concerns at a national scale over the years. While this marks our inaugural collaboration on a unified regional attempt, the entire team has shared a longstanding alliance, leveraging their accumulated experience and intimate understanding of the region. With a common origin rooted in this locality, we collectively recognize the pronounced demand for high-calibre investigative and analytical journalism. This shared recognition has propelled us towards a shared objective: the establishment of a regional newsroom in the Moravian-Silesian region.

The idea has been resonating among us since 2020. However, at that time two of us lived in Prague and were not directly in the region. It is our presence on the ground that we consider crucial, as quality local journalism requires a deep understanding cultivated from extensive experience and historical awareness of the region, which is why we decided to wait to establish a newsroom. When we finally all moved back to Ostrava this year, it was clear that we could not just stick to discussions. From our point of view, nothing substantial has changed in the regional media in the Moravian-Silesian region in the last three years - there is still a lack of quality investigative and analytical journalism. We would therefore like to change this and contribute to ensuring that the citizens of one of the largest and most economically important regions in the Czech Republic have quality information so that they can scrupulously control the powerful.

Simultaneously, our extensive experience equips us to uphold the contemporary standards of journalism. We embrace innovative formats such as OSINT (Open Source Intelligence), data journalism, and visual investigations. Our portfolio includes the creation of audiovisual content encompassing podcasts and educational TikTok videos. This multifaceted repertoire positions us as a dynamic and contemporary team poised to unleash untapped journalistic potential within the Moravian-Silesian region. (More in our bios below)

9. Which people will execute the project (in your organisation, and any partners or subcontractors)? What is their profile?

Simona Janíková - For the last seven years she has worked for Hospodářské noviny (HN), where she was mainly dedicated to finding and describing interesting business and human stories all over the Czech Republic. In 2020, she became regional editor of HN in the Moravian-Silesian region, returning to her home region after eight years in Prague. In Ostrava, she broadened her scope - she also wrote about politics, elections, the environment, events in industry, etc. and also built up a network of contacts. In 2022, she and her colleagues wrote a series of articles on air pollution in the Czech Republic. She created and planned a whole series called "[What the Czech Republic Breathes](#)", which focused on the Moravian-Silesian region. She gave birth to her first child at the end of last year and has been on parental leave since then.

It's clear to her that if she wants to return to journalism, she needs to stick to long reads, for which she will have more time. These texts are very meaningful to her because they can go into depth, which is not possible in daily news. Since she has been back in Ostrava, she also sees that it makes sense to write for the local community, the texts can be more targeted and as a journalist she is closer to her readers. She believes that working in the region can have a real and quicker impact, and the audience can resonate with the texts long after they are published. That is why she resigned from HN in August this year and sees the founding of Okraj as a meaningful project.

Jan Žabka - Formerly, he worked as a regional investigative journalist for HlídacíPes.org in the Olomouc region from 2018 to 2019. He then became a reporter at the national editorial office of HlídacíPes.org, focusing on topics like disinformation, societal divisions, and information security. While studying journalism at Palacký University in Olomouc, he was editor-in-chief of Houpací Osel student magazine. His bachelor's thesis explored Solutions Journalism in the Czech Republic. He stands out as one of the few Czech journalists skilled in OSINT and geolocation techniques collaborating with the international investigative team Bellingcat. Jan is also recognized for creating educational TikTok videos on media literacy. For this, he was nominated for the Czech Journalism Award 2021. Since the same year, he started teaching students and seniors how to verify information and counter online threats. He also created an e-learning course on visual manipulation for seniors in partnership with Transitions, an international media organisation. Additionally, he's been involved in developing innovative journalistic tools through the News Storytelling Innovation project by Czech.digital. He is a fellow of the Journalist Security Fellowship in Central Europe by the international organisation Internews.

Furthermore, he successfully completed journalism programs like the Ceeli Institute's Investigating Corruption and Money Laundering, as well as the Bakala Foundation's Journey: Journalism Bootcamp.

Klára Filipová - She started her work as a journalist in high school at the regional editorial office of Deník. Since 2017, she has worked at the regional newsroom of Czech Television in Brno, where, in addition to her traditional work as a TV reporter, she also worked as a creator of news content for social media. Her videos have had hundreds of thousands of views. In 2020, she moved to Prague, where she worked at the public Czech Television as a researcher and editor in the well-known investigative programme Reporters CT. Thanks to this experience, she became interested in data journalism and completed an internship

thanks to ECJ in the data editorial office of another public media outlet - Czech Radio. This newsroom is one of three in the country that is dedicated to data journalism. Their work focuses on environmental, political and social issues in an effort to uncover systemic problems. After working nationally for several years, she has come to the conclusion that she is much more interested in returning to regional journalism. For that reason, she moved back six months ago so that she could use her experience to build a serious media outlet in a region that stands outside the media coverage.

10. How will you announce and communicate about your project?

Our outreach strategy encompasses collaboration with media entities specialising in media affairs, such as Mediář and Mediaguru. Through their platforms, we intend to spotlight the emergence of a newsroom in the Moravian-Silesian Region, garnering significant visibility not only in journalistic circle.

Concurrently, a robust social media campaign is on our horizon, designed to capture the gaze of our audience. For this, we'll work externally with a professional to help us reach our target audience and offer our content in an engaging way. This campaign will serve as a conduit to channel attention towards our project, underscoring our journalistic content that forms an integral part of this initiative.

In a bid to amplify our impact, we've forged a collaborative partnership with Czech Radio, a prominent public broadcaster. This collaboration will see some of our articles featured on their platform, strategically garnering attention to our cause.

11. Will the project have an afterlife? Are there any results or products that can be shared or made accessible afterwards?

The acquisition of this grant stands as a pivotal milestone, facilitating two crucial aspects of our endeavour. Primarily, it will empower us to construct a cutting-edge website, thereby solidifying our online presence. Equally significant, this support will bolster the editorial structure, streamlining its functioning. This strategic enhancement will alleviate a substantial portion of the technical demands, allowing us to dedicate our energies wholeheartedly to the pursuit of investigative and analytical journalism within the Moravian-Silesian region.

The project's overarching goal is to establish a robust and enduring operational framework for the editorial office, laying the foundation for its sustained existence and even its potential growth through the integration of more journalists in the times ahead. We realise that there are only three of us and our forces are limited. In the future, we would like to work with colleagues who already live in the region or are returning to the region and need the perspective of working in a high quality medium.

To achieve our goal, we are resolutely committed to proactively pursuing supplementary financial backing from diverse sources within the field in the upcoming months and years.

14. Why does Journalism fund Europe need to support this project?

The Moravian-Silesian Region stands as a historical testament to its past as a mining hub and a stronghold of heavy industry. These legacies, while contributing to its robust history, have cast their imprint on the environment, as well as generated intricate social and economic challenges. In terms of landmass and population, the region ranks amongst the largest and most densely inhabited within the Czech Republic. Notably, it's home to the third-largest Czech city, Ostrava. However, this region has also grappled with a persistent exodus of its population, posing a significant demographic challenge.

The Moravian-Silesian region is one of the largest and most important in the country, it is an economic, political and industrial centre. Therefore, the local population is poorly informed and the powerful are hardly controlled by the watchdogs of democracy - journalists. There is a noticeable gap in terms of quality investigative and analytical regional media. This deficiency hinders systematic and nuanced investigation of the region's many problems, and thus prevents the visibility that is necessary for local civil society to effectively address and solve these problems.

As we already said, local media entities in the region either suffer from financial constraints or predicate their operational framework on advertising contributions from local businesses and non-confrontational relationships with politicians. In direct response to this gap, the establishment of the non-profit newsroom, Okraj, emerges as a transformative prospect. Okraj aspires to extend quality, autonomous journalism to both the region and its inhabitants. Simultaneously, it envisions aligning itself with the overarching objectives of the "Local Media For Democracy" initiative, fostering a symbiotic relationship with local democracy and the informed citizenry it necessitates.

15. Please share additional comments regarding the budget: