

## Why is Investico promoting collaboration, and what can we offer you?

By Jeroen trommelen, Chief editor of Investico

[Investico](#) is a Dutch platform for investigative journalism, with a staff of five experienced journalists and 10 freelance reporters/investigators; most of them recently out of university and around their 30-ties.

- We are relatively young; were founded 4 years ago, by a coalition of concerned media and citizens,
- We are non-profit; the bulk of our money comes from sponsors and foundations; some government funds, and some revenue from media we collaborate with. So our business model is a bit like Pro Publica in the US; The Bureau of Investigative Journalism in the UK and Investigate Europe.
- We are focused on investigative journalism on structural issues, meaning, for example, that we skip the small public or financial scandals if they are nothing more than that: a public scandal.
- And we are intensely focused on collaboration, meaning that we try to collaborate with other media in *every* investigation we do. Preferably with at least 2 other media partners in print, on radio, television or online. Investico is always the *modest* partner in the collaboration. We use existing platforms of existing media, often important big ones, to reach the right public. In return, these media get a large part of the credit – even if they didn't really do the largest part of the work.

Why was Investico founded on these principles?

-Many *regular media*, even quality-media in The Netherlands, have *limited capacity* to produce Investigative journalism, while there is a *growing demand in society* for reliable, well researched stories.

-As most of you know; well researched, investigation journalism is *too expensive* – in the sense that the *real market price is too high*; especially in the context of the availability of free news. As consumers, people demand free news. As citizens, they are worried about the quality of journalism.

-Collaborating is more efficient; in the sense that society gets *“more value for it's money”*

-*The impact* of news productions *is larger* when you collaborate: News coming from multiple sides at the same, is more difficult to ignore.

-In collaboration we *stand stronger against your enemy*. Like, let's say, a rich Russian businessman who is unhappy about the suggestion that he might be involved in a white-washing scandal, and threatens to go to court.

-And – last but not least – we get *better stories* in a collaboration.

Better researched, because you have more manpower, and *more intelligent stories*, because you often cooperate with colleagues outside of your comfort-zone, thus preventing tunnel-vision or reckless reporting.

All this applies to collaboration within the Netherlands.

But also, in my view, to international collaboration.

Which we do: Investico participates in ICIJ. Two of our staff – including myself – are members of ICIJ; we have been part of several OCCRP-investigations, we have been working with *Investigate Europe*, and we are member of the *Global Investigative Journalism Network* – which is especially good for conferences and networking,

But what we rarely do, I'm sorry to say, is cooperate in the way we do projects within The Netherlands. Most of our domestic stories do not start with a leak – like many ICIJ-investigations or OCCRP-investigations, they don't even start with *a golden tip* or a *lead* from an insider - although they sometimes do. They mostly start with a relevant question. This kind of investigation is often in the area of day-to-day subjects; about real problems for real people, close to their own lives.

In the past, Investico has tried to find European partners for these kinds of stories, but often failed to do so. For many reasons, often dealing with:

- \* funding or otherwise money-related,
- \* the idea that it's hard to 'translate' the concept of a story from one country to another...
- \* or maybe just my lack of our persuasive power,

Still, many of these stories were *easy to share* and easy to 'upscale' to a cross-border level,

Let me give you examples.

1. We investigated **the gaming-industry**, who deliberately created highly addictive games, using techniques from the gambling industry to persuade gamers to spend money on their 'free' products. As a result, Dutch addiction-programs and addiction-clinics are full with very young gamers, starting at 12 years old, with severe addiction problems. For youngsters, games are the second largest addiction problem after cannabis in the Netherlands. Why would this problem be different elsewhere in Europe?

2. **Data-trade.** We found out that Dutch farmers are unknowingly 'giving away' sensitive business-information through the equipment they use; like milk-machines and other machinery. In modern farming, all this equipment is connected to the internet. Large agricultural companies buy the information; use it (for example) to set prices on future markets; leaving the farmers as losers. This is probably a European phenomenon:

3. And what is true for farming equipment, is also true for **automobiles**. Modern cars are connected to the internet, just like our smartphones. Information on whereabouts of the driver and other privacy-sensitive information, like address book and agenda of the drivers' smartphone, the place we live and shop or go out to eat, even the number of passengers (since cars 'know' with seat-belts are used) are sent to the manufacturer who sells this information on the market. We do this for The Netherlands but the car industry German, French and Italian, so the results will apply to many other European countries. Some media in some countries have reported on this subject, but investigative research is scarce.

4. **Opioid's.** In the USA and the UK, addiction to strong, addictive painkillers called opioids is a large and well reported problem. In the US, the addiction is epidemic and one of the biggest health issues in the country. On the European continent little information is available on how many patients and/or opioid-users are - in fact - addicts.

Investico researched the Dutch situation and found that 200 thousand people (on a population of 17 million) are long-time users of opioids and probably addicted. Doctors and pharmacists admit that they have let the situation go out of control.

But Dutch doctors are known to be cautious with medication. They tend to *not* describe pills - which is good in many cases. So, the numbers in other European countries are possibly much higher. I would have been better to research this across borders.

5. **Crime-rate.** In The Netherlands, the crime rate is going down, according to everyone. And so are the rates in many other European countries. Even more spectacular are the results for what is called 'high impact crime' - crimes that affect the major parts of the population, like breaking into houses and violence on the street. This is good news for politicians who promised 'lower crime' for decades. But it's not true. The police are manipulating its own statistics to give the politicians what they want. Investico found some examples of this in other European countries, investigated the Dutch national police and found proof of deliberate manipulation. How is that in your country?

6. And finally: **The ADHD-explosion.** This is a serious question: Are our children slowly getting mad? In many western countries, a large number of children are diagnosed with a relatively new attention disorder problem called ADHD. Medication like Ritalin - a mild form of *speed* - is used to 'cure' the disease. In the USA, 1 out of 9 children is diagnosed with ADHD. In the Netherlands, this is 5 or 6 percent. But science is critical: ADHD is not an actual

disease, merely a diagnose and therefore subjective. Our question is: Who benefits from this epidemic? We started this investigation recently, but I would still love to discuss a European project on this subject.

Interested? Call of mail me,

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