

Less is more. Study on slow journalism outlets' authors

Virgo Siil

 0000-0002-6525-2757

University of Tartu, Tartu, Estonia

Abstract: The concept of slow journalism has evolved from dissatisfaction with speed-driven journalism. Discussion about this form of journalism has revolved around what it should be; principles it should follow, and how. Although authors play an essential role in achieving slow journalism's goals, there is a lack of empirical research about their motivation and practices. I interviewed 22 authors and conducted four observations in two slow journalism outlets in Estonia. The results show that the authors are motivated by contributing to society, their autonomy, and self-fulfillment, which they were often not afforded in other outlets. However, some journalists had difficulties switching from one set of principles and values to another and experienced problems with time management, storytelling, and self-motivation. Non-journalists may bring some advantages in following slow journalism principles and working with sources.

Keywords: slow journalism, storytelling, alternative journalism, journalism practice, time pressure

INTRODUCTION

Journalism is often defined by speed, which is one of the instruments that helps media outlets stay ahead of the competition (Hermann, 2016) and one of its aspects that makes it threatening to power holders (Örnebring & Schmitz Weiss, 2021). The presence of too much speed causes society to lose its multifaceted reality (Palau-Sampio, 2019), context, and understanding (Eriksen, 2001), which attributes to rifts in society (Gibbs & Warhover, 2002) and undermines media credibility (Barranquero et al., 2016; Eriksen, 2001). Slow journalism has emerged as a counter-movement to the trend of hurry, following the example of the slow food movement (good, clean, and fair) to compensate for the problems caused by fast media and to balance it (Le Masurier, 2015). Slowness is a tool that helps fulfill its social responsibilities by taking time to focus, reflect, dig deeper, search for the best sources, enjoy the process, and appreciate the “other” (Ball, 2016; Thomas, 2016).

While slow journalism gives the authors time to find and create quality content, it is still unclear if they use these opportunities that way and what motivates them. By following its own principles, slow journalism should show by example that journalism can be done differently. However, the authors' point of view of what this looks like needs to be clarified and whether and to what extent these principles are followed in everyday activities, and what difficulties the authors may face.

This is a continuation of a previous study (Siil & Kõuts-Klemm, 2023) that focused on the operating principles of slow journalism outlets *Edasi* and *Levila*, which motivated this research focusing on the authors. The catalyst for this reasoning comes from Mendes and Marinho (2022) who conclude in their literature review that there has been limited attention on authors' views and perceptions about slow journalism, their routines and practices. In this study, I use the umbrella term "authors" since not all interviewees in this study identified as journalists, and wrote mostly analytical or opinion pieces, essays. I interviewed 22 authors and observed four editorial meetings to find answers to the research questions (RQs):

- RQ1: What motivates (or demotivates) authors of slow journalism?
- RQ2: How are slow journalism principles affecting the practices of authors?

SLOW JOURNALISM AND ITS AUTHORS

Rushing affects journalists, as they are expected to produce a lot of content quickly, which leads to a decrease in the quality of coverage and to the risk of authors burning out and leaving the field (Reinardy, 2010, 2013). This favors the usage of stereotypes and simplistic images, with no time to see the bigger picture (Harrington, 1997). At the same time, media work is based on the desire to autonomously and creatively tell stories, which tends to take place within a distinctly commercial context (Deuze & Prenger, 2019) that in turn restricts fulfilling their roles (for example, watchdog), autonomy (Allan, 2022) and creativity.

When searching for and using sources, journalists tend to focus on authorities, celebrities, and geographically closer areas since they are more accessible, take less time, and are cheaper to research. But in the process, peripheral groups, marginal areas, and those with little influence do not get a voice (Palau-Sampio, 2019; Vihalemm, 2022) because finding them, winning their trust, working with them and cooperating takes more time and effort. The critical approach of journalists requires time to slow down (Craig, 2016).

The fuzzy concept of slow journalism (Cheng, 2021; Le Masurier, 2015; Neveu, 2016; Rauch, 2018) has been associated with several forms of journalism and can include elements of other forms of journalism. However, slow journalism

differs in its priority of social responsibility, slowing down, taking time to search, find sources (Greenberg, 2007), doing research (Gess, 2012; Neveu, 2016) and shaping the story.

The nature of this form of journalism is determined above all by avoiding the harmful effects of speed on the practice of journalism (Le Masurier, 2015), putting society's needs first. Research by Fulton and Scott (2021) shows that slow journalism for Australia's ABC journalists is "a change in practice, the importance of community engagement and the ability to invest time in finding and developing stories," and Le Masurier (2015) in an interview in London with the editor of *Delayed Gratification* emphasizes that they cannot follow news values.

Theodore Peterson (1984) describes six journalism tasks in social responsibility theory as (i) providing information and (ii) discussion, (iii) enlightening the public, (iv) safeguarding the rights of the individual, (v) servicing the economic system (advertising), and (vi) maintaining self-sufficiency. The principles of slow journalism prioritize the first three, as the latter tasks force authors to rush.

The goals of slow journalism described by various researchers are related to authors and their practices: giving voice to underrepresented groups (Palau-Sampio, 2019), creating understanding (Ball, 2016; Craig, 2016), avoiding polarization (Drok & Hermans, 2016) and the use of stereotypes. Other, no less important aims, are being ethical but thorough (Gess, 2012), delving into topics and being creative (Greenberg, 2007), using narrative storytelling (Neveu, 2016), treating both authors and audiences fairly (Neveu, 2016; Rauch, 2018). Slow journalism should seek out untold stories, reduce the noise in the public information space, emphasize more context, accuracy, and quality rather than speed and competition, avoiding sensationalism, scoops, and high-profile events (Ball, 2016; Berkey-Gerard, 2009; Neveu, 2016; Thomas, 2016).

Moving at a deliberate pace is not a goal or a value but a tool that helps fulfill slow journalism's societal goals by taking time to focus, reflect, dig deeper, search for and create trust with sources (Fulton & Scott, 2022). Slowing down is the defining concept in the practical aspect, which helps the authors achieve their goals.

Considering the high standards and expectations put on slow journalism, it has been called a 'Weberian ideal type' (Neveu, 2016). The authors of slow journalism must meet high and versatile expectations in working with sources, collected material, and its delivery (Le Masurier, 2015). This study aims to advance the knowledge on the authors' experiences with slow journalism, if, how, and why the authors are following the principles of slow journalism.

DESCRIPTION OF OUTLETS AND AUTHORS

THE OUTLETS

Edasi (founded in 2016) and *Levila* (founded in 2019) each combine their own medium and formats in their content. *Edasi* identifies as slow journalism, publishes a quarterly print magazine with most of its online content behind a paywall. *Edasi* covers social, cultural, business, travel, well-being and lifestyle topics often as analytical opinion pieces by experts and as interviews with one source. *Levila* publishes for free investigative, narrative pieces irregularly, it identifies as a media lab, and its principles correlate with those of slow journalism (Siil & Kõuts-Klemm, 2023). *Levila* experiments with formats and genres, focusing on social issues. In both outlets, the founders serve as editors-in-chief, authors, and fill other roles as well. *Levila* relies on funding from investors and donors, *Edasi* is mainly financed by operating revenues, subscriptions, advertisements, and in a lesser degree by donors. *Edasi* has an average of 40–50,000 unique users per month and more than half of the readers are from Tallinn, *Levila* has 10–40,000 unique users, an average of 20,000 per month, and almost three quarters of *Levila*'s users are from Tallinn (Sikk, 2023).

Estonia has a population of 1.3 million (of which almost 30% speak Russian as their mother tongue), but its media market is highly competitive, its media sector is primarily shaped by the rules of the market and the behaviour of the audience; and resources for the production of quality journalism are declining (Kõuts-Klemm et al., 2019). In Hallin and Mancini's (2004) model of media systems, Estonia falls in the category of Nordic democratic corporatist model.

More than 61% of Estonians follow the news every day or more frequently. The audience that reads print newspapers fell from 90% in 2008 to 51% in 2017 while the readership of online newspapers grew: 47% of adults read online newspapers in 2018. The number of internet users grew from 67% in 2008 to 90% in 2017 (Vihalemm & Kõuts-Klemm, 2017).

THE AUTHORS

I interviewed 22 authors – 11 in *Levila*, 11 in *Edasi*, of whom 2 are founders who also contribute as authors. Some authors have contributed to both outlets. Both outlets have authors who have worked as journalists or studied journalism (14) and those who have not (8). Since not all identified as journalists, I use the term “authors”. Although some were not journalists, they had previously published opinion pieces, analytical essays, critiques or interviews, so everybody had experiences with other outlets to compare it with *Edasi* or *Levila*. Some of the authors were on the payrolls of one of the outlets. Both outlets had some authors who participated in editorial meetings. There are authors who

have contributed many articles over the years and there are those who have published just a couple of pieces.

Those with previous journalistic experience allowed for comparison with the journalistic practices of other outlets. Interviewees with no journalistic experience enabled a comparison between journalists and non-journalists.

The interviewees were selected on the grounds of having published at least two (articles, video, audio) pieces in *Edasi* or *Levila* to collect data about their experiences with sources, because thorough work with sources is one of the prerequisites of slow journalism.

I did not include the authors' age or gender as variables since they were irrelevant to achieving the research objectives. Most interviewees were men, and the age of authors varied from from early 30 years of age up to Estonian retirement age (65 years). The participants gave their informed consent about being aware of the study's aims and their confidentiality. To maintain their confidentiality, I removed identifiable characteristics in the results section (names, gender, preferred medium, previous and current employers).

METHODS

I conducted 22 semi-structured interviews, which were coded R1-R22 to give the interviewees anonymity, from spring 2022 to summer 2023 and observed four editorial meetings in the fall of 2022. The in-depth semi-structured interviews lasted between 35 and 90 minutes. The interviews focused on four topics. The first concerned the authors' practices (topics, focus, sources, style, storytelling, structuring, time management, work stages, struggles, etc.). The second concerned motivation (why these outlets? what role do they fill? demotivation). The third involved experiences with each of the outlets (similarities and differences in slow journalism, reasons for leaving, and feedback). The fourth focused on interactions with editorial boards (pay, help, intervention or suggestions for stories and feedback). I chose the topics and asked about motivation based on previous literature which focuses on what and how slow journalism should strive to achieve (its motive), so it is vital to know the same about its authors.

I transcribed and coded the recorded interviews (practices, principles, interaction with outlets, sources, producing process, problems, motivation, comparison with other media, etc.). The codes were both inductive, generated when analyzing the data, and deductive, based on research previously published, i.e., expectations expressed for authors of slow journalism. After the coding, I analyzed the data to find coinciding areas in the interviews, common topics (Braun & Clarke, 2006), initial open coding followed by selective coding, and converging some

codes in similar areas (e.g., motivation and demotivation). I anonymized and analyzed the transcriptions on a laptop without web access.

I also conducted two non-participant observations in each of the outlets' editorial meetings (n=4; participants in each meeting n=4–6), noting what was discussed and what topics, practices, principles, and issues emerged. The observations lasted approximately two hours. I coded and analyzed the written notes from the observations in the same way as the interviews. The participants in the observations were the editors-in-chief (e.g., the founders), authors, editors, and an assistant to the editor-in-chief.

The sample is small, but for an exploratory qualitative study, 10 to 15 interviews should be sufficient (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Observations allow the collection of “clean” data, but as a researcher I kept in mind the danger of subjective interpretation (Given, 2008; Mey & Mruck, 2010). Observing the editorial meetings made it possible to compare results from interviews, corroborating or contradicting the information given by authors and founders.

To shed light on the views, experiences and practices of authors of slow journalism, I sought answers to the questions of what (de)motivates authors of slow journalism and what practices they use.

RESULTS

AUTHORS ARE CHOSEN CAREFULLY

The founder of *Levila* stated that giving authors time and a good salary does not guarantee results. According to the authors, these issues stem mainly from time management and self-motivation.

R18: When I said before that it is nice to have that freedom and trust, at the same time, you get tired of it very quickly. It would be much easier if someone told you to “go there and do it now,” I would not have to think all the time whether it is important.

The authors defined themselves as having a liberal worldview, at the same time trying to remain neutral and understand the “other.” Both outlets have authors who have not worked as journalists. According to the founders and authors, journalistic background may make it difficult to follow the principles of these outlets, and according to some authors, the attitude of the sources towards non-journalists is more favorable because there are trust issues with other outlets.

R21: [the author] must be a good writer, must not be evil, not push their narrow agenda, must have the ability to generalize social topics, /.../ it is even better if they are not journalists or regular authors in Estonian media.

Trust was one of the keywords in the description of the relationship between the outlet and the author. The authors consider the ability to manage time, self-mobilization, focus and finish, self-discipline, and creativity as essential characteristics. In the case of *Edasi*, the ability of some co-authors to write an opinion piece quickly was also expressed since they have other occupations. However, some worked on pieces for a longer period. The authors found that this work requires an author who gives sense to their work values, prefers quality over quantity, does not aim for wide distribution and clickbaits, has social and context perception, and does not focus on the day-to-day politics but on the more significant currents underlying it all.

Issues appeared at any stage depending on the author's background: non-journalists may need help in the preparation period when they must look for sources and contact them. Journalists' may face difficulties with abandoning ingrained journalistic practices, news values, style, and adhering to the slow journalism principles, finding topics and sources accordingly.

R1: People [with journalistic background] have a very rigid view of what journalism should be, but I look at the media in a very broad sense, to the point that there are no limits. Ethics, trust, cooperation, facts – all this is important. But everything else, how to make these connections, how to build this story: it doesn't make sense to set it in stone. Our best stuff doesn't come from people with journalism degrees.

According to the interviewees, renowned authors, specialists in their field are part of *Edasi*'s marketing and motivation for the authors. Pride of belonging to an 'elite' group of authors and doing high-quality and enjoyable work was also expressed by *Levila*'s authors. Satisfaction and pride are related mainly to the brands of the outlets, as their emphasis is on creating better content than other media.

TOPICS FOLLOW THE GOALS OF SLOW JOURNALISM

The outlets' general social goals influence the topics based on which stories are selected. The principles described by the authors include creating coherence in society, making sense, generalizing, giving context, stories' timelessness, giving voice and quality. I observed during editorial meetings that the founders ensure that the topics adhere to the main goals, but the authors are still influential at this stage.

R3: There is no point in doing some longer story if you are uninterested. Otherwise, nothing will come of it anyway. Moreover, the focus is still decided by you – you are familiar with the material and what in it is most important and interesting.

The authors have a great deal of control over their pieces. They perceived the trust placed in them by the editor-in-chief and great freedom in choosing the focus and form of the pieces. This does not mean that anyone and every story is published indiscriminately; the previous selection excludes, for example, authors with an agenda and content marketing.

Journalists and non-journalists could benefit from combining the two groups; journalists would ensure journalistic professionalism, technical skills, and contacts. Non-journalists bring to the table different points of view and practices, deep knowledge from their field, and trust from sources; according to one author, it could also be an educational and interesting form of cooperation for the journalists themselves. According to one interviewee (R11), slow journalism requires a different type of editing and editors, one that gets involved in the story before it begins and supports and guides the author from the beginning.

PREPARATION AND WORK WITH SOURCES TAKE TIME

Thorough work with sources is integral to the goals of slow journalism, for example, in covering underrepresented groups or covering a new angle, trying to understand, while avoiding stereotypes and sensationalism. Trust was highlighted in the relationship between authors and sources. According to the authors, there is a mistrust of journalists, both in the case of public figures and ordinary people, due to personal negative experiences or sources considering the general quality of journalism to be low. According to the authors, finding a source who agrees to comment with their name and face can be time-consuming, and the effort must be worth it, which shows another facet where the quality of slow journalism may manifest itself.

R14: His [the source's] one argument for accepting me was, "It is a good thing you are not a journalist. With you, I can talk." So, me not being a recognized journalist opened the door for me.

Edasi's coverage of underrepresented groups manifested in cultural figures who tend to be overlooked by other outlets but also in that hard-to-access public figures are willing to be interviewed by its authors.

Levila focuses primarily on underrepresented groups and topics, searching for relevant sources, which makes the work of these authors difficult in many ways.

R5: If you want to publish a story about real people, real life, it is always more difficult than writing [a story] about public figures, politicians who are always available here in Tallinn and interested in appearing in the media.

Those who conduct interviews were characterized by the desire to work with sources face-to-face, they like to give the source their time, and not limit themselves to a few obligatory comments with a brief phone call or email as experienced in other media. The thorough work with sources is evident in the preparation of the stories, where the authors drove tens to hundreds of kilometers to spend time with sources before recording, and the interviews ranged from an hour to six hours.

R6: The biggest difference from outlet X is the speed and amount of news; [in *Levila/Edasi*] there is time to do background work, read, talk to sources several times, not be satisfied with one quick comment.

The non-journalist authors' competence in the same professional field as the sources allows them to establish a connection, act as equals, and the quality of the resulting piece is correspondingly better. Because of the trusting relationship the sources interfere much less in the story than expected, and they allow leaving previously forbidden facts and quotes in the story when they see in which context and how these are used.

CAPTIVATING THE AUDIENCE WITH STORYTELLING AND QUALITY

Along with author-centeredness and autonomy, greater personal responsibility was mentioned, for example in the choice of topic and in telling the story. According to the observations and interviews, the tone of the stories should be balanced, "to understand, not to condemn" (*Levila*). At the same time, *Edasi* is "not malevolent," which does not equal soft topics but avoiding conflict as a news value. The language should be simple (which does not mean plain) and avoid officialese and foreign words if possible. The story is expected to be well-thought-out, easy to follow, creative, well-structured, flowing, and with a personal touch. Authors are expected to create high-quality content, use an excellent, unique style, and storytelling regardless of genre or medium.

The authors' style was expressed in the way they created the story: some sat behind a computer and wrote or edited most of the story in one go, while others carefully and painstakingly constructed or composed the story for up to a couple of months and tried to create as logical a story as possible through meticulous structuring.

R15: The most difficult thing is to develop a structure or an approach. [I have] the desire to try new structures, not to repeat myself.

Levila's stories contain more sources, often in the form of audio or video, which requires a more complex story and narrative storytelling, but the desire to vary and develop their style and storytelling was expressed by some authors of *Edasi* as well. Authors noted that they have the time to develop their style, make it more compact to avoid creating an unnecessarily bulky story.

Although the goal is not necessarily to spend a long time creating a story, many other aspects of this process (work with sources, shaping the story, quality assurance, thoroughness, etc.) were related to the longer schedule these outlets allow. The use of time across the stages of creating a story varied depending on the author, genre, and medium – some analytical pieces were done in an hour, while some required long preparatory work and reading of dozens of articles, up to the drawing of cartoons and illustrations lasting several weeks, or documentary projects lasting months.

The authors without a journalism background conduct their interviews without relevant technical skills and training. Help with transcribing was sometimes offered to some authors, and the editor later processed the material since several of the authors contributed for free. Some who did not receive help with transcribing found that interviewing for *Edasi* needs to be compensated more adequately, otherwise they don't feel motivated to contribute with that kind of stories.

The authors from both journalistic and non-journalistic background reported professional evolution in their interviewing techniques, storytelling skills. Also, on a more general level, learning to set the story's focus: what you want to say with it.

STRUGGLES WITH TIME MANAGEMENT

The general principles of slow journalism influence everyday practices: all parties involved are given time to delve into context, extrapolate, and avoid news values of conflict, sensation, celebrities, scoop. The authors found that slow journalism does differ from other forms in its principles and practices.

R14: It [slow journalism] is kind of like it [journalism] should be. It is like an ideal model /.../ I immediately understood that it is not mainstream journalism because that threshold differs. It is higher. You must approach things differently or come in through a different door.

The need to let the story “settle” or “sink in” emerged as an essential part of the process, i.e., the pause between interviewing, creating the story, and sometimes

the draft and finishing, when the material is not actively worked on. This provides an opportunity to find the story's core – an approach, focus, or style – from which the rest of the story flows and enables the author to manage, consolidate, and structure elements of complicated topics.

Issues with time management sometimes resulted from the authors being engaged in other jobs or activities. Dealing with other tasks partially overlaps with the “settling” process mentioned earlier, but with that comes a risk that the more passive period stretches so long that when the author returns to the story, they no longer remember its parts and elements and must start from the beginning. For this reason, some stories have been left unfinished. To solve this problem, the authors proposed more editorial meetings, working in the office together to exchange ideas or cooperate with another author. Discussing ideas and problems with someone even before the work with the article begins and keeping each other on schedule can alleviate the problems with complicated stories and storytelling.

AUTHORS' MOTIVATION SUPPORTS QUALITY

The authors emphasized that a good story in these outlets is only produced if the author is motivated and interested in the topic. The motivation of the authors to contribute to society stems primarily from dissatisfaction with haste, superficiality, thoughtlessness, sensationalism, gossip, opposition, conflict, mass production, and the exhausting work atmosphere in other outlets. According to the authors, these are caused by a profit-based way of thinking.

R6: In big media companies, their [authors'] backs are against the wall all the time, they have to do it, the deadlines are approaching, and the paper will be published tomorrow – whether there is news or not, the paper still has to be published.

Dissatisfaction with the experience in other media was expressed by the interviewees in the desire to take time out and focus: “getting off the conveyor belt,” “getting off the wheel,” “taking a break from the media wheel”. Slow journalism gives time and freedom to work on skills and mediums, motivating authors with a corresponding interest to contribute to these outlets.

R22: I am now doing all the things I could not do that I saw as wrong in outlets X, Y, or Z – I will fix them now. I am free from it and no longer must stick to click-hunting /.../ I've got the freedom to do exactly the kind of thing that is like ideal journalism for me.

The quality and positive brand of the outlet motivates authors – in case of *Edasi* sometimes for free. The latter viewed their co-authorship as an intellectual hobby. The authors are motivated by autonomy, self-realization, time, and a chance to use different forms, genres, and volumes. For many, the freedom from volume limitations was one of the most significant differences from other media. This freedom also worked the other way: there was no need to make the story longer than necessary. In *Levila*, with its salaries above the average in the Estonian media market, pay was mentioned as a motivator. Although *Edasi*'s fees are lower some of its authors also mentioned pay as one of the motives.

The authors' motivation helps them to stay on track while creating a comprehensive, complex story that sometimes takes several months or to write an in-depth analytical story for a lower fee or for free.

The prominence of one's work in these outlets with low output, which could be overlooked in the mass of information in other outlets, was also connected with pride and self-fulfillment. The authors found that their work and contribution are more valued in outlets with a slow publication cycle and smaller content quantity.

Possible demotivational aspects were the hypothetical scenarios where *Edasi/Levila* edged closer to other media in practices, content, and principles, as well as political-ideological leaning to extremes, underpayment, and the uncertainty associated with the possible termination of the outlet or it becoming (too) exclusive.

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR THE OUTLETS

A pleasant atmosphere and working with like-minded and inspiring people were mentioned and compared to negative experiences in other outlets. According to the experiences of the interviewed authors, in the investigative section of the more prominent media houses, the journalist may be required to stop working on a story and do another, faster and more current story, characterizing the difference between these two forms of journalism.

When writing stories for other outlets, they felt harassed by volume limitations, whether on paper or online. At the same time, *Edasi* and *Levila* were found to be more suitable outlets for in-depth analyses of complex topics.

R5: Just give me time, and I will do everything /.../ I have time [in *Edasi/Levila*] to do my job as it should be done.

The founders of both outlets fulfill several managerial roles and some superficiality in performing these duties is unavoidable: in the case of *Levila*, distribution or marketing problems were mentioned, which are also related to difficulties of reaching a wider audience and thus giving value to the authors' contribution. In *Edasi*, marketing was highlighted primarily as rather exemplary, although

some were dissatisfied, especially with regards to reaching audiences outside the capital. Similar concerns were expressed regarding the reach of *Levila*, but cooperation with larger outlets emerged as one possible solution. Difficulties with reaching peripheral areas can make it difficult for the outlets to achieve their goal of uniting different social strata. The possibly low impact of the outlet was mentioned by a couple of the authors as a reason for leaving *Edasi/Levila*.

The authors expressed concerns about the outlet which relies on one founder. This was partly seen as a weakness of the outlets, and the authors felt that the founders should delegate their tasks so that they themselves could focus on strategy and decrease the risks. Outlets that are dependent on the founder could also lead to funding problems.

R20: Some of the investors who did not want to invest said that, well, it is all very nice, right, but a one-man band is a considerable risk.

In the case of *Levila*, the outlet is independent of the media market but dependent on donors, and some authors were hesitant to tie their future to an outlet with such an unstable funding model.

The authors viewed *Edasi* and *Levila* as neutral outlets and associated other media's polarizing behavior and ideological bias with creating problems in society. At the same time, some authors voiced opinions that *Edasi* publishes stories from people with liberal views and that *Levila's* similar bias is expressed in the content and the choice of topics.

There were inconsistencies concerning feedback; some authors received sufficient feedback from the outlet, and there were those who said that it was lacking, and they would need more of it to improve as an author. The fact that other outlets try to copy their work and offer opportunities for cooperation based on their achievements in *Levila/Edasi* was also seen as positive feedback.

R5: And the really good things are not produced [in other outlets]. But if you do it [a successful project] in *Levila/Edasi*, you'll get a call from outlet X: "hey, we think we could do these things [in our outlet], that's cool stuff".

Some authors thought that slow journalism would function best as a subdivision of a large media house, ensuring a uniform professional level and funding while maintaining creative freedom. Others countered that autonomy disappears in a more prominent outlet, and other problems of a media house creep into other divisions, which would corrupt the principles of slow journalism and prevent the fulfillment of its goals.

In addition to time management, an existentialist or an identity problem can arise with bigger autonomy. In addition to reporting and analyzing what

is happening in society with their stories, authors are forced to make sense of their own roles and goals, since the editorial board doesn't do it for them, contrary to other outlets. Some authors with journalistic backgrounds voiced this issue.

R16: The moment of truth arises: what do you really want to do? When the burden [of time pressure] was taken off, it was like a vacuum: it is easy to do the first or second story, but when doing the fifth, you must already motivate yourself; there was no need for it in daily coverage. Now there is no speed argument anymore.

The authors found that when comparing other outlets (whether daily or weekly newspapers, magazines, news media, cultural outlets or business papers) with *Edasi* and *Levila*, the latter differ in terms of deadlines, style, content, principles, goals, autonomy, creative development, quality, and self-fulfillment opportunities for authors.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Slow journalism aims to show by an example that journalism can be done differently, without the controversial practices of superficial reporting, conflict, sensationalism and polarization. Interviews and observations to study whether and to what extent the idealistic principles of slow journalism are followed in everyday practices in two Estonian outlets, *Edasi* and *Levila*, confirmed the benefits and motivation of slow journalism for the authors but also revealed some issues.

Two main groups of authors were manifest: those with and those without a journalistic background. A journalistic background might not always be helpful in slow journalism, as haste and a stereotypical way of working, using sources and structuring the story can be hard to abandon for some. Also, some sources would not have agreed to the interviews if the authors had been journalists, confirming that the credibility of both the press and journalists has been undermined. This implies that one of the goals of slow journalism – to use sources not covered by other media – could be partly achieved using non-journalists. At the same time, authors with previous media experience can do journalistic work “the way it should be done” with sources, giving a voice to underrepresented groups.

Authors' motivation is linked to practices of slow journalism: slowing down, thorough work, and developing their skills allow self-fulfillment, pride, autonomy, and satisfaction with their work, which they do not get in other outlets. The authors considered slow journalism a luxury (Greenberg, 2007). Following the high standards of slow journalism creates a strong brand of social responsibility

and quality for the outlets, which in turn motivates the authors, again emphasizing the perceived difference in quality between slow and fast journalism.

The authors have both personal (self-fulfillment, time) and societal (creating understanding) motives that overlap with each other, as social contribution brings a sense of self-fulfillment, while the development of skills allows them to create more relevant and better stories for audiences. This satisfaction coincides with the notion expressed by Deuze and Prenger (2019) that autonomy and creative freedom motivate media workers and support the professionalism of journalism. Interviewees used the term “author’s genre” and other expressions to underline the outlets’ trust in the authors’ decisions, style, and autonomy compared to other outlets. Authors control almost all aspects of their story, including focus, sources, timetable, style, storytelling, and emotion. This may spark the interest of younger audiences who expect more emotion and subjective views from authors (Andersen, 2022). The authors’ motivation would be reduced if the outlets became more like problematic practices in other media, i.e., polarizing, ideological, sensational, hasty, and superficial.

However, the benefits come with difficulties that stem from significant autonomy, working alone with voluminous and complicated material and sources. Authors may face difficulties with time management and working with complicated stories, structuring the story to be easy to follow, and engaging. This creates issues with self-motivation or even identity for some. The authors in other competitive outlets had less autonomy and more aspects of their work there were predetermined, while in slow journalism, they can’t rely on external motivation; they must motivate themselves.

The low production of these small outlets motivates the authors since their work does not disappear under other stories, unlike in high-producing outlets. On the other hand, the smallness of the outlets comes with potentially demotivating qualities: in-depth stories created with great effort do not always have enough circulation, which reduces their impact. One solution appeared to be cooperation with major outlets, which is supported by the slow journalism’s ideal of avoiding competing.

Interviewees’ difficulties with time management appeared among journalists and non-journalists alike and were sometimes related to working simultaneously in several places or outlets. Quitting other positions could alleviate this problem, but it would be more difficult for non-journalists to earn a living. Also, the advantage of these authors stems from professional activities and knowledge in other fields. So, paradoxically, some of these authors continue to have time management and time pressure problems that counter the idea of slow journalism. One possible solution emerged: cooperation with other authors and greater support and feedback from editors, which allows the development of ideas

and technical skills, as well as increases the sense of belonging, which would primarily support those authors who are not part of the core editorial group.

Slow journalistic outlets might act for journalists as a kind of an oasis (Rauch, 2018) where they can work with topics and practices they are not able to use elsewhere, and having realized their ideas, they can later return to other outlets with new storytelling skills, working with sources and different mediums.

This study shows that following the principles of slow journalism motivates authors and enables them to produce in-depth and high-quality content. They have time to develop their technical and creative skills, enjoy the process, avoid burnout, and be proud of the result. On the other hand, this “ideal type” of journalism (Neveu, 2016) comes with its own set of issues; great autonomy requires reliance on the authors themselves in terms of time management and self-motivation. Some authors with ingrained values and practices from speed-driven outlets may face difficulties adapting to slow journalism principles. The solution to some problems in this field can be greater cooperation with other authors, a partnership between experienced and less experienced in journalism, and closer cooperation with editors in earlier stages of producing a story.

Although this qualitative study is based on a small sample in a small country, the insights gained from this study could inform a quantitative study which provides an instructive set of findings to prevent and solve issues that come with working on slower journalistic pieces in other outlets.

REFERENCES

- Allan, S. (2022). *The Routledge Companion to News and Journalism* (2nd ed.). Routledge. DOI: 10.4324/9781003174790
- Andersen, K. (2022). Realizing Good Intentions? A Field Experiment of Slow News Consumption and News Fatigue. *Journalism Practice*, 16(5), 848–863. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2020.1818609
- Ball, B. (2016). Multimedia, Slow Journalism as Process, and The Possibility of Proper Time. *Digital Journalism*, 4(4), 432–444. DOI: 10.1080/21670811.2015.1114895
- Barranquero Carretero, A., & Jaurrieta Barriain, G. (2016). Slow Journalism in Spain: New magazine startups and the paradigmatic case of *Jot Down*. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 521–538. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1124729
- Berkey-Gerard, M. (2009). Tracking the “Slow Journalism” Movement. *Markberkeygerard.Com*. <https://web.archive.org/web/20120911165001/http://markberkeygerard.com/2009/07/tracking-the-%E2%80%9Cslow-journalism%E2%80%9D-movement/>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. DOI: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Cheng, L. (2021). The Practice and Presentation of Slow Journalism: A Case Study of Kinfolk Magazine. *Journalism Practice*, 0(0), 1–18. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2021.1969987

- Craig, G. (2016). Reclaiming Slowness in Journalism: Critique, complexity and difference. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 461–475. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1100521
- Deuze, M., & Prenger, M. (Eds.). (2019). *Making Media: Production, Practices, and Professions*. Amsterdam University Press. DOI: 10.2307/j.ctvcj305r
- Drok, N., & Hermans, L. (2016). Is there a future for slow journalism?: The perspective of younger users. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 539–554. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1102604
- Eriksen, T. H. (2001). *Tyranny of the moment: Fast and slow time in the information age*. Pluto Press.
- Fulton, J., & Scott, P. (2022). Time Well Spent: ABC Journalists Reflect on Slow Journalism and the Remote Communities Project. *Journalism Practice*, 16(8), 1597–1613. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2021.1874485
- Gess, H. (2012). Climate change and the possibility of 'slow journalism.' *Equid Novi: African Journalism Studies*, 33(1), 54–65. DOI: 10.1080/02560054.2011.636828
- Gibbs, C., & Warhaver, T. (2002). *Getting the whole story: Reporting and writing the news*. Guilford Press.
- Given, L. M. (Ed.). (2008). *The Sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications.
- Greenberg, S. (2012). Slow Journalism in the Digital Fast Lane. In R. Keeble & J. Tulloch (Eds.), *Global literary journalism: Exploring the journalistic imagination* (pp. 381–393). Peter Lang. https://www.academia.edu/5199522/Slow_Journalism_in_the_Digital_fast_Lane
- Greenberg, S. (2007). Slow Journalism. Why doesn't Britain have a culture of serious non-fiction journalism like the US? *Prospect*. <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/opinions/57661/slow-journalism>
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (1st ed.). Cambridge University Press. DOI: 10.1017/CBO9780511790867
- Harrington, W. (Ed.). (1997). *Intimate journalism: The art and craft of reporting everyday life*. Sage Publications.
- Hermann, A. K. (2016). The Temporal Tipping Point: Regimentation, representation and reorientation in ethnographic journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 492–506. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1102605
- Kõuts-Klemm, R., Harro-Loit, H., Ibrus, I., Ivask, S., Juurik, M., Jõesaar, A., Järvekülg, M., Kauber, S., Koorberg, V., Lassur, S., Loit, U., & Tafel-Viia, K. (2019). *Study of mediapolitics and developments [Meediapoliitika olukorra ja arengusuundade uuring]*. University of Tartu, Institute of Social Studies. <https://www.digar.ee/arhiiv/nlib-digar:399372>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (Third edition). Sage Publications.
- Le Masurier, M. (2015). What is Slow Journalism? *Journalism Practice*, 9(2), 138–152. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2014.916471
- Mendes, I., & Marinho, S. (2022). Slow Journalism: A Systematic Literature Review. *Journalism Practice*, 1–31. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2022.2075783
- Mey, G., & Mruck, K. (Eds.). (2010). *Handbuch qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (1. Auflage). VS Verl. für Sozialwiss.
- Neveu, E. (2016). On not going too fast with slow journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 448–460. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1114897
- Örnebring, H., & Schmitz Weiss, A. (2021). Journalism and the Politics of Mobility. *Journalism Studies*, 22(14), 1894–1910. DOI: 10.1080/1461670X.2021.1971108

- Palau-Sampio, D. (2019). Reframing Central American Migration From Narrative Journalism. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 43(1), 93–114. DOI: 10.1177/0196859918806676
- Rauch, J. (2018). *Slow media: Why “slow” is satisfying, sustainable and smart*. Oxford University Press.
- Reinardy, S. (2010). Need for Speed onto Internet Clashes with Journalistic Values. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 31(1), 69–83. DOI: 10.1177/073953291003100106
- Reinardy, S. (2013). Depleted Resources Causing Burnout for Layoff Survivors. *Newspaper Research Journal*, 34(3), 6–21. DOI: 10.1177/073953291303400302
- Siebert, S.T., Peterson, T., Schramm, W. (1984). *Four Theories of the Press: The Authoritarian, Libertarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet Communist Concepts of What the Press Should Be and Do*. University of Illinois Press. DOI: 10.5406/j.ctv1nhr0v
- Siil, V., Kõuts-Klemm, R. (2023). Survival of the Slowest. A Case Study of Two Slow Journalism Outlets in Estonia. *Mediální studia*, 17(1), 7–26.
- Sikk, T. (2023). How are the readers of Edasi and Levila perceiving their goals [Kuidas tajuvad Edasi ja Levila lugejad nende väljaannete eesmäärke]. University of Tartu, Institute of Social Studies. <https://dspace.ut.ee/items/87419e21-53d8-46a5-b84a-7db97010202c>
- Thomas, H. M. (2016). Lessening the Construction of Otherness: A slow ethics of journalism. *Journalism Practice*, 10(4), 476–491. DOI: 10.1080/17512786.2015.1120164
- Vihalemm, P. and Kõuts-Klemm, R. (2017) Meediakasutuse muutumine: internetiajastu saabumine [Change in media usage: arrival of the internet age]. In P. Vihalemm, M. Lauristin, V. Kalmus ja T. Vihalemm (Eds.) *Eesti ühiskond kiirenevas ajas: uuringu Mina. Maailm. Meedia 2002–2014 tulemused*. Tartu: Tartu Ülikooli kirjastus, 251–278
- Vihalemm, T. (2022). Media, miners and the injustices of sustainable transition in North-East Estonia. *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 11, 101129. DOI: 10.1016/j.exis.2022.101129