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# Performance of Investigative Journalism in Spain. The perception of its current state

**Raquel Martínez-Sanz** [CV] [Orcid] [GGS] Assistant professor - Department of Modern, Contemporary and American History, Journalism and Audiovisual Communication and Advertising - University of Valladolid, UVA, Spain - [raquel.martinez.sanz@uva.es](mailto:raquel.martinez.sanz@uva.es)

**Patricia Durántez-Stolle** [CV] [Orcid] [GGS] Part-time professor - Department of Modern, Contemporary and American History, Journalism and Audiovisual Communication and Advertising - University of Valladolid, UVA, Spain - [patricia.durantez@uva.es](mailto:patricia.durantez@uva.es)

## Abstracts

[EN] **Introduction.** The paramount relevance of Investigative Journalism, as a watchdog of the latent powers and supervisor of the actions from public representatives, requires a detailed knowledge of its needs in order to ensure its continuity and good health. **Methodology.** Based on the direct testimony of its protagonists, namely the professionals who daily perform it, a current and complete overview of their practice in Spain. **Results and conclusions.** The conducting of eleven in-depth interviews to a truly wide range of renown high-level professionals reveals that, the profession is still undergoing a difficult situation, with lack of means and very low earnings; moreover, it shows how both the rigor and the method are the key to face, with the greatest of guarantees, the accusations, allegations and pressures from the ones mentioned by these journalism professionals, at their regular activity. Finally, journalists were asked to provide solutions to the problems they themselves identified as limiting their work.

## Keywords

[EN] Investigative Journalism; journalist; checkup; interview; corruption.

## Contents

[EN] 1. Introduction. 2. The investigation, a task that reveals the hidden. State of the question. 3. Methodology. 3.1 Trajectory of the professionals interviewed. 4. Results. 4.1 A common definition of investigative journalism. 4.2 Labour situation and conditions of the new generations. 4.3 The

appearance of the first indications. 4.4 Coordinated and multidisciplinary work. 4.5 Cases that, in one way or another, never close. 4.6 The state of health of investigative journalism in Spain. 5. Conclusions. 6. References.

Traslate by **María Miñana Guerola**. Universidad de Valencia

## 1. Introduction

Since mid-2014, corruption and fraud represent the second most important problem in the country - only surpassed by unemployment and, in some specific moments, by the independence of Catalonia- according to the CIS barometer (2018). In addition, a significant increase in means of the number of information intended to account for the emergence and evolution of cases of illicit enrichment, misappropriation of public money and influence peddling is seen in many cases becoming the main issue of newspapers and news (Jiménez, 2014; Guerrero-Solé, Pont-Sorribes & Palencia-Lefler, 2013; López Rabadán & Casero Ripollés, 2012).

With this way of proceeding, Journalism fulfil the function of representing reality by offering the citizen an empowerment that motivates and justifies decision-making both individually and as a group, although this does not prevent the media from taking advantage of their privileged situation and actively intervening in the fight for the imposition of the legitimate vision (Chavero, 2012; Zamora & Martín, 2010; Bourdieu, 2002). "The audience is forced to trust in the media so that they build reality for them, but they also expect them to act as an element of control, denouncing abuses of power and bad political practices" (Chavero, 2012).

Research, as a synonym of verification, confrontation and deepening, is intrinsic to the exercise of journalism (García Márquez, 1996; Pereira, 2010). The *gatekeeping* theory presents the journalist as a watchdog who watches over the abuses of power, guaranteeing the right of citizens to be informed. However, the strong crisis in the sector -caused by technological change and economic difficulties- has reduced the possibilities of controlling the media, thereby hindering its practice (Gutiérrez Atala, Ferreira Jiménez & Pajoni, 2015). Thus, it is usual that the work of the *conventional* journalist is characterized by a frenetic pace, by accumulating tasks -what López García (2015) calls polyvalence-, and by having a limited investment of resources (precariousness). Conditions that restrict the mandatory audit task of the journalist linked to the information of strict current affairs (Espino Sánchez, 2016).

This reality, recognized by many authors (Ufarte & López-Redondo, 2013; Sabés & Verón, 2012; Salaverría & Negro, 2008), means that both from an academic and professional point of view, Investigative Journalism constitutes itself a journalistic modality with its own characteristics and way of doing (Parra Valcarce, 2017; Reig, 2000).

The study that is collected here intends to advance in this direction: to emphasize the value of investigative journalism as a support for Democracy (Checa & Barredo, 2016; Waisbord, 2001) by detailing and making evident its work routines. To this end, the direct testimony of the professionals who practice it is taken (n=11), with an interest in their training, work techniques, relationship with the journalistic company and achieved effects. All this will allow us to achieve our main objective: to build a panoramic vision of the current state of investigative journalism in Spain.

## **2. The investigation, a task that reveals the hidden. State of the question**

The uniqueness of investigative journalism lies in its purpose: to bring to light a circumstance of public interest that has deliberately or accidentally remained hidden (Garcés Prettel & Arroyave Cabrera, 2017). The journalist, therefore, exercises the task of monitoring but also putting at the centre of the debate what is really relevant to the citizen (Meneses, 2016; Martínez-Sanz & González, 2018).

Often the social interest is mistakenly associated with the demand, when in reality what determines that a topic is apt to be investigated marks it, not the expectation or curiosity that it can raise, but the repercussion that it may have on the life of the citizen (Reig, 2000). In spite of everything, Checa Montúfar warns (1994: 27) that the danger lies in "the enclosure in a purely denunciatory or sensationalist journalism, that does not have a constructive contribution, a proposal for solutions and that can even be an apologist for crime".

This implicit transcendence in the topics addressed causes the personal sources, fundamental in the construction of the story, to present an initial resistance to sharing with the journalist the information available to them. The treatment required by a witness, an agent, or a victim to gain sufficient confidence to speak with the journalist, requires a personalized care and treatment that in today's journalism there is no time to cultivate.

And if something of great interest has managed to remain hidden, it is because it is conveniently hidden (Arribas Urrutia, 2016; Phail Fanger, 2012). Concealment in investigative journalism translates into a chaotic mass of data and complex circumstances that involve the investigated event and that hinder its clarification. Consequently, without the explicit intervention of the journalist the revealed plot could never have surfaced.

Through the documentary verification, that is, the verification of each and every one of the data, the validation or rejection of the thesis defended by the journalist is achieved (Rueda-Rieu, 2014; De Pablos, 1998). Only then the result will be reliable and can be published. Although it is true that in conventional or current journalism the errors committed have a limited impact and are solved by rectifying what has been published, in investigative journalism the consequences of an erroneous accusation can be irreversible and can damage the reputation or professional career of the indicated (Gómez-Sáez, 2015).

In addition, obtaining strong evidence not only strengthens the complaint but also helps achieve another of the great purposes of investigative journalism, and is that the perpetrators and / or involved in the events break their silence and are forced to give explanations, not only before the Justice, but before the public opinion.

It does not always have to be to be always this last and definitive 5<sup>th</sup> phase the physical and personal entrance in prison or in the cell of a police station or court of the people investigated. What it is about is a change of situation; The most radical of them is, without doubt, the loss of freedom and their entry into a prison. But, for the record, this last phase does not imply a sharp prison but a radical change in the status of the affected party (De Pablos, 1998).

Faced with the economic crisis in the sector, the revaluation of quality journalism and long format as a differentiating and valuable factor stands out. As Rosique-Cedillo and Barranquero-Carretero (2015) point out, since the end of the 2000s, movements have emerged to support *slow journalism*, which advocates moderating the rhythms of information production and consumption in contrast to the cult of immediacy. And while it is true that the hard task of carrying it out falls to the journalist, Héctor Borrat (1989) warns that the true protagonist in research is exercised by the media. This justifies the need to explore the relationships and "tensions" that can be reached between the professional and the company and that is only obtained through the direct testimony of its protagonists.

The investigative journalist can't perform his task outside the company. [...] the true protagonist of investigative journalism is not any individual, no team of professional journalists, but, inexorably, the social actor newspaper that, when it suits their interests and to deploy a specific strategy, assumes the role of investigator of secrets unduly hidden by other actors (Borrat, 1989: 87).

### 3. Methodology

The main objective of this work is to gather the vision that the investigative journalism professionals have of their daily work, focusing on aspects such as training and work evolution; work routines and relationship with the company; or quality of published works and effects. These personal evaluations, based on professional experience, constitute a point of support for the academic notions developed above, since they allow us to appreciate the extent to which they are met at present.

In order to solve the questions raised, the in-depth interview is used as a professional interaction capable of going beyond the spontaneous exchange of ideas. From the approach based on careful questioning and listening, the qualitative research interview is a place where knowledge is built (Kvale, 2011).

The interview adopted a semi-structured format consisting of 31 questions intended to be answered by Spanish investigative journalists and in practice in any media. These initial questions, common to all

the subjects, were complemented with others, at the discretion of the interviewer and according to the course of the dialogue but in any case, always aimed at knowing the way of acting, the professional career and/or research interests of the interviewee.

The selection of journalists was guided by two prerequisites: 1. that they considered themselves investigative journalists and 2. that they practiced the profession at the time of the interview. In addition, and to guarantee maximum representativeness, up to five variables were taken into account:

- Gender. We looked for professionals of both sexes: women and men.
- Age. Subjects of all age groups - grouped by decades - were deliberately selected, from the age of thirty to the sixties.
- Years of experience as a research journalist. Three groups were established: *Junior* professional, with a route between 5 and 10 years, *Semi Senior* professional, with between 11 and 25 years of experience and *Senior* professional, with a career in the higher sector at 25 years.
- The means of communication from where the research work is disseminated. To this end, journalists were taken to work for television, press, radio and media and digital formats.
- The employment relationship. There were salaried professionals, hired by a specific means, and *freelancers*, stand-alone who are not part of the payroll of a particular journalistic company.

Finally, after considering the criteria described, a non-probabilistic sample of convenience is adopted consisting of 11 subjects that although it does not allow to draw generalized conclusions, it does establish trends given the broad representativeness of them (Humanes e Igartua, 2004). The selected journalists were: Sandra Mir, Marcos García Rey, Pilar Velasco, Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo, Fernando Rueda, Xaquín López García, Laura Cornejo, Carlos López Fonseca, Ana Terradillos, Daniel Montero y Esteban Urreiztieta. Figure 1 synthesizes, by percentages, the presence of each of the variables in the sample configured by eleven professionals.

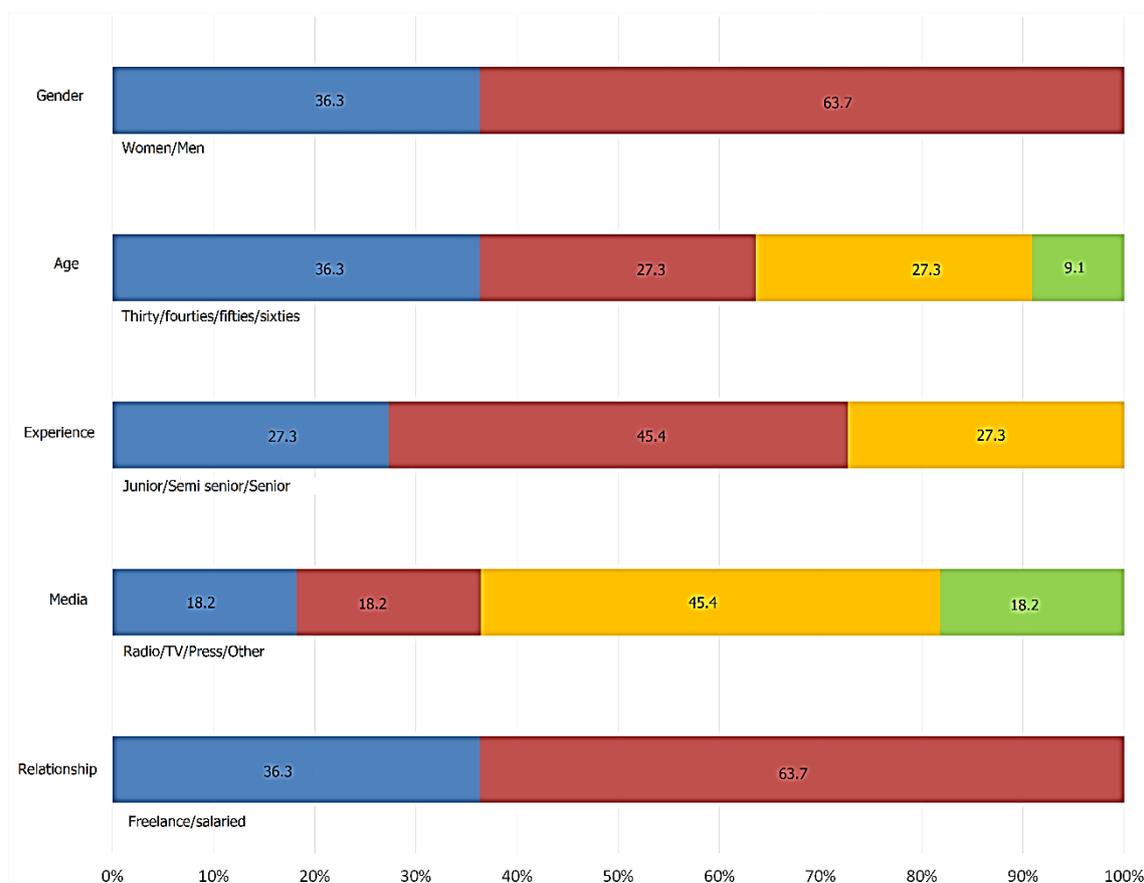
In-depth interviews were conducted between the months of March, April and May 2016, extending, on average, 55 minutes. In addition, and prior agreement with the journalist, the meeting was recorded entirely in audio format. It was considered essential that when the conditions allowed, the interviewer would travel to the journalist's place of work to help generate the best conversation climate (Olaz Capitán, 2016).

The interview was structured around three thematic axes:

*The beginnings in the journalistic profession. Current job situation.* The first block is interested in knowing the way in which the interviewee was initiated in investigative journalism and the type of formal training he received. In addition, it deepens in the professional situation in which the subject is

currently immersed, the topics that interest him most and his personal opinion about the labour landscape of the entire profession in Spain.

**Fig. 1 Percentage representation of the variables in the study simple**



Source: own production

*The research process.* The second block explores the qualities, techniques and ways of acting that must be present in any research process and that condition the profile of the professional. In addition, the story is used in the first person to know how to start an investigation, the average time of work, ethical conflicts that may arise and the plausible consequences of their work.

*The health status of investigative journalism in Spain.* The third and last block seeks to know the opinion that professionals of investigative journalism deserve the quality of the works that have been published or issued in Spain in the last five years. In addition, they are asked to provide solutions to the main problems they face and that limit their ability to go further.

### 3.1 Trajectory of the professionals interviewed

Sandra Mir is a journalist in *Noticias cuatro* and co-author, together with Gabriel Cruz, of several works, the result of her research on the situation and Spanish political management. With 15 years of experience in the profession, her work is mainly focused on social reporting, having focused on situations such as child prostitution in Pakistan, child trafficking in Ecuador or the existence of child soldiers in Sierra Leone.

Carlos López Fonseca is a specialist in terrorism information. His professional career as a journalist goes through newspapers like *Ya*, *El Independiente* and *El Confidencial*. In addition, he was part of the magazine *Tiempo* for 18 years where he became head of Actualidad. Fonseca is the author of several books linked to the trajectory of the terrorist group ETA.

Laura Cornejo defines herself as a versatile journalist thanks to her work for the radio, televisión and written and digital press. Specialized in the regional scope of Castilla y León, has been present in headlines such as *Gente*, *Diario de Valladolid* de *El Mundo*. Very active on the Web, Cornejo manages a blog, *Sin Mordaza*, where he gives voice to the research he does for his own interest.

Esteban Urreiztieta leads since 2016 the research team of *El Mundo*, a position that had previously occupied the Balearic Islands for 8 years uncovering the main cases of corruption in the Islands and led to the resignation first, and then to jail, to the leader of Uniò Mallorquina, María Antònia Munar. He previously held the position of deputy director at *El Español*.

Daniel Montero participates from its beginnings in the journalistic project of *El Español*. Activity that he combines as a collaborator in several television programs and with an editorial facet that has led him to publish up to 3 books whose content drinks directly from the investigations related to corruption in Spain. Montero's professional career as a research journalist begins in the *Interviú* magazine.

Ana Terradillos is an expert in terrorism, works as a journalist in Cadena Ser, in Madrid, and participates as a collaborator in several gatherings of Cuatro putting under her spotlight the corruption of the country. In 2003 it covers the Iraq War and from that moment its scope of investigation extends to the international terrorism of Islamic cut (Al Qaeda and Islamic State).

Xaquín López has worked as a journalist in the TV news and TVE news services since 2010, although his time in the public entity goes back years ago including RNE, Canal 24 horas and La 2. Currently, he combines the facet journalism with the coordination of the Master of Journalism in Television at the Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid. The publication of the report "En ruta con los niños esclavos" (*El País*) earned in 2007 her the Children's Rights and Journalism Award.

Fernando Rueda is a specialist in espionage and intelligence services with a career in investigative journalism over 30 years. He was deputy director of *Interviú* magazine and currently works as a *freelance* participant in various media. He is the author of a dozen books related to his main line of specialization and works as a professor at the Villanueva University Centre (Universidad Complutense).

Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo is editor-in-chief of *La Vanguardia* a newspaper he has been linked to since 1976. Together with his colleague, Jordi Bordas, he founded the research team of this medium in 1983. He has been awarded, among others, the Ortega y Gasset Prize and the Ondas Prize, he teaches journalism at the Ramón Llull and Pompeu Fabra universities. His foray into television also led him to work as a co-writer and adviser in *Teleobjetivo* (TVE).

Pilar Velasco works as a journalist for the Cadena Ser research team, following up mainly political and economic cases. Previously, she was part of the magazine *Interviú* and *Estrella Digital* and was the assistant director of the program *Actualidad en 2D* in La Sexta. Velasco is the author of the book *No nos representan: el manifiesto de los indignados en 25 propuestas* (2011).

Marcos García Rey is a Research Editor at *El Confidencial* and a member of International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ), an organization awarded with the 2017 Pulitzer Prize for research related to the Panama Papers in the "In-depth Journalism" category. García Rey has also participated in investigations such as the Falciani List or "Saqueando los mares". He was founder and coordinator of the Master of Journalism in Research, Data and Visualization (2012-2017).

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 A common definition of investigative journalism**

The in-depth interview with each and every one of the journalists begins with the definition of what the interviewee understands what investigative journalism is. This way of proceeding aims to establish a common starting point and make sure that the conception of the object of study -investigative journalism- is adjusted to the same parameters.

The eleven interviewed professionals reaffirm the definition -journalistic modality that seeks to expose facts that remain hidden and that entails the direct action of the journalist- although they repeatedly postulate that research is inherent to the journalism itself. There are those who even bet on other nomenclatures or expressions to identify it: "second-rate journalism" in reference to the fact that it needs a slower rhythm or "journalism that gets you in trouble", because of the frequency with which authors have to deal with demands.

#### 4.2. Labour situation and conditions of the new generations

While it is true that one of the initial requirements to develop the interview was that the journalist was active, most recognized not only that, but also, combine their work as a journalist with teaching in specialized university master's degrees and/or writing compilation books of their research. This common note warns us of its strong vocation and involvement despite being professionals with long experience and a consolidated situation and, therefore, without the incipient need to open the way.

With regard to the journalistic exercise itself, we are interested in knowing the medium in which they develop their work. Two of the journalists clarify that they are linked mainly to television, two others to the radio and five to the press -printed (1) and digital media (4)-. The two remaining professionals say that they do not feel represented by this classification because they do not limit themselves to a single support, but, depending on the circumstances, their work adapts to the most suitable medium, there being no predominance of one over another.

Of the entire sample, seven work for a medium, as salaried employees, while four do it as a *freelance*. However, half of them remember that at some point in their professional career they have passed through this figure, driven by circumstances rather than by their own conviction. When mentioning the significant increase of self-employed workers, the admiration towards these professionals is unanimous: "defending oneself and surviving as a *freelance* has a lot of merit [...]. The risk is maximum and profitability is scarce", says Carlos López Fonseca.

Among the strengths that surround the work of the *freelance* journalist, the respondents highlight the inexistence of ties and the freedom to work on those topics that interest them most without having to explain to anyone. There is also coincidence when evaluating its evolution: "this figure has been distorted by offering derisory payments that border on insult and complicate the very survival of the journalist".

And when dealing with the main disadvantages assumed by the self-employed, it refers to issues such as loneliness or lack of protection when work is questioned. "Although the director of the media is responsible for what is published, in case of complaint, you answer directly", they remind us.

However, when asked about the most prone to work in investigative journalism, the answers adopt a wide variety. There are those who opt for the *freelance* status as the best mechanism so that the inquiries can be extended over time; there are those who consider that the private company is the one that can give more guarantees; and those who do not opt for a particular option pointing out that each has its pros and cons. As Daniel Montero acknowledges in the context of the debate on public or private entities "the important thing is that the medium adopts a critical perspective and fulfil a social purpose. (...) The problem comes when the medium prioritizes their particular interests. It is at that moment when journalists have dichotomies".

Without delving into the exact amount, many professionals feel that they are conveniently remunerated by the media for which they work clarifying that "with this you do not get rich". Ana Terradillos remembers, in addition, that "the dedication is absolute and the need to update you with training, constant".

When reviewing the quality of the university education that is offered to future journalists, the majority considers that it is improvable, although they point out that the knowledge of how they are done. Things are given by practice, that is, by experimenting in the first person. In spite of everything, they coincide in highlighting that a recent graduate must leave the faculty managing in English and dominating certain computer tools.

In the case of the specialty of investigative journalism, the panorama is blackened almost unanimously, the perception that from the Spanish university is not prepared in this modality if it is not through master's studies. Marcos García Rey determines that the good education of the future investigative journalist must be oriented to: "know how to analyse and represent data and master the access to public information". It should be noted that many of the journalists interviewed have regular contact with the new generations, either because they teach or because they receive scholarship writing, which gives them a privileged vision.

### **4.3. The appearance of the first indications**

All the journalists who attended our in-depth interview recognized that they were immersed in some research work. It is striking that more than half apostillan that the usual thing is to be working in more than one case. Xaquín López explains his way of acting:

The ideal is to have many different options and move them at your whim depending on the rhythms of each. I have sleeping stories, themes that I have been pursuing for 3, 4, 5 years but I know that in the end I can get it, that's why I insist on them. As a general rule, I let them rest when I reach a point where there are no results and when a few months pass I recover them. You have to have many open fronts and choose according to the moment and the possibilities.

The most interesting subjects among investigative journalists are corruption, political management and party financing, tax evasion and jihadism. In this order, these were the most named cases around which were behind the track: Ausbanc and Manos Limpias, Bárcenas case, *Panama papers*, Puyol family, Urdangarín case and terrorism in Spain.

At the time of beginning an investigation, professionals of Journalism find in their confidants the most propitious formula to start their research. However, establishing a relationship of trust with these types of sources takes time and requires constant professionalism and good work. Esteban Urreiztieta insists

that "the sources that have given me the most valuable information are the ones that I have personally cultivated and the ones I deal with face to face, because only then can you get them to trust. And from there you start to document what they tell you".

Other frequent starting points for a journalistic investigation are the filtering of documents and the critical supervision of the media. "Sometimes a news item jumps and you consider that it is not sufficiently treated or that it lacks data to be understood. It is at that moment when you can start to consider an investigation", explains Laura Cornejo. There are also those who advocate reviewing whether the same irregular situation that has been discovered, and which is currently news, is taking place simultaneously in other geographical spaces or contexts. All with the aim of checking if the same pattern of behaviour is repeated.

Even though these are the most common mechanisms used by journalists to start a new investigation, they all recognize that each case, each situation is a world. But if there is a pattern that can be extended to the majority, Pilar Velasco is committed to "follow the trail of the money, although it sounds like a topic. Wondering how money comes and how it is used are key issues when it comes to guiding the issue".

#### **4.4. Coordinated and multidisciplinary work**

If the discovery of the topic to be investigated affects the work of the weeks or even the following months, the choice or not of the colleagues who will be accompanying the journalist during the entire process is no less important. When asked about the ideal number of members of a journalistic research team, the respondents expressed conflicting opinions: from those who prefer to work alone - recognizing that this has done very well-, those who choose to work as a couple- as long as there is complicity and not a forced union-, going through those who advocate a bigger and more varied team, the better. All those who opted for the working group insisted on the need to be integrated by professionals of varied abilities where they can't be absent, in addition to journalists, computer engineers and data analysts.

When defining the essential qualities of a research journalist, the following responses were collected:

- Effort, perseverance and tenacity. The issues investigated by the journalist, by keeping themselves hidden either deliberately or by chance, require their explicit intervention as they will have to unravel and analyse a whole web of complex data and circumstances. The resolution of this arduous task demands time and perseverance. Do not be overcome by discouragement in the most unsuccessful moments and be patient in the search for new data or connections are basic features to get results.
- Vocation. "You have to like the job very much and enjoy your work because it is very laborious and ungrateful many times", recalls Esteban Urreiztieta. That high dedication to which we

alluded to in the previous point is only understood and can be maintained over time, if the journalist feels true passion for his work.

- Method. In addition to possessing talent and showing a predisposition towards work, the investigative journalist needs an adequate method of work, based on rigor, that channels all his effort and allows him to structure his own and acquired knowledge.

Although there is no doubt that the investigative journalist has at his disposal a wide range of techniques to obtain valuable information, during the interview he focused on the opinion that deserves the use of covered recording mechanisms such as cameras or hidden microphones. In that sense we find a great unanimity. All remember that in Spain there was a "golden" era for this technique, constantly demanded and that came to constitute itself a television format. However, its use was soon distorted by attempting, without justification, against the privacy of the people recorded.

During the talks, four journalists acknowledged openly and without being explicitly asked for it, using the hidden camera at some point in his career, always with the aim of covering their backs: either to register the threats or to get a proof that proves the thesis defended in the journalistic work in case of being sued for it. From these testimonies it is concluded that the result of a hidden camera does not have to be destined, irremediably, to its public diffusion.

Taking into account the assessments of the 11 specialists, it is appreciated that when what motivates the use of a hidden camera is to denounce a particularly relevant situation, of public interest and whose testimony can't be achieved through another resource, its use is legitimized.

#### **4.5. Cases that, in one way or another, never close**

Once the research process has finished and the work has been published, we are interested in knowing to what extent the journalist is aware of the evolution of "his topic" or, on the contrary, He prefers to take a distance and confront a new project as soon as possible. While it is true that no one declared to end their investigations abruptly, but in all cases is committed to monitoring, after raising this question, we see two types of response depending on the pressure to produce material to the that the journalist is submitted by his means. Those professionals more attached to the current situation said to follow the evolution of the case investigated to register reactions, to verify that the journalist and/or media that gives the exclusive is respected and mentioned and even to attract new sources interested in contributing their testimony. Follow-up characterized, in any case, by its capacity to give rise to new material that can be published in a short-medium term. On the contrary, another important group of professionals, more detached from the daily compulsory production, carry out this follow-up mainly guided by nostalgia and empathy towards the subject, hoping to check its evolution in the long term.

However, there is a situation, alien to the own will of the journalist and common to all, which means that the latter can't close the chapter and is the one that occurs when those aggrieved by a journalistic

investigation denounce its author before the courts. As they recognize: "it is unpleasant. The notification of your first complaint is indelible. You get afraid; It is an unknown situation, even knowing that you have everything tied and well tied". In spite of everything they admit that it has to be this way, that it is necessary to continue demonstrating value "because you know that you are bringing to light issues that others -mummy, corrupt, fraudsters, etc.- wish to keep hidden. And that is the best sign that you are doing your job well".

The thematic scope where the investigative journalistic work is framed of which the interviewees feel proudest, revolves mainly around the (bad) management: political, administrative or economic. Above all, corruption cases stand out. In addition, many journalists have experienced that their work has had direct consequences on society contributing, as far as possible, to limit excesses of power. "Many of my subjects have ended up being investigated by the Justice, by the prosecution and I know in good hands that they have served the people they affect", says Pilar Velasco.

More precisely, it is possible to determine that the publications signed by journalists have modified behaviour, internal regulations and legislation; they have produced dismissals, resignations and even imprisonment for those who broke the law and have contributed to citizens knowing the truth of what happened. Sandra Mir does not forget, also, the great personal contribution that is made with each story: "experiences, testimonies, friendships, knowledge of other realities... that enrich you as a person, that generate a valuable baggage. And that makes me feel very proud".

In these terms Eduardo Martín de Pozuelo also expresses who remembers moments of great emotion with victims and relatives of accused Franco and Nazis who did not know the past of their loved ones. "You feel and live with emotion every one of the advances".

#### **4.6. The state of health of investigative journalism in Spain**

If until now the issues raised have been oriented to know the way of working and the report of the professional experience, the following questions deepen the opinion that deserves the last published work by his colleagues by profession, as a way to test the state of health enjoyed by investigative journalism in Spain today.

With all this, and taking as reference the present time, journalists were asked to reflect on the main problem that haunts the practice of investigative journalism that is practiced in Spain. The most repeated option was the limited budget that the media allocate to cover it. In conjunction with this, Sandra Mir, a witness to the drastic decrease in the payment offered by the media in the process of buying full reports to *freelancers*, is expressed. The limitation of not having guaranteed access to data concerning the Public Administration was also put on the table, leaving in evidence the ineffectiveness of the recently released Transparency Law.

On average, journalists attribute a grade of 6.5 out of 10 to journalistic works published or broadcast in Spain in the last five years. There were those who said that the results shown in the press are much higher than those issued on television and who, by doing a comparison exercise, places Spain at the same level as other countries that enjoy high esteem at the international level.

Complaints about the ailments, and in parallel, it is proposed to the journalists to suggest improvements that contribute to increase the quality of the research works. In this sense, two types of media are repeated: on the one hand, that journalism companies devote more time and resources to investigative journalism and, on the other, that journalists are more thorough: "the data must be worked on because they are the basis for contextualize and size the issues" (Pilar Velasco). In this same line Marcos García Rey is expressed for whom a good research methodology is fundamental. "You can have a lot of talent, you can be a very tenacious person and spend a lot of time, but without a good methodology, you will not get a rigorous result".

If there is a recurrent reference to the lack of means to investigate, we ask the sample to indicate the issue that it would address if it had an unlimited budget. The majority, and with great spontaneity, can't repress offering more than one answer: the monarchy and the origin of its patrimony; the business of enforced disappearances in countries such as Mexico or Colombia; the crimes of the Civil War; corruption in Justice; the power relations forged by the autonomous administrations that have been governed by the same party for decades; political corruption and extortion; or the traffic of women from their countries of origin, were the answers provided.

Finally, journalists were asked to assess the possible damage -if any- caused by the formats that call themselves "research" without being so and that are a constant in the television offer. For Sandra Mir, the journalist has acquired an excess of unjustified protagonist in recent years, expressing her support for having to go unnoticed. "The role of the journalist is limited to checking the data and transferring the information".

## **5. Conclusions**

The investigative journalism, as a differentiated journalistic modality, fulfils the function of exposing everything that remains hidden establishing a continuous vigilance on the established and factual powers, that is, everything that conditions and is relevant to citizens.

This noble function, however, encounters numerous obstacles because of the implications that its denunciation may imply. The research process takes time; time to deal with sources and gain their trust; time to unravel complex issues; and time to verify each and every one of the data that will support the story. Without this guarantee, the journalist can't publish and therefore demand from the people causing the damage public explanations. However, we must not forget the priority role played by

journalistic companies, which support research and ultimately determine which issues are public and which are left stranded.

In order to know first-hand the perception that investigative journalism professionals have of their work (work situation, routines and quality of investigations that come to light in Spain), eleven journalists of first level and of all condition. These not only provided a unanimous definition of investigative journalism but also validated with their statements the conditions signed by academics.

With regard to the employment situation, the interviewees admitted that the profession is still in a precarious state, especially visible in the figure of the *freelance*, who, while addressing the issues that most interest him, receives insignificant payments for his work. The fact that many well-known journalists have been forced to pass through this state at some point in their careers represents the delicate situation that the guild has gone through, and to a large extent still remains.

The investigative journalists in Spain work, as a general rule, on more than one topic simultaneously being interested mainly in corruption, political management and party financing, tax evasion and jihadism. Its starting point is usually due to the clues provided by a confidant, someone of confidence who has access to data or information of interest, although as they recognize, each case has its evolution and its particularities.

Where there was no unanimity is in the ideal number of members of a research team although it did repeat the maxim of having a good environment and, above all, profiles and knowledge that complement the rest. All in order to be able to face with the greatest possible solvency the judgments and demands to which they are subjected, practically continuously, media and journalists. Symptom that you identify with having reached the bottom of the matter.

In spite of everything, it is recognized that not everything is valid and that the mechanisms of hidden surveillance like the hidden camera have a very bad image due to the indiscriminate and abusive use they had in a bygone era. Only its use is justified when it is the only viable resource to report an irregular situation of interest or to prove a threat.

With all this, the investigative journalists consider that the quality of the published works is good at the same level -mainly the written press- than the most recognized international publications, although they say that it could be improved if the media invested more time and economic resources. the investigation.

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