None huger than Perugia

This year’s eleventh International Journalism Festival, Europe’s largest annual media event, was like the Edinburgh Fringe for journalists. For five days media practitioners, NGOs and others gathered in Perugia, Italy (about half way between Rome and Florence) for more than 250 events.

High-profile speakers at the Festival included Owen Jones and Craig Newmark.

Unlike the Edinburgh Fringe, this festival is free to attend and open to the public – first-come, first-served. All sessions at the festival were livestreamed and are available on YouTube. Sponsorship comes from Facebook, Google, Amazon, the EU and the Italian government.

In the Renaissance-era university buildings of Perugia’s city centre, about halfway between Florence and Rome, more than 600 speakers shared their experiences of reporting from around the world.

Some key themes this year included the first anniversary of Giulio Regeni’s murder in Egypt and reports on immigration, data journalism, state surveillance and emerging authoritarianism.

One of the most valuable parts of the festival was hearing from journalists themselves around the world about the political situations in their home countries – rather than through the lens of the Western mainstream media. Syrian journalist Zaina Erhaim, for example, spoke about present-day Syria as being “five Syrias” based on the different groups or parties ruling the particular area. She described the six-year conflict as a revolution, not a civil war – since it involves the regime using public money to suppress opposition movements, rather than multiple parties of equal power battling each other.

In a panel on reporting on migration, Yasir Khan, the senior editor of digital video at Al Jazeera English, spoke about the company’s unique policies on reporting stories about immigration.

The company uses the term “refugees” (or “people”) but not “migrants” and tries to report on refugees as survivors rather than victims.

In one widely-shared Al Jazeera video they followed a refugee living in Berlin who, every week, makes a large pot of soup to feed homeless people in a makeshift soup kitchen under a bridge.

Khan said this story got no trolls – what kind of negative comment could someone make about a person helping vulnerable people? © Tamara Micner

New members meet again

New members of London Freelance Branch met on 27 April with experienced members Phil Sutcliffe and Francesca Marchese, who writes: “more than 12 attended! We spoke about the mission of the Union, explored our website www.londonfreelance.org and discussed job issues.

New members introduced themselves and had an insight into the union’s activity.”

These meetings happen on the last Thursday of every third month. The next is at the Camera Café, Museum Street, London WC1A 1LY on Thursday 27 July from 6pm.

New members in April: photo © Francesca Marchese

Freelance Directory

The NUJ Freelance Directory is the most reliable and probably the biggest listing of professional English-language media freelances. Now we’ve redesigned it to work better on mobile devices, so it looks a bit fresher too. Every freelance in it is an NUJ member who’s demonstrated to the Union that they are in fact a professional journalist – whereas some other directories list anyone who pays a fee. Your entry in the Freelance Directory is free to you as a paid-up NUJ member who has told the union you’re freelance. Go to www.freelancedirectory.org to create or update your entry – especially if you’ve just joined the NUJ. You can upload sample photos, which can include a photo of yourself for your profile. You need to make sure the union centrally knows you are freelance: we give full details of how to do this at www.londonfreelance.org/fil/1705coa.html

The Freelance plans to feature selected new profiles – what do you think of that as an idea? Tell us – at editor@londonfreelance.org

And the Union’s Freelance Industrial Council is discussing fresh ways to promote the Freelance Directory to editors, starting with those known to want to engage trade union members.

Participants at last year’s International Journalist Festival in Perugia.

Photo: © Tobia Faverio/IJF

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Media against hate

More than 30 media practitioners and NGO representatives gathered in Vienna for an event in April run by Community Media Forum Europe (CMFE), which represents not-for-profit community media.

As part of the CMFE’s Media Against Hate campaign (www.cmfe.eu), sessions focused on how media folk can counter rising hate speech. There was advice on how to create more diverse, inclusive stories around issues raised by immigration and multiculturalism.

Mukti Jain Campion, an Indian-British independent producer for BBC Radio 4, presented her list of diverse sources.

Ingrid Brodnig discussed the importance of challenging problematic metaphors and false analogies, and the need to create new images to counter xenophobia.

Ingrid noted that, although responding to abusive comments or posts is unlikely to change the minds of trolls or “true believers”, it can educate other readers less sure in their beliefs and more likely to be swayed by information. She described several effective strategies in use to address hate speech online.

One of these is to frame the discussion below an article rather than allowing an open-ended debate – “What are your experiences of moving to a new place?” rather than “What do you think?”

Other advice included allowing comments only when a moderator is available or when an issue is getting a lot of debate. Invest moderators’ time in the first half-hour after an article is published to set the tone of a debate. It’s more effective to delete hateful comments before they are published rather than after: replace the comment with a brief explanation of why each was deleted.

Another effective tactic is to require commenters to answer some simple questions about the article before they can leave a comment (to prove that they actually read it – there’s an example linked from the longer online version of this article).

Finally, workshop participants Ehab and Lama, both Syrians living in Luxembourg and working in radio, advocated those reporting on refugees looking at people’s pasts and futures as well as their present: what were their lives like before they had to flee, how do they see their futures now they live in Europe?

© Tamara Micner

Freelance on the go now

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