



## Article

# Collaborative Journalism from a Latin American Perspective: An Empirical Analysis

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**Abstract:** The practice of collaboration in journalism is not new. The developments in information and communication technologies (ICTs) are understood by many scholars as the critical factor for collaborative journalism to flourish across newsrooms. By working together, practitioners can address the challenges of a profession in crisis as well as the need to produce quality investigative reporting. Much of the academic discussion regarding cooperative efforts in journalism has happened in the US and Europe. This paper aims to shed light on collaborative journalism outside this region, focusing on Latin America. To conduct our study, we looked at the literature concerning collaborative journalism in the Scopus and Scielo databases to build a survey that was shared among Latin American practitioners who worked on collaborative projects in recent years. Our findings show that Latin American news organisations are taking part or forming collaborative efforts to share a set of practices, processes, and motivations. However, their motivations are different from their Western counterparts, as Latin American journalists are looking for ways to fulfil the normative role of journalism in society and occupying spaces left by the mainstream media. By doing so, practitioners focus on topics and communities that are often misrepresented, forgotten, or underreported in the media. Finally, our paper concludes by suggesting a profile of news outlets working on collaborative projects across the region, and we provide some directions for future research.

**Keywords:** collaborative journalism; Latin America; business models; journalism practice; normative journalism

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, many successful cross-border collaborative projects have been developed in the news industry, such as the Panama Papers, the FinCen Files, The Cartel Project and many others (Abraham 2020; Sambrook 2018). The phenomenon of collaboration in journalism is not new but these projects showed that collaborative journalism plays a central role in the production of stories that impact our society and challenge our global consciousness. In this respect, cooperative efforts gave means for practitioners to address the complexities of our current globalised, datafied and platformised society (Mesquita and Fernandes 2021). However, collaborative news projects are very much associated with transnational efforts, which is not always the case. Cooperative efforts are being carried out at different levels, ranging from local to regional (Jenkins and Graves 2019; Stobely 2017).

During the mid-nineteenth century, journalists struggled to gather information from remote regions and other countries due to geographically restricted ways of relating to others, making these professionals and their organisations rely on non-journalistic sources, such as tourists and diplomats (Williams 2011). In our currently hyperconnected environment, scholars defend that the alliances between different journalists were spurred on due to technological advances, which have facilitated the communication between them. Thus, international collaborations became more affordable and appealing to news outlets,

which found lower entry barriers to access information, helping to foster new forms of working and producing content (Alfter 2016; Stonbely 2017; Sambrook 2018).

However, the same information and communication technologies (ICTs) that allowed better and cheaper connections, have also disrupted the traditional business models of the news media industry, especially after the emergence of the internet and the platformization of the society (Dijck et al. 2018). The press has lost its role as gatekeeper to social media platforms. In these spaces, anyone could become a source of information, reducing the duty of news outlets to that of traditional guardians of the information. In an ecosystem where news outlets have scarce resources to utilise in the most effective way, while still having to ensure their vital role as gatekeepers of the public interest, collaborative journalism emerges as a means to join forces to overcome these limitations (Deuze 2006; Van Der Haak et al. 2012).

Research on collaborative journalism has been very centred in Western rich countries until recently. Little is known about the practice in the Global South, particularly in Latin America. Few studies have paid attention to this region that includes the major Spanish speaking population in the world as well as some of the strongest emerging economies, such as Brazil and Mexico. In recent years, Latin American news outlets have been involved in many important transnational investigations, such as the Paradise Papers and The Cartel Project (Benton 2020; Latin America Archives-ICIJ n.d.). These news organisations were also promoting regional ground-breaking investigative projects such as *Lava Jato* in many countries of Latin America, *Vaza Jato* in Brazil and “889 Pages” in Puerto Rico (Faure 2019; Chavkin 2019; Oliveira 2020). These collaborative projects focused on covering topics that were important for their own realities and issues.

Therefore, it is worth trying to understand the similarities and the differences between collaborative journalism in Latin America and elsewhere. Since journalism is a profession that suffers from both internal (organisational and individual) and external (political, economic, social and cultural contexts) influences, it is expected that collaborative journalism in Latin America would portray some singularities (Traquina 2005). According to Hanitzsch and Mellado (2011), economic and political factors are among the main influences that make journalism different in different parts of the world. Even though Latin America is not a monolithic block, the region’s countries share a lot of communalities, such as their colonial past and the recent path toward the re-emergence of authoritarian and non-democracy regimes (Salaverría and de-Lima-Santos 2021). For instance, in terms of media systems, scholars have long been critical of the established and traditional mainstream media in these countries, in which media ownership is highly concentrated in the hands of a few families, and their dependency on political and economic powers (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez 2014). In addition, Latin America suffers from a low level of freedom of the press, which has been deteriorating in recent years (RSF 2020).

Given this scenario, it is important to examine the practice of collaborative journalism in the region. To conduct our study, we surveyed 120 Latin American news organisations in 15 countries that have played a part in collaborative projects in recent years. By conducting this quantitative study, this paper aims to shed light on how Latin American news organisations perceive collaborative journalism based on their own personal feelings and experiences. To this end, this article poses the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Who is conducting collaborative journalism projects and what are the types of collaborations taking place in Latin America?

**RQ2:** Which motivations and benefits of these collaborations are perceived by organisations?

**RQ3:** What are the processes and how do organisations financially support collaborative projects?

## 2. Collaboration by Whom and for Whom

The Panama Papers became a benchmark for collaborative journalism scholarship. This cooperative project was carried out by hundreds of journalists and news organisations around the world and revealed the wrongdoings of important figures across the political

and economic spectrum, as well as artists and athletes. The investigation was coordinated by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and was made possible thanks to a leak of data and information from the Panamanian law firm Mossack Fonseca (Graves and Shabbir 2019; Fitzgibbon and Hudson 2021). Founded in 1997, the ICIJ has designed a blueprint for this new form of cooperative journalistic work (Sambrook 2018; Konieczna and Graves 2020). To conduct this investigation, the ICIJ involved not just journalists and news media organisations, but also universities, advocacy groups and specialists from diverse industries (Sambrook 2018).

Since this case, an increasing number of organisations have started promoting collaborative investigations around the world. In Latin America, Connectas takes on this role. Founded in 2013 by Carlos Eduardo Huertas during his stay at the Nieman Foundation at Harvard (USA), Connectas produces its journalistic investigation and resorts to partnerships to shed light on transnational issues, such as infrastructure, energy, telecommunications, technology, environment, organized crime, and governance. Similar to ICIJ's approach, the Latin American organisation has partnered with other news media to provide technical and professional support for investigative projects under the CONNECTASHub, a space that articulates journalistic complicity to make news reports. For this, Connecta adopts four principles: independence, quality, networking, and reading of the issues beyond their local impact (Salaverría et al. 2018; CONNECTAS | Nosotros n.d.).

However, collaboration happens in different ways and not only via larger organisations, such as the ICIJ and Connectas. Journalists and news organisations join forces to produce journalistic projects, which can range from short-term to long-term based upon these actors' needs (Mesquita and Fernandes 2021; Salaverría et al. 2018). Scholars have pointed out that Latin American news media organisations began to collaborate as a way to mitigate the lack of resources and stretch their audiences' coverage (Salaverría et al. 2018). In the region, cooperative efforts are also seen among independent journalists, NGOs and alternative media (Gearing and Berglez 2019). For example, a study by Harlow and Salaverría (2016), which mapped the region's native digital media, concluded that "the most influential native online sites are trying to renew traditional and outdated forms of journalism, serving as alternatives to the mainstream media" (11). Similarly, a recent study has found that like their larger transnational counterparts, smaller organisations also have the potential to produce impactful investigations, leading to socio-political changes (Gearing and Berglez 2019).

In Latin America, collaborative processes were also associated with innovation processes in news outlets (de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021a; Schmitz Weiss et al. 2018). Although many organisations and professionals are taking part in collaborative journalism, little is known about the processes involved in these efforts, or about the power relationships and structures built by practitioners to make collaboration beneficial and sustainable (Alfter and Cîndea 2019).

### 3. Incentives to Cooperate in the News Industry

Traditionally, collaborative journalism has been described as an editorial collaboration between media organisations, nongovernmental (or non-profit) organisations, universities, and other actors working collectively on the production of stories that would be hard or impossible to create in another way (Alfter 2016). In another vein, collaborative journalism can be seen as a model of producing journalism that embraces the emergence of new actors, using them as a form of introducing new and different viewpoints to the news reporting (Sambrook 2018). To achieve this cooperative *modus operandi*, media practitioners have to share information, data, sources and resources, which was not common before. Journalists were trained to ensure they always get the best scoop possible, promoting a competitive environment instead of a cooperative one (Carson and Farhall 2018).

Scholars argue that with collaborative journalism, there is an old and a new way of producing investigative journalism (Carson and Farhall 2018). The old way is highly competitive, where journalists would guard their privileged information with their lives,

while in the new model the sharing environment prevails. Thus, the competitive model has started to be overthrown by a new form of common journalism (De la Serna 2018).

Investigative journalism has been recognized as a very expensive practice that demands time and effort, which could mainly be supported by larger organisations (Houston 2010). These organisations would profit from investigative stories through forms of social capital, such as reputation and awards. Since the disruption brought about by the emergence of new ICTs, for-profit news organisations whose revenues were strictly grounded on advertisements and subscriptions would not risk investing in investigative journalism because they cannot “capture the value” of an investigative piece (Hamilton 2016). As Hamilton (2016) explains, news organisations start to engage in other forms and models of journalism to regain the terrain or even to be able to support their businesses. Amid these new and renovated forms of journalism, collaborative investigations have emerged as a means of raising cultural and economic capital in the news industry (Carson and Farhall 2018). Despite the general economic challenges faced by the news media industry nowadays that have led to the shrinkage of investigative teams, collaborative projects have been more and more recognized by the industry as a feasible and reliable model of investigation.

In another line of thought, scholars linked the emergence of collaborative efforts in the news industry to the impact of such projects. For example, Heft (2019) looked at Twitter to understand the impacts of the Panama Papers. The results showed the importance and capability of the “spreadability” that such cross-border investigations have over public attention (Heft 2019). The ICIJ’s investigation had the most significant outcomes of The Panama Papers three years after its release in 2016, showing that a high-profile investigation has a long-term impact, especially on policy-making bodies (Graves and Shabbir 2019).

Therefore, organisations and journalists saw collaboration as a way to survive the economic challenges, but also as a step forward towards innovation in the newsrooms by renewing journalism’s normative practices and mission. De la Serna (2018) identifies collaborative efforts as part of the context of journalism practices evolution, such as the introduction of a more participative way of producing news with audiences and other professionals and a new model of investigative journalism which served as a template for a renewed collaborative ethos. The author also pointed out the main impacts of this new commons of journalism, which is field reparation—to fill the gap left by the news media industry when it starts to decline—the share of technology and data, as well as the expanding role of j-schools and non-profit organisations in the efforts. In this context, scholars have begun to consider the evolution of collaboration among journalists as the main force towards the improvement (or rescue) of journalism as a profession and an institution.

In the Global South, the precarious work of journalists has another layer of depth. According to Matthews and Onyemaobi (2020), the precarity of the work of journalists in these regions is attached to the general political, economic and social conditions of these countries, adding to it the safety issues that journalists and media practitioners are often exposed to. In Latin America, the ongoing state of violence is also a motivator for collaborative journalism (Chacón and Saldaña 2020). By working in networks, news media practitioners see cooperative efforts as a way to protect themselves against violence in the region. For example, journalists are using collaboration to avoid and bypass government censorship in Latin American countries, which commonly happens in Cuba and Venezuela.

According to previous studies, another effect of the precarious nature of the work is that journalists tend to reorganize themselves in new and alternative work arrangements. In Brazil, journalists are focusing on the journalistic mission to the public rather than on profitable business (Figaro and Nonato 2017). In general, these professionals are journalists who have been forced out of legacy media and have joined forces to build small newsrooms that work through cooperative or association models. Thus, these practitioners have found in networked experiences forms of exchange, share, and solidarity, advocating for a product that delivers a service that is essential for the promotion of democratic values.

Additionally, journalists and news organisations are using these alternative and independent work arrangements to fulfil a space left by mainstream media and occupying spaces that are rarely seen on or heard by mainstream media. By failing to introduce new voices to the coverage (Ford et al. 2020), the news media industry lacks diversity (Cherubini et al. 2020). Thus, collaborative journalism becomes a crucial tool to engage with communities and diverse voices by fostering cooperative approaches “among newsrooms, journalists, and community members in a spirit of inclusion, dialogue, and analysis” (Ford et al. 2020, p. 61). For example, news outlets partnered with local communities to deliver information that is relevant to those in remote areas (Mesquita and Fernandes 2021); meanwhile, these news outlets might benefit from the partnership in terms of accessing wider audiences.

#### 4. Types of Collaboration and Their Sustainability in the Long Run

One of the first works aiming at classifying collaborative journalism is a report published by The Centre for Cooperative Media (Stonbely 2017). In it, collaborative journalism models are discussed through a comprehensive matrix of features of this expanding model. Built on secondary research—in particular, the inductive analysis of documents, such as conference presentations, journal papers, and interviews with people that are part of collaboration efforts—the author defines six models of collaborative journalism: Temporary and Separate, Temporary and Co-creating, Temporary and Integrated, Ongoing and Separate, Ongoing and Co-creating, Ongoing and Integrated. These models were defined under three different levels of analysis: “Level of Integration” (meaning that different levels of integration would be based on whether the content is produced together or separated), “Duration” (whether the collaborative project is open-ended, temporary, or otherwise), and “Level of Commitment” (temporary collaborative projects requires low levels of commitment from the partners. On the other hand, ongoing projects that rely on sharing tools, sources and resources and common working processes demand more commitment to the collaboration). However, this study is built from an analysis of predominantly North American collaborative projects, focused on processes and does not offer much information about the sustainability of such projects, the formality of these partnerships and their motivations.

Collaborative journalism is an endeavour that happens on several levels, from local to international, and with different timelines. Jenkins and Graves (2019) interviewed 30 professionals and partners that have been contributing to collaborative efforts at a local level. The authors could identify three models of collaboration among these practitioners and their organisations: “(1) a permanent network of journalists and non-journalists engaged in topic-driven reporting projects; (2) legacy and start-up news organisations working together on a single extended investigation; and (3) regional news organisations sharing content through a collaborative newsroom” (Jenkins and Graves 2019, p. 5).

In Latina America, journalistic investigations are undertaken mostly by non-profit organisations (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014). These news outlets are very dependent on international foundations, grants and scholarships (Warner et al. 2017). One of the challenges for news organisations in the region is sustainability (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014). While many commercial news organisations rely on governmental subsidies (Fernandes 2019), making them even more subjected to local political fluctuations and influences, smaller organisations rely on philanthropic money to sustain their activities (Table 1).

In summary, there are various and different objectives for collaboration. The academic literature still lacks in-depth information about the profile of the organisations that are conducting collaborative efforts in Latin America. Whether these news outlets are in for-profit, non-profit, traditional, legacy, or native media outlets, what their motives are, with whom they are collaborating and so on, are still a mystery. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap.

**Table 1.** Contents and arguments of the literature review.

Argument	Source
Partnerships with universities, advocacy groups, specialists from different areas and industries	Sambrook (2018)
Principles such as independence, quality reporting, networking and reading issues beyond local impact	Salaverría et al. (2018)
Involvement of all sizes of news organisations	Mesquita and Fernandes (2021)
Overcome the lack of resources and to stretch their audiences' coverage	Salaverría et al. (2018)
Alternative to mainstream media	Harlow and Salaverría (2016)
Collaboration promotes innovation	Schmitz Weiss et al. (2018)
Smaller organisation able to produce impactful investigations	Gearing and Berglez (2019)
Little is known about power relations and sustainability	Alfter and Cândia (2019)
Described as an editorial collaboration between organisations	Alfter (2016)
Embraces the emergence of new actors	Lewis (2018)
Grounded on sharing environment	Carson and Farhall (2018)
Due to financial issues, news organisations start to engage in other forms and models of journalism	Hamilton (2016)
Feasible and reliable model of investigation.	Carson and Farhall (2018)
The importance and capability of "spreadability"	Heft (2019)
Long-term impact, especially on policy-making bodies	Graves and Shabbir (2019)
Focus on field reparation; shared resources; the expanding role of j-schools and non-profit organisations in the efforts	De la Serna (2018)
Journalists tend to reorganize themselves in new and alternative work arrangements	Figaro and Nonato (2017)
The emergence of a spirit of inclusion, dialogue, and analysis	Ford et al. (2020)
Way to protect themselves against violence in the region	Chacón and Saldaña (2020)
Six models of collaborative journalism	Stonbely (2017)
Local collaborative journalism	Jenkins and Graves (2019)
In Latina America organisations are highly supported and dependent on international foundations, grants and scholarships	Warner et al. (2017)
Latin American news organisations challenged to be sustainable	Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando (2014)
Latin American organisations more susceptible to local political fluctuations and influences	Fernandes (2019)

## 5. Methodology

Surveys are a well-established method for collecting quantitative data, such as demographics (Wolf et al. 2016). We consider this is the best method for this study, as it allows us to deal with larger datasets and capture common information across different actors. This supplies us with data to map the profile of the organisations that are conducting or taking part in collaborative journalism efforts, their motives, practices, and processes. The survey was composed of questions drawing upon the findings of the literature review and research questions. The questions were composed of short, open-ended, multiple-choice and checkboxes. The survey was disseminated between March 2021 and April 2021. The survey was sent to 500 news organisations in 20 countries of Latin America. In total, our answers encompassed 120 news organisations in 15 Latin American countries, as shown in Table 2.

It is relevant to point out that the questionnaire comprised 35 questions, of which 23 are analysed in this paper. After the data cleaning, the final list achieved a sample of 487, as shown in Table 3. The sample was composed of practitioners that were invited by e-mail to fulfil a form based on Google Forms. The results were then compiled into a spreadsheet.

**Table 2.** Nationality.

Country	Sample	Response Rate
Argentina	30	27%
Bolivia	25	16%
Brazil	145	37%
Chile	15	20%
Colombia	39	31%
Cuba	16	25%
Ecuador	13	15%
Guatemala	7	29%
Mexico	53	15%
Nicaragua	13	8%
Panama	5	60%
Paraguay	12	25%
Peru	19	16%
Uruguay	18	17%
Venezuela	19	16%
Regional	4	25%

**Table 3.** Overall Data Collection Summary.

	Total	Percentage of Participation
News organisations reached	487	-
News organisations' replies	120	25%

*Data Analysis Procedures*

The data analysis follows some steps provided by [Nishishiba et al. \(2014\)](#). First, it was defined as “cases” and “variables”. While the former represents each of the respondents of the survey, the latter symbolizes each of the questions asked in the survey to the participants. To make it easy to access the variables, they were labelled under a singular or a short term. For example, the question “What is your nationality?” was simplified to “Nationality”). A list of each term labelled and its description can be seen in Table 4.

**Table 4.** Categories, Variables, Format and Labelled Variables.

Category	Variable Description	Variable Format	Labelled Variable
Demography	What's your nationality?	Open-ended	Nationality
	I identify my gender as ...	Multiple choice	Gender
	How old are you?	Multiple choice	Age
	What is your professional training?	Multiple choice	Educational Background
	Which organisation are you answering this questionnaire for? Type of organisation:	Multiple choice	Organisation type
	How big is the organisation?	Multiple choice	Size
	What is the corporate social function of the company/organisation?	Multiple choice	Corporate Name
	What is your current role in the organisation for which you work?	Open-ended	Role
Motivation	What is your role in this project?	Multiple choice	Role in the Project
	Why did you (and/or your organisation) decide to collaborate with other organisations?	Checkboxes	Motive for collaboration
	To have access to ... What motivated the creation of the project?	Checkboxes	Motive for the project

Table 4. Cont.

Category	Variable Description	Variable Format	Labelled Variable
Types, Duration and Scope	Who do you (and/or your organisation) collaborate with?	Checkboxes	Types of collaboration
	Topic of the collaboration	Checkboxes	Topics
	What is the scope of the collaborations?	Checkboxes	Scope
	What is the duration of the project (or projects)	Multiple choice	Duration
	Which is the working process?	Multiple choice	Workflow
Process	How do you think collaboration is benefiting you and the organisation you work with?	Checkboxes	Benefits
	Who decides who to collaborate with?	Multiple choice	Decision-making
	What is the decision-making process in the project?	Multiple choice	Network
	What kind of agreement have you (and/or your organisation) entered with the other entities or professionals involved in the collaboration?	Multiple choice	Agreement
Sustainability	What is the organisation's business models?	Checkboxes	Business Models
	How do you (or your organisation) finance the project?	Multiple choice	Financing
	Are members of the network able to support themselves only with the revenue generated by journalistic work?	Multiple choice	Sustainable

The second step grouped variables by higher “categories” that represent the topic under which each variable lies. For instance, the variables “age”, “gender”, “country”, “country of residence/work” were grouped under the category of “demography”. Table 4 brings these categories and their respective variables. For cleaning, clarity and summarising purposes, these options were defined as “groups”. Additionally, for standardization purposes, there were changes in the groups when needed, meaning that some groups may include more than one description as shown in Table 5.

To be able to analyse the data and provide an initial discussion, descriptive statistics and normalization were applied to the data. In summary, the steps taken were as follows:

1. Data cleaning and translation;
2. Definition of cases and variables;
3. Labelled variables;
4. Grouped variables under categories;
5. Description of variables and formats;
6. Definition of groups and description of changes;
7. Analysis and discussion with the use of basic descriptive statistics and normalized data.

Finally, the raw data show differences in the numbers of respondents by country. To provide more reliable results, there was a need to normalize the data. Normalization of data is useful for comparisons, and it intends to scale, transform, and equalize the data. “Transforming the values of variables so that they approximate a normal distribution. This is done mostly so that statistical tests that assume normally distributed variables can be used”. (Vogt 2005, pp. 212–14).

**Table 5.** Categories, Variables and Groups.

Categories	Variable Name	Groups
Demography	Nationality	N/A
	Gender	Female Male Genderqueer/Non-Binary Prefer not to say Other
	Age	18–25 26–35 36–45 46–55 56 or more Rather not answer
	Educational Background	Social Communication Journalism Multimedia Audio-visual Law Social Sciences Others
	Organisation type	TV/Radio Digital Native News Agency Newspaper Magazine Other
	Size	Small (up to 5 people/organisations) Medium (from 5 to 20) Large (more than 20) Varies by project
	Corporate Name	Non-profit For-profit NGO Other
	Role	CEO/Founder and Director Editor/Editor-in-chief and Coordinator Content Creator
	Role in the Project	Coordination Data and information collection Fieldwork Report Production of video, audio or multimedia content Data analysis and visualisation Other:

Table 5. Cont.

Categories	Variable Name	Groups
Motivation	Motive for collaboration	Tools Data and information Expertise/Specific knowledge Technical abilities Sources Funding Other For safety
	Motive for the project	A common agenda We are used to working with this group of people We needed people in remote locations We required skills that we didn't have at home The subject we work with requires this Other:
Types, Duration and Scope	Types of collaboration	Other news media organisations Universities Communities Defence organisations Other:
	Topics	Politics Art/Culture Health Human rights The technology Finance/Economics/Business Environment Science Housing Gender and race Combine multiple themes
	Scope	National International Local Regional
	Duration	Continuous/Open (indefinite) Temporary-1 month (around) Temporary-6 months (around) Temporary: one year or more
	Workflow	Partners create content separately and share it Partners work together to create content Partners share content/data/resources at the organisational level Other
	Benefits	We are reporting better We have more sources, resources and information We are getting more audience We are receiving information from different and more places Other:

Table 5. Cont.

Categories	Variable Name	Groups
Process	Decision-making	Horizontal (without hierarchical coordination) Horizontal (with coordination) Vertical (like a traditional newsroom) Other:
	Network	All of us in the organisation The editorial team The network we are part of Other:
	Agreement	Verbal Contract or any other formal agreement No formal agreement Other:
	Business Models	Collaborative financing (Crowdfunding) Government-sponsored cultural incentives Cultural incentives promoted by private philanthropic institutions Partners/ Associates/ Members Advertising Sale Sale of products and services Content production Subscription Events Education Resources of the organisation's own members There is no funding Financing by project Other
	Financing	With resources from the organisation itself We seek external support (partners/crowdfunding/etc.) for our projects We apply for funds (grants/scholarships) that already have specific projects A mix of the previous ones
	Sustainable	Yes always Yes, most of the time Not always No

## 6. Results

In this section, data collected from the survey administered to Latin American practitioners working in collaborative projects are presented and analysed in support of the theoretical framework presented before. First, we present the profile of practitioners and the types of collaboration most commonly found in Latin America. Second, we show the motivation for collaboration and the benefits perceived by the organisations. Finally, we present the processes involved in collaborations, the business models adopted by these organisations and their sustainability.

### 6.1. Who Is Collaborating and Which Are the Types of Collaboration Taking Place in Latin America?

The data collected have shown that there is a certain balance in terms of the gender of the respondents (50% male, 48% female), but only 2% non-binary, as shown in Table 6. Our data also confirm recent studies on gender equality in Latin America that show an upward trend of women in management positions of non-profit, alternative, and independent news organisations (Blanco-Herrero et al. 2020; Salaverría et al. 2018).

**Table 6.** Gender.

		Woman	Man	Other
Variable	Gender	58	60	2
		48%	50%	2%
Variable	Role in the Organisation	Woman	Man	Other
Group	CEO/Director/Founder	23	26	-
Group	Content Creator	4	4	-
Group	Editor-in-chief/Editor/Coordinator	23	21	1
Group	Freelancer	-	1	-
Group	Journalist/Reporter	7	7	1
Group	Public Relations	1	1	-
Variable	Role in Collaborative Projects	Woman	Man	Other
Group	Coordination	36	25	-
Group	Data and information collection	18	18	1
Group	Fieldwork	11	9	-
Group	Report	15	20	1
Group	Production of video, audio or multimedia content	19	17	-
Group	Data analysis and visualisation	15	10	1

In terms of age, 70% of the respondents are between 26 and 45 years old, which points out that a majority of the respondents have some professional experience (see Table 7). A group of 22% of the respondents are 46 or older, while only 8% of respondents are between 18 and 25 years old. This result echoes a prior study conducted by Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando (2014), who found that most organisations and journalists who have been leading investigative journalism in Latin America have some experience in the profession. Furthermore, veteran journalists usually team up with students and young professionals to form new, non-profit, and independent news outlets, as a way of overcoming the high costs of hiring experienced professionals (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014).

**Table 7.** Age.

Variable	Age	Nominal	Percentage
Group	18–25	10	8%
Group	26–35	41	34%
Group	36–45	43	36%
Group	46–55	15	13%
Group	56–more	11	9%

The educational background of more than 61% of the respondents was journalism, followed by other areas of communication (20%), as detailed in Table 8. Overall, the demographic data show that the respondents were largely educated, young, and balanced in terms of gender.

**Table 8.** Education Background.

Variable	Educational Background	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Journalism	74	61%
Group	Communications	24	20%
Group	Other	20	17%
Group	No formal Education	2	2%

Prior studies have noticed an increase in the numbers of digital-native news organisations in Latin America, especially after the 2010s (Salaverría et al. 2018). This could be explained in part by the failure of legacy media to provide a service that the public need, as well as the financial crisis that the mainstream media has been facing all over the world. In terms of the types of organisations that are conducting or are part of collaborative efforts, the data show that 60% consider themselves as digital-native news media organisations (see Table 9). Digital-native news organisations have been associated with a strong commitment to restoring journalism by adopting new values and routines (Salaverría et al. 2018). Thus, it is expected that the majority of the organisations participating in collaborative journalism would be digital-native ones. In addition, around 15% have declared themselves as being “others”. This can refer to freelance professionals, and collective movements, among others.

**Table 9.** Type of Organisation.

Variable	Type of Organisation	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Digital Native	72	60%
Group	Magazine	2	2%
Group	News Agency	7	6%
Group	Newspaper	16	13%
Group	Others	18	15%
Group	TV/Radio	5	4%

As shown in Table 10, the majority of the organisations are medium-sized (5–20–42%), followed by small-sized organisations (up to 5–32%). Large organisations with more than 20 professionals represent 20% of our dataset. The data are in line with previous studies that argued that larger, for-profit organisations would not risk investing in investigative journalism (Hamilton 2016). Nevertheless, the financial crisis has pushed organisations toward new and renewed forms and models of practicing journalism (Mesquita and Fernandes 2021; Schmitz Weiss et al. 2018). In summary, collaborative journalism seems to be widely spread across the industry. Yet, most organisations conducting collaborative efforts are small and medium in size.

**Table 10.** Size.

Variable	Size	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Medium size (between 5 and 20)	50	42%
Group	Small (until 5)	39	32%
Group	Large (more than 20 people)	24	20%
Group	Depends on the project	7	6%

Around 6% of the respondents said that the size of the organisation might change according to the project that they are carrying out at that moment. Concerning their legal structure, non-profit organisations made up the majority of the respondents, as shown in Table 11 (52%). The other half is composed of for-profit organisations (30%), 6% non-governmental organisations and 12% that are declared to be “others”. Most of these organisations are, therefore, non-profit, small to medium in size, and digital native. Again, the data confirm that smaller, non-profit organisations are the ones leading the way regarding collaboration in the news industry (De la Serna 2018; Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014).

**Table 11.** Corporate Name.

Variable	Corporate Name	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Non-profit	63	52%
Group	For-profit	36	30%
Group	Others	14	12%
Group	ONG	7	6%

Collaborative journalism can involve many different types of organisations, from other news outlets to universities, libraries and so on (Sambrook 2018; Stonbely 2017). In Latin America, the great majority of news organisations indicated that their collaboration happens primarily among newsrooms. Of the 120 respondents, 90% of them (108) replied that they conduct collaborative journalism with other news outlets. Collaborating with communities is also indicated as a type of collaborative journalism effort by 45% of the responses. Collaboration with freelance reporters comes right after with 43%. Last, universities and advocacy entities were indicated by, respectably, 36% and 31% of the respondents (see Table 12). A very small number indicated NGOs (3%) indicates that collaboration among news outlets and civil society is not common, as was indicated in a recent study about data collaborative projects in Brazilian *favelas* (de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021b). From these data, it can be inferred that a large share of media organisations still prefers to collaborate with other media organisations rather than other institutions. Nevertheless, collaboration is a model of practicing journalism that embraces the inclusion of emergent new actors in the production of the news reporting and it is guided by a spirit of inclusion and diversity, as the data show by the inclusion of actors such as communities and freelance professionals in the types of collaboration (Lewis 2018; Ford et al. 2020).

**Table 12.** Types of Collaboration.

Variable	Types of Collaboration	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Other news outlets	108	90%
Group	Communities	54	45%
Group	Freelancer	52	43%
Group	Universities	43	36%
Group	Advocacy	37	31%
Group	NGOs	3	3%

These organisations have covered a large range of social affairs through collaboration, as shown in Table 13. The topics covered are diverse, but reporting and investigating Human Rights, Politics, Gender and Race, Environment and Health were often mentioned by these Latin American respondents. Most of the efforts are focused on a single topic and one geographical scope, as shown in Table 14.

By analysing data on two levels, our respondents indicated that the geographical scope (55%) are mostly national or international. In absolute terms, 61% have declared that they are working on national issues. As pointed out by Mesquita and Fernandes (2021), independent news organisations are occupying a space left by the mainstream and legacy media, which often disregard and misrepresent social issues, such as Human Rights and Gender and Race. In this sense, it is understandable that these organisations have focused their field of action on national contexts. This is in accordance with a prior study that found out that collaborative efforts are also performed at the local level (Jenkins and Graves 2019).

**Table 13.** Topics.

Variable	Topic	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Various	35	29%
Group	Human Rights	29	24%
Group	Politics	12	10%
Group	Race and Gender	10	8%
Group	Environment	9	8%
Group	Health	8	7%
Group	Art/Culture	4	3%
Group	Finance/Economic/Business	3	3%
Group	Technology	3	3%
Group	Others	3	3%
Group	Environment, Health, Politics	1	1%
Group	Health, Science	1	1%
Group	Politics, Finance/Economic/Business	1	1%
Group	Politics, Race and Gender, Human Rights	1	1%
	Total	120	100%
	Single topics	78	65%

**Table 14.** Scope.

Variable	Scope	Nominal	Percentage
Group	National	73	61%
Group	International	62	52%
Group	Regional	45	38%
Group	Local	31	26%

However, transnationality of investigations is pursued more often by collaborative efforts in Latin America. In the survey, respondents have declared that they are also working primarily on international collaborations (52%), followed by regional (38%) and local (26%) networks. A detailed description is found in Table 14.

From these respondents, 42% of the collaborative efforts are continuous and open, while 44% are temporary, with 24% being for around 6 months and 20% for one year or more, as shown in Table 15. When the information provided by these respondents is combined, we can identify those important social issues have been the focus of collaborative journalism efforts in the region and they happen mostly at national or international levels without a clear end.

**Table 15.** Duration.

Variable	Duration	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Continuous/Open (indefinite)	50	42%
Group	Temporary-6 months (around)	29	24%
Group	Temporary: one year or more	24	20%
Group	Temporary-1 month (around)	10	8%

In relation to the workflow adopted, the answers suggest that efforts in which the content is created together among different practitioners within the network are commonly found in Latin American collaborative projects. As shown in Table 16, almost half (44%) of the organisations prefer a shared creation of content. In 26% of the cases, the sharing goes beyond this and is spread across the whole organisation. In these cases, the participants of the network share everything—data, information, sources—at the organisational level. However, some networks still only work together in the dissemination of the stories (24%). Nevertheless, all organisations work collaboratively at some level, most of them in a deep way, sharing content creation, data, information, sources and resources at the organisational level.

**Table 16.** Workflow.

Variable	Workflow	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Common content creation	53	44%
Group	Organisational shared environment	31	26%
Group	Separated content creation/Common dissemination	29	24%
Group	Others	3	3%
Group	Common content creation, Organisational shared environment	2	2%
Group	Separated content creation/Common dissemination, Common content creation	1	1%
Group	All the above	1	1%

In summary, most of the organisations working on collaborative projects create content together openly and continuously. This section sheds light on the level of collaboration that can permeate content production. It is understood that those organisations that can conduct collaboration at the level of production have a higher level of integration (Stonbely 2017). Thus, the level of integration has shown to be high among Latin American practitioners that are conducting collaborative journalism efforts, meaning that collaboration is embedded in journalistic practices.

#### 6.2. Motivation for Collaboration and Benefits

In terms of motivation, two groups can be perceived as interrelated: “Motivation for collaboration” and “Motivation for the project”. These groups account for a more general motivation towards collaboration, and more specifically related to the collaborative effort. As shown in Table 17, according to the organisations surveyed, the motives for collaboration are mainly to have “Expertise and Specific Knowledge” (69%), “Data and Information” (58%), and “Funding” (52%). Other reasons are also indicated by the respondents as the motivators for collaboration, such as access to technology (49%) and more diverse sources (38%). Concerning “safety,” less than one-fourth of the respondents assigned collaboration as a form of security measure or to share the risks of a particular investigation.

**Table 17.** Motivation for Collaboration.

Variable	Motivation for Collaboration	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Expertise/Specific knowledge	83	69%
	Data and information	69	58%
	Funding	62	52%
	Technology	59	49%
	Sources	46	38%
	Safety	15	13%
	Broader coverage audiences	10	8%

Since this question allowed the respondents to choose more than one option, some interesting analysis can be made by the combinations that respondents chose. The most common combinations found in their responses were “Technologies” and “Expertise and Specific Knowledge” as well as “Data and Information” and “Expertise and Specific Knowledge”.

In respect to motivation to collaborate in a project, it is more common that organisations to work together in collaboration because of a common agenda (67%), as shown in Table 18. Another 40% declared that they tend to work on projects through networks interested in the topic covered. To a lesser extent, 21% indicated that they are in search of new skills to add to the project and do not have them in-house, while 16% revealed that their motivation to work in collaborative projects with organisations that they are used to work with. Lastly, 14% indicated that they were in search of people in remote places. Again, this question allowed journalists to choose more than one option, and most of the answers were a combination of two or more motives, with the most common ones being “Common agenda” and “Due to the topic covered,” followed by “Common agenda” and “New skills” as well as “Common agenda” and “Remote places”.

**Table 18.** Motivation for the Project.

Variable	Motivation for the Project	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Common agenda	80	67%
	Due to the topic	48	40%
	New skills	25	21%
	We are used to it	19	16%
	Remote places	17	14%

Previous studies conducted in rich, Western democracies have shown that journalists tend to collaborate because of the shrinkage of newsrooms, especially due to the lack of resources (Sambrook 2018). Thus, it seems natural that organisations trying to overcome the lack of specialised personal or resources to acquire tools, technology and the lack of financial support for investigations would find in collaboration a way to circumvent the issue (De la Serna 2018; Figaro and Nonato 2017). Our data indicated that having common agenda is at the top of the list of the criteria when choosing with whom to collaborate.

There are many benefits that organisations claimed to achieve when taking part in collaborative projects, such as having “more access to sources, resources and information” (77%), acquiring information from “more and different places” (64%), having access to wider audiences (58%), or the possibility of “reporting better” (53%) (see Table 19). About 3% of respondents are not sure of the benefits that collaborative journalism can bring or what these cooperative projects are already bringing to the organisation. Previous studies have given little information about the benefits that organisations would achieve by collaborating (Salaverría et al. 2018). However, it is possible to assume that news organisations are keen to collaborate to overcome their lack of resources, to promote diversity and to widen their audiences and impacts, which may be considered as their expected benefits.

**Table 19.** Benefits.

Variable	Benefits	Nominal	Percentage
Group	More		
	sources/resources/information	92	77%
	Information from different places	77	64%
	Wider audience	69	58%
	Better reporting	63	53%
	Not sure how it is beneficial	4	3%
	Others	1	1%

### 6.3. Processes and Sustainability

In terms of the decision-making processes applied during collaboration, the majority of the organisations declared having some sort of coordination to facilitate collaboration, even though the majority indicated to adopt a horizontal management approach (63%), as shown in Table 20. This is followed by 26% of respondents who indicated not having coordination but adopting horizontal coordinating approaches. Only 10% have marked a very clear hierarchy, such as vertical with coordination, as adopted in traditional newsrooms. When comparing our results to those of older studies, it must be pointed out that the lack of an organisation, such as ICIJ or Connectas, made the process less hierarchical and more dependent on the news organisations that are participating in a collaborative project (Graves and Shabbir 2019).

**Table 20.** Decision-making.

Variable	Decision-Making	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Horizontal (with coordination)	76	63%
Group	Horizontal (no coordination)	31	26%
Group	Vertical (traditional newsroom)	12	10%
Group	Others	1	1%

Thus, the decision-making process reveals a majority of the organisations betting on a more non-traditional and less-hierarchical approach to collaborative projects. However, as much as it may seem, horizontality does not mean a lack of coordination, and, as previously suggested by [Alfter \(2018\)](#), collaborative efforts need “editorial” coordination focused on solving problems, administrative and logistic coordination. In line with previous studies, power relations are embedded in any social structure and, therefore, they can also be observed in the structures and efforts of collaborative projects ([Alfter 2018](#)).

The network variable reveals that most of the Latin American news organisations are abiding by more traditional and hierarchical approaches in the process of deciding with whom to collaborate. Half of the respondents declared that the process of decision is carried out by an editorial or management team (see [Table 21](#)). Another 36% claimed that all the members of the organisation take part in the process and just 9% said that the network that the organisation takes part in is responsible for a collaborative project. This shows that even though organisations that are conducting collaborative journalism tend to be horizontal, they still rely on some sort of hierarchical process to decide who takes part in a collaborative effort. As suggested by [Alfter and Căndea \(2019\)](#), the power relationship starts to show up in terms of deciding who is inside and who is outside the collaborative efforts, showing that these collaborations bring traces of homophilous and endogamous behaviours ([de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021c](#)).

**Table 21.** Network.

Variable	Network	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Editorial/Management team	60	50%
Group	All of us in the organisation	43	36%
Group	The network	11	9%
Group	All by myself	4	3%
Group	Others	2	2%

The great majority of the collaborative efforts are formally celebrated among collaborators (80%), being it verbally or through a formal contract or similar. However, a representative number of 19% declared that they do not formalize any type of agreement, leading one to think that the collaboration is deeply integrated into the routine of these organisations that they do not need to officialise it. Only a small portion of respondents indicated that these agreements differ between projects (see [Table 22](#)). There are pros and cons to this practice. On one side, collaboration became a natural process that organisations do not even think about it anymore. On the other side, news organisations might be losing their capability to improve, innovate and look outside their bubble, while the responsibility is on the load of who is in the network ([Alfter and Căndea 2019](#)).

**Table 22.** Agreement.

Variable	Agreement	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Verbal agreement	45	38%
Group	Any formal agreement	44	37%
Group	Without any formal/verbal collaboration	23	19%
Group	Verbal agreement, Any formal agreement	5	4%
Group	All the above	3	3%

Regarding the capability of news organisations to sustain themselves, the majority rely on more than one source of income, with the most common being “financing by the project” (49%) and “crowdfunding” (45%). Other revenue streams cited by the respondents were “content production” (38%), “sales of products and services” (33%), “advertising” (31%), “philanthropy” (29%) and “membership” (28%). To a lesser extent, answers indicated that “events” and “subscription” (both 20%) as well as “education” and “resources from its own members” (both 17%) were also sources of some of their income. Detailed information is shown in Table 23. In summary, most organisations rely on more than one source of income. These findings show that these news organisations are normally very flexible in terms of revenue strategy, and they have decided to adopt a myriad of business models to sustain their business.

**Table 23.** Business Models.

Variable	Business Models	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Financing by project	59	49%
Group	Collaborative financing (Crowdfunding)	54	45%
Group	Content production	46	38%
Group	Sale of products and services	40	33%
Group	Advertising Sale	37	31%
Group	Cultural incentives promoted by private philanthropic institutions	35	29%
Group	Partners/Associates/Members	33	28%
Group	Events	25	21%
Group	Subscription	23	19%
Group	Education	20	17%
Group	Resources of the organisation’s own members	20	17%
Group	Government-sponsored cultural incentives	13	11%
Group	There is no funding	10	8%

This debate reminds us to understand how these collaborative projects are financed, Table 24 brings a description of their answers. One-third of the respondents declared that they financed their projects through a mix of “seeking for external funds for projects,” “using the organisation’s own resources” and “application for existing funds and grants”. About one-third of the respondents said that they rely only on the organisation’s own resources and one-fourth “seek external funding” for the projects that they have already designed. The final portion of respondents (17%) rely only on “application for existing funds and grants” to fund the project.

**Table 24.** Financing Collaborative Projects.

Variable	Financing	Nominal	Percentage
Group	With resources from the organisation itself	34	28%
Group	We seek external support (partners/crowdfunding/etc.) for our projects	30	25%
Group	We apply for funds (grants/scholarships) that already have specific projects	20	17%
Group	A mix of the previous ones	36	30%

Even though organisations have been applying a mixed-income approach both to sustain the organisation itself and fund collaborative projects, the majority of the organisation and members of the network are “not always” or “not at all” able to support themselves only with the revenue generated by their journalistic work (65%), as shown in Table 25. The question evaluates the degrees of the capability of sustainability, where 23% declared that members of the organisation are “not” able at all to support themselves. Another 23% indicated that “most of the time,” they can support themselves and a minority (13%) pointed out that the organisation’s members are “always” able to support themselves only with the

revenue generated by journalistic work. It is possible to infer that these organisations are having trouble sustaining themselves and their professionals, even working in networks.

**Table 25.** Sustainability.

Variable	Sustainability	Nominal	Percentage
Group	Not always	50	42%
Group	No	28	23%
Group	Yes, most of the time	27	23%
Group	Yes, always	15	13%

In summary, access to funds is especially important in the Latin American context. Many authors have argued that the majority of new independent, nonprofit news outlets depend heavily on philanthropic support, especially from international foundations and big tech companies, such as Google and Facebook (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014; Mesquita and Fernandes 2021; Bell 2019). Our respondents have also indicated that their business models are supported mostly by projects and seek external funding for their organisations and their projects. In addition, some of the respondents declared that they have been using their own resources to conduct investigations.

## 7. Discussion

Similarly to other studies, much of the investigative reporting currently conducted in Latin America is the result of the work of small- and medium-sized news outlets. Many of them are independent, non-profit news organisations that emerged during the internet boom of the 2000s (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014; Mesquita and Fernandes 2021). Our survey was able to confirm prior findings that the majority of the organisations and journalists conducting investigative journalism have some or many years of experience in the profession (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014). Similar to prior findings, our survey indicated that veteran journalists are working with young professionals and students in new, small-sized news outlets.

In terms of gender, Blanco-Herrero et al. (2020) argue that there has been increasing participation of women in newsrooms. In traditional news media, women still make up a low number in management roles. On the other hand, independent news outlets have at least one female cofounder (around 60%), this is consistent with what has been found in previous studies (Salaverría et al. 2018). Our data also showed that women are more present in all functions of collaborative projects, but especially in management roles. For example, our respondents included 36 women and 25 men in coordination roles. In the roles of data collection, data visualisation and multimedia production, women outnumber men in the responses to our survey. A similar pattern of results was obtained in reporting, in which men outnumber women.

In summary, our data indicate that there is an increasing presence of women in the lines of command and management in independent, alternative, and non-profit news organisations in Latin America.

As stated, there are not many studies on collaborative journalism, especially in the Global South. The academic literature was able to show that news outlets that are conducting collaborative efforts in a partnership or a sort of consortium with organisations alien to journalism, such as advocacy organisations, non-governmental organisations, and universities (Sambrook 2018). Our data show that most collaborations are conducted among news outlets and practitioners, but there are some collaborations with two or more types of organisations, such as communities and universities. The data also show that almost half of the news organisations are actively collaborating with communities, showing the potential of participatory journalism in the region (Gruszynski Sanseverino and de-Lima-Santos 2021). A recent study on data journalism showed the interest of data journalists in relying on the public to build “alternative” sources of data, especially in forgotten communities (de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021b). However, it indicates that the engagement of the

audience and the general public in the news production is yet to evolve (Wall 2015). Therefore, the level of participation of communities, as well as why and how journalists are collaborating with these people are still to be investigated.

Our data revealed that collaborations in Latin America are mostly a peer-to-peer effort. However, these organisations cover topics that are often avoided by liberal, mainstream media (Guerrero 2014). This shows a commitment of these organisations to an idea of journalism's role in society (Figaro and Nonato 2017). In this view, it is assumed that journalists understand their profession to achieve an end related to social and democratic needs (Mellado and Dalen 2014). However, they cannot always translate these commitments through the content they produce because many forces internal and external to the profession and the individual might influence the content production (Hanitzsch and Vos 2017). Many studies defend the point that journalists turn to small- and medium-sized, non-profit organisations because they see these as spaces to be "freer" to reporting (Harlow and Salaverría 2016; Warner et al. 2017; Salaverría et al. 2018). Thus, our data show that the topics covered by these Latin American collaborative projects are in line with these journalistic goals, such as Human Rights, Politics, Gender and Race, Environment and Health.

In terms of the scope of the projects, news organisations are more focused on investigating social issues that directly impact the communities that these organisations are part of. Consequently, most of these organisations are conducting more national collaborative projects, as this form of journalism performs a critical social function, dealing very explicitly and consistently with the issues of their communities. In this sense, our data point to different directions than previous studies on collaborative journalism, which indicated that international collaborative efforts are more commonly performed (Alfter 2016; Sambrook 2018). Even though the authors of such studies do not peremptorily state that collaborative journalism is always multinational, cross-border or international, the scholarly literature does not give much attention to national, regional, or local efforts (Stonbely 2017; Jenkins and Graves 2019).

Our respondents have indicated that most collaborations are ongoing and open. On this basis, collaborative journalism might be a structural model that is inherent to the journalistic and investigative practices of the many Latin American news organisations. On the other hand, it can also be inferred that those news organisations have a looser approach to collaboration, performing it through a freer association. However, it also hampers that these news organisations from performing to the full potential of a structured collaboration, with editorial coordination of the assigned responsibilities (Stonbely 2017). However, it is possible to infer that those longer projects leave space for the maturation of practices, transforming them into something almost natural. Meanwhile, shorter projects could become more focused, with clear objectives. It is most likely that these projects are the kind of projects that are more commonly deployed among long-time partners or even in a more hierarchical fashion. In summary, our data show that Latin American collaborative efforts are often ongoing projects.

Finally, most of the organisations are working on collaborative projects to create content together, similar to Stonbely (2017)'s findings. This means a high level of commitment of the practitioners to the collaborative effort, meaning that collaboration is embedded in journalistic practices.

In relation to the motivations, our survey's responses are in line with the literature when pointing out that many collaborations are prompted by the needs of organisations to access data and information, skills, tools, sources, and resources that they do not have in the house as well as circumvent newsroom's shrinkage. However, the data collected show that the combination of access to "Technologies" and "Expertise and Specific Knowledge"; and to "Data and Information" and "Expertise and Specific Knowledge", were shown to be very particular to the Latin American context, as there is a lack of access to technology and the skillsets needed to deal with it (de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021a).

Some of the most commonly cited motivations were to increase audience size, material exposure, impacts, and access to funding. The latter was cited all over the survey in many opportunities. This echoes previous studies that showed the last few years have been marked by the increased offering of grants and other kinds of funds for collaborative projects (Kayser-Bril 2018). This has a strong influence on the increase of the practice of collaboration itself since many collaborations have been a form of journalism that attracts the attention of foundations and philanthropic organisations. However, the data show that although funding is a significant concern among the Latin American news organisations, it is not the primary motivation for collaborative efforts in most cases.

Many of the respondents added to their motives for collaboration other reasons, such as the need to diversify journalistic narratives, “adding new and fresh perspectives”, “giving a voice to human rights referents in our environment based on the recognition we have of their knowledge and trajectory”, and “showing talents from the peripheries”.

Decision-making occurs in the horizontal form in collaborative projects. However, this does not mean that there is a lack of coordination between the organisations participating in the effort. Most of the projects establish networks to support these coordination bodies, meaning that those who decide are the ones in the coordination teams of these news outlets. In this vein, collaborative projects are formally established by the partner organisations. The projects also show a profoundly cooperative format by adopting a common and shared process of content creation in most cases. Thus, it is safe to say that collaborative journalism in Latin America follows the tendency observed in other countries, characterised by horizontality, formal agreements, editorial and administrative coordination and an essence of common and shared spaces and practices (e.g., Sambrook 2018; Alfter 2016).

In formalization of these projects, the great majority of the collaborative efforts are established among collaborators (80%), whether verbally or through a formal contract or similar. However, a representative number (19%) declared that they do not formalise any type of agreement, leading one to think that the collaboration is so deeply integrated into the routine of these organisations that they do not stop to formalise it. There are pros and cons to this practice. On the one hand, the practice is such a natural process that organisations do not even think about it anymore. On the other hand, organisations might be losing their capability to improve, innovate and look outside their bubble, as suggested by Alfter and Căndea (2019). Stonbely (2017) has included formal agreements in a checklist that describes the requirements for collaborative work on the six models of collaborative journalism projects. There are interesting points to evaluate in relation to these Latin American collaborative projects: first, the level of formality of such projects; second, the lack of any formal agreement could potentially damage the ethos of collaboration; finally, in the long run, formal contracts mean an institutionalisation of collaborative practices, which can bring both beneficial and harmful effects.

Our data show that “advertisement” is still a crucial form of income for most organisations. Nevertheless, philanthropy still plays an important role in the region, as organisations rely strongly on seeking external funding for their projects (Requejo-Alemán and Lugo-Ocando 2014). It is also very relevant to the sales of products and content to third-party organisations. A great number of respondents have indicated that they have been using the members’ own resources to conduct investigations. This also reflects the finding that the majority of the members of the organisations participating in the survey are “not always” or “not at all” able to sustain themselves financially with journalistic work.

It is known that the conditions of work for all journalism professionals have worsened worldwide (Matthews and Onyemaobi 2020). Our data show that both non-profit and for-profit organisations are having problems sustaining themselves. The majority of for-profit news organisations indicated in our survey that they can sustain themselves “always” (8%) or “most of the time” (30%). On the other hand, around 71% of ONGs are not always able to sustain themselves—and “non-profit” organisations score almost 67% in the same situation. This is an alarming number that reflects not just the reality of the precarious situation of journalism professionals in the region, but also shows that collaboration and journalism

are seen by most of our respondents as a necessity and they are acting as activists, even though they might not consciously say that.

## 8. Conclusions

Overall, our survey shows that the majority of the Latin American news organisations are collaborating among themselves, meaning that they have been preferring collaborations with other news outlets. However, our data show that collaboration also happens with universities, freelancer professionals and communities.

Furthermore, collaborative journalism in Latin America is mostly conducted by small to medium-sized, non-profit, and digital-native organisations. Gender and educational background do not make a difference in the willingness to take part in collaborative journalism projects. The gender representations are quite balanced, even though we felt that there was a lack of representation of “non-binary” people, which should be combated in all means, and especially in collaborative projects that claim that are inclusive and diverse. Nevertheless, it is inspiring to see that collaborative projects have been able to promote gender equality, especially in the lines of command. To be able to deliver their mission and values to society, news organisations are coming together in search of specific knowledge and expertise, for information, sources, and funding to make this work possible with high quality.

It is also interesting to observe that having a common agenda seems to be what makes organisations come together to investigate any topic. About one-third of the respondents said that a “common agenda” is needed when collaborating on any topic. However, another 26% said that this is especially relevant when covering issues around “human rights”. According to 30% of the respondents, human rights is a topic in itself that requires collaboration, while another 47% of respondents admit that it is better to collaborate with people that you are already used to working with.

In a similar vein, collaborations when the topic is “race and gender” or “politics” tend to happen primarily with organisations that they are used to working with. These collaborations prioritise working with organisations or individuals that can add new skills to their projects and their agenda. Similarly, having specific skills is relevant to collaborative projects covering health issues. Finally, having access to people in remote parts of the country appears to play an important role when collaborative projects are about human rights, but also the ones covering health, finance, and business. Thus, collaborative projects are generally designed among organisations that share a common agenda or coverage interest.

These are interesting findings that could lead one to think that human rights are a tough subject. Particularly in countries where attacks on human rights are a norm rather than an exception, journalists and news organisations might have to be very careful when choosing their partners. On the other hand, this sheds light on the homophily features of these networks, which tend to work with the same peers, limiting the participation of newcomers ([de-Lima-Santos and Mesquita 2021c](#)).

Independent new outlets tend to collaborate and cover topics that are mostly disregarded by the mainstream media ([Mesquita and Fernandes 2021](#)). However, this study did not consider the effects of such types of coverage on the news organisation, such as how they prepare themselves, how they collaborate and with whom to be able specifically to protect themselves and their sources when covering such important and risky issues. Future studies could fruitfully explore this issue further.

The decision-making process reveals most of the organisations are betting on a more non-traditional and less-hierarchical approach to collaborative projects, with almost 90% of the respondents declaring that the process is carried out horizontally. As suggested by [Alfter \(2018\)](#), collaborative efforts need “editorial” coordination focused on solving problems, administrative and logistic coordination. To this end, even adopting a horizontal approach, there is a leader in each of the news organisations, helping in this coordination. On the other hand, short-term projects seem to be more hierarchical. Thus, we found a

strong connection between more hierarchical decision-making processes and temporary projects. Additionally, the majority of the organisations present in this research are small to medium size (74%). Adopting a more horizontal decision-making process makes it much easier for news organisations to approach collaboration, as they have few collaborators, with many temporary professionals. Future studies could explore this issue further by looking at other factors that might be influencing these collaborations, such as the size of the organisations.

To sustain their business models and the collaborative projects that they are involved in, news organisations in the region are used to relying on more than one source of income. Among the many sources that these organisations rely on, we could find philanthropic funding, crowdfunding, membership, among others. However, a great portion of these organisations do not have any source of income.

Another important theme in Latin America is violence. Consequently, safety has shown to be a relevant concern for the Latin American news organisations that are working in networks. Although less than one-fourth of the respondents rely on collaboration as a form of security measure or share the risks of a particular investigation, it is clear that the countries that have shown this kind of concern more strongly are the ones where the level of press freedom is low (RSF 2020), such as Nicaragua, Venezuela, Mexico, Colombia, Cuba and Brazil.

To conclude, our study contributes to the academic literature of collaborative journalism by shedding light on the experiences of Latin American news outlets. The region presents some particularities that influence the conception of cooperative efforts in the journalistic field. For example, the commitment to normative values and the mission of journalism in society, the focus on the coverage of social issues that are relevant in their contexts, the increasing participation of communities in the process of production, and the commitment to a more horizontal and representative decision-making process are some characteristics that appeared in our survey. Similarly, Latin American news organisations have not been able to sustain themselves and their collaborative projects. Unfortunately, to our knowledge, there are no studies on collaborative journalism in the depth that this present study tried to achieve. In future work, investigating how they overcome this challenge might prove important.

Regarding the limitations, it is safe to say that the data collected is limited in its extensiveness and thus limits what conclusions can be drawn. In addition, practitioners from some Latin American countries did not answer the survey, limiting the ability of this study to explain all the region. Lastly, Latin America is a region composed of countries of different characteristics and developments, which are quite impossible to compare. Despite the limitations, these are valuable insights for collaborative journalism scholarship.

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