

1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to describe the methodology followed within a two-months period investigation conducted by a group of two Master students (Andrea Gómez Bobillo & Zinovia Fragkiadaki) in the context of the Master's degree project in Investigative Journalism at the University of Gothenburg. The investigation revealed that Greek hotel maids were wrongly cut out from the Heavy and Unhealthy Occupations List (KBAE).

'Many reporters assume that because something is in a library, it must be old news. Wrong.' (Hunter et al., 2012: 12). Knowing that since the latest insurance law came into force in July 2011, Greek hotel Maids are out of KBAE and also being aware of the 'Las Kellys' campaign in Spain, where a nationwide group of hotel cleaners fought against the working conditions causing serious health problems, our team, on Wednesday, April the 3rd, presented to our supervisor, David Crouch, the idea of examining related issues in Greece, where tourism balloons every summer.

The process followed during this investigation is described in detail through this paper, concluding with the reason why the final product qualifies investigative journalism. Specifically this methodological essay is delivering an overview of the workflow; including details about the information gathering, "cleaning" and analysing and how we did find an interesting story out of this. Furthermore, it focuses on the network building process and how we handled the interviews with unions, experts, hotel directors and hotel workers as well as the text formation. The last section is concluding by outlining a few ethical issues arisen, weak points but also lessons learned.

2. Scope of investigation

The scope of this investigatory project was set out early in order to define the aims and objectives. At first, we planned to examine the hotel working conditions in Athens and the scope was a local one, limited to hotel maids in the capital of Greece as covering the entire country in a period of two months could be proven impossible. However, our scope template was establishing the possibility that the scope gets broadened to a country-level one in case that the findings verify that the same pattern is repeated in other regions. The project had to be completed by late May, 2019 and contact persons would be experts - present at the Standing Committee that decided on the exclusion of hotel maids of the list of heavy and unhealthy jobs -, special occupational doctors as well as hotel maids.

2.1. Scope limitations and potential weaknesses

Limiting our investigation in only a few hotels that are involved in "blameworthy" actions was a dead end due to lack of time, the major barrier together with the period that the investigation was set to be conducted (April - May 2019) which was overlapping the beginning of seasonal employment in the touristic sector. Although our team tried to focus on hotels within Athens area, we further considered that some of the maids would be moving to the islands for summer season employment. That said, not only would it be difficult to pair the comments of hoteliers and workers but it would also add the disadvantage that those located far away wouldn't be able to get filmed.

3. Hypothesis

"Greek hotel maids wrongly cut out from 'Heavy and Unhealthy Occupations List' (KBAE) for eight years" bringing devastating effects on both hotel maids and the level

of occupational health and safety. The “who” of this story is not just a name and a title, it is a personality, with character traits and a style- Greek hotel maids. The “when” is not the present of the news, it is a historical continuum; the procedure for them to be cut out from the list that was arbitrary and based on “absurd” views. The “what” is not merely an event, but a phenomenon with causes and consequences; maids can't benefit from the advantages of being on the KBAE list, like early retirement. The “where” is not just an address, it is a setting, in which certain things become more (or less) possible; the Greek touristic sector which is reaping the benefits of the increasing touristic influx each year (Hunter et al., 2011: 8).

4. Audience and publications

4.1 Target audience

“Readers make the news” was one of the most common sayings of Professor David Crouch during MIJ lectures. Having therefore in mind that the right concentration on our targeted audience can enhance all our efforts to make this investigation worthy and unique, we aimed to greek citizens and, especially at the working class, including hotel workers. Moreover, as the project was occasioned by the Spanish movement “Las Kellys”, Spanish citizens would be potentially interested in the topic that they have been already familiar with.

4.2 Target outlets

We targeted local Greek investigative outlets such as Inside Story and Vice Greece but also several other greek news publications including “nafteboriki.gr”, “kathimerini.gr”, “Εθνος”, “taNea.gr”, “TO BHMA”, “Enikos.gr” and “Protothema.”. The Spanish “La información.com” was further reached, while Guardian UK was another option as well.

5. Background

As open sources either validate or disprove specific points of the hypothesis and further allow the journalist to deduce the secret more accurately (Hunter et al., 2011: 31), the group's strategy began by searching for proof using open sources like news online, documents, research, information by governmental organisations.

Indeed, the group found several news articles published mainly in 2011 regarding the introduction of the new list of heavy and unhealthy occupations informing on exclusions and inclusions of jobs. However, nothing was published in terms of maids' current situation in Greek media. That led to the main angle of the news story.

On the other hand, Andrea found plenty of articles published in Spanish media (about Spanish hotel maids) as, as mentioned before, it has been a hot topic there during the last few years. We checked content related to Greek workers in Spanish media, also English written media but to no avail.

In our effort to find previous research, we came across the “Assessment and Prevention of Occupational Risk in the Touristic Sector” which was shared with us by the special occupational doctor Ilias Tantis. The assessment was conducted back in 2007, by the Hellenic Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (ELINYAE) but was crucial in helping us understand the ergonomic risks both chambermaids and other hotel workers face and

also provided us with the right laws that apply to hotel workers and could assist in the investigation.

6. The process by which the investigation was carried

6.1 Choosing a story for investigation

In the beginning of the MIJ Programme, 11th of September, a lecture entitled “What is Journalism” taught us that a successful investigative story should be several things; original, fresh, new, unexpected, counter-intuitive, relevant to target audience, timely, socking, significant, it should add a new aspect to a broader story, get people talking, imply that “something must be done” and of course involving interesting people. Therefore, we began our selection process sticking to the aforesaid criteria but also to the perception that “..investigation is a weapon, and you can hurt people with it – deliberately, or by your own carelessness.” (Hunter et al., 2011: 12)

The “Hotel Maids” topic was chosen after keeping track of what’s in the news, paying attention to what’s changing in our environments, and listen to peoples’ complaints (Hunter et al., 2011: 11). But, until that point we recognised several social problems (William C. Gaines, 2008: xv), interesting to investigate according to the aforesaid parameters, such as the Swedish youth joining Universities for free only because of the benefits; the fraud behind social media adds; the inefficiency on gambling control; the fraud in telephone companies taking advantage of elderly people; the liability of Greek Government for the increasing loss of land and properties due to fires over the last decade and the wrongdoing behind Teleperformance relocation policies.

Another lecture of the MIJ programme shed light on the ways of finding a potential investigative story either trying to prove wrongdoing that might be happening, getting a leak by a whistleblower, or copying a pattern. We chose the latter not only because it had more potential to be true but also because it was the topic that we believed to from the very first moment. Besides, if the story does not touch your passions, one way or another you are going to fail with it (Hunter et al., 2011: 12). The group was strongly believing that due to the similar culture that Mediterranean countries share, there were high probabilities of the story being repeated in Greece.

6.2 Background research process and work division

We created a contact list and a calendar to our convenience and, most importantly, we did not let the language be a barrier to our investigation. Zinovia took over all the papers, research and articles in greek for translation and also contacted Greek people. At this point it important to mention that all the emails used to have an extra, translated version so that we did not waste time and keep pace with each other.

In mid-May the team met in Athens, Greece for the most critical part of the project, that of the interviews with several experts. Having structured our questions together, Andrea was filming and editing the interviews while Zinovia was the interviewer and translator.

Regarding the background research, articles in Spanish Media, specified to us the types of health problems suffered by workers (e.g.: musculoskeletal disorders, traumatic injuries, respiratory illnesses, infectious diseases and the medicines they have to take).

The research was expanded in digital media and social media including Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn so that we could come into contact with the maids. Furthermore, an app where people complained about several topics was found, but without any result.

The three main labour laws regarding 'Safety and Health of Workers' in Greece (N1568/85, N 2224/94, Π.Δ. 17/1996, Π.Δ. 397/1994) played a major role for information surrounding the story.

Other general statistics that helped frame the story were statistics on working conditions by sector by the Greek Ministry of Labour, Social Security & Social Solidarity. (ΥΠΙΑΚΠ); information regarding average salaries, contracts and dismissals provided by ΥΠΙΑΚΠ; Statistics on tourists' arrivals in Greece issued by the Hellenic Statistical Authority.

We further formed a plan regarding how we are going to approach the hotel directors that possibly circumvent the law (i.e. Trip Advisor/reviews/ claims on Facebook groups of Hotel Workers etc.).

6.3 Forming the hypothesis

Our first, weak enough, hypothesis was: "Greek government fails to protect hotel workers 'neglecting' their contribution in the hospitality sector and therefore Greek tourism and economy." Together with our supervisor we identified two major mistakes; the first one - and easy to correct - was that hotel workers had to be narrowed down to a more specific group (e.g chefs, maids, receptionists) and furthermore including the Government was making the hypothesis difficult to be proved.

As we were gathering information, we came across to the official KBAE list stating that maids were deleted, and we realised that the KBAE list was the main angle and proceeded with the following hypothesis:

"Greek hotel maids wrongly cut out from 'Heavy and Unhealthy Occupations List' (KBAE) for eight years" bringing devastating effects on both hotel maids and the level of occupational health and safety. That would or would not be true; we still had to get the facts (Hunter et al., 2011: 14).

The team used the hypothesis as a tool to further define specific "questions that must be answered" (Hunter et al., 2011: 14) such as; why are they cut out from the list; what do we mean by the word "wrongly"; who is to blame for; how does this exclusion affect them; how many people are affected? would their inclusion in the list make their life better and why? etc.

After discussions mostly with occupational doctors, who confirmed the high ergonomic risk of the occupation, thorough desktop research in older reports worldwide so that we understand the health problems hotel maids tend to suffer from but also days of reading the labor law and documents shared by the Greek authorities on the amount of inspections, working days and wages, we successfully verified our hypothesis, since we had found at least four sources who confirmed it (Hunter et al., 2011: 14).

6.4 Identifying and approaching potential outlets for publication

We contacted the above publications (part 4.2) early in the investigative process via email, aiming to pitch our work through a well-structured email, proposing them to consider our investigation and to address our work to a specific editor.

Pitching our work was a challenging task as the team did not want to share the information we gained through our investigation process without having finalised our story, in fear of “stealing” our content. Therefore, only the necessary information was shared.

The pitching text was relevantly short, with a strong subject, presenting reasons why this story is worth reporting and why it concerns their readers. Our personal portfolios were linked as well, so that editors could know what to expect from us.

Although that we did not manage to produce our whole journalism project in collaboration with an editor, the team has been in talks with both Vice, Greece and Inside Story for getting published.

Also, Andrea is in talks with an online newspaper where she used to work even though the angle of the story would have to change to a more economical aspect due to the specialisation of the outlet.

6.5 Choice of methods for the investigation

The basic methods followed during our investigation were desktop research and interviews. As described above, part of our strategy in the initial stage was to begin research with the easiest questions, meaning those one can answer with information that does not require talking to people (Hunter et al., 2011: 21).

Following the steps provided by Hunter et al (2011: 33-35) we confirmed that we weren't missing anything important and that we were taking each step at the right time.

It is important to mention that the group examined why hotel maids in Greece are no longer considered a heavy and unhealthy job, impartially and committed to journalists' first obligation; the truth. (Bill Kovach and Tom Rosentiel, 2014: 47-68).

6.6. Identifying sources and interviewees

Open sources provided us with a list of far more interesting names to call (Hunter et al., 2011: 21). For example, the official KBAE List provided us with the names of the members of the committee who objected the exclusion of maids.

We further created a list with all potential key actors of the story such as several unions and institutions supporting the sector like the Hellenic Society for Labor and Environment Medicine (EYEP) and the Hellenic Institute of Occupational Health and Safety, as well as the ministry of Labor, Social Security and Social Solidarity. That way, desktop research and general sources led us to the expert sources - basically occupational doctors - who, in turn - led to unique findings. Both documents and statements on the overall standing committee procedure and health problems.

The protagonists of our story, maids, were identified via digital and social media research as explained earlier.

The contacting procedure was based on three steps in order to secure a response: 1) asking for an interview, 2) informing about questions, 3) informing about all criticism and ask

for comments with a strict deadline if declined, according to Nils Hanson's advice during a lecture at MIJ Programme.

What we learned out of the source gathering procedure is that the more sources you have the more interesting angle you can shape. Although we did not include every single interviewee, they all played their specific role to the final result.

6.7 Problems of securing and conducting interviews

Occupational Doctor Tantis T. Elias was one of the occupational doctors provided by Hellenic Society for Labor and Environment Medicine (EYEP), however the fact that he was not located in Athens made it difficult to interview him in person. The interview was held via email instead, which proved equally helpful.

The same problem was faced with many maids that were willing to answer our questions but they were not living in the capital at the moment the investigation was being conducted due to seasonal employment in the islands. Furthermore, one of the maids that we were in contact with from the very beginning had to stay in hospital for some time due to respiratory infection and couldn't be filmed neither recorded, which limited her quotes to just text.

Even though we gave our sources a good reason to speak with us (Hunter et al., 2011: 43), our efforts to get in touch with many hotel directors, the outsourcing company and the Minister fell into oblivion.

6.8 Problems of finding and using sources

Although Andrea pretended she was a former hotel worker and managed to join a Facebook group in which people asked and offered hotel related jobs but also made complaints about working conditions - and made a post explaining that she was looking for maids who want to share personal experiences, the post received very low engagement. However, the group helped us find maids through other posts and comments. Therefore, we managed to reach some of them by direct message.

A follow up post was made one week after, stating that "We are looking for maids from specific hotels that hire outsourcing companies as we had been told by one of our sources." A person replied and promised to look for contacts but to no avail.

Finding the contacts of committee members that voted for the KBAE list was challenging enough as we contacted the wrong people several times since some of them claimed not having participated even though they were on the online list or others had a common name and surname.

Interviewing "victims" was expected to be a significant obstacle, while the source anonymity, added to the limitations. Due to the sensitive environment of the current investigation, the fear of hotel maids to lose their jobs was be a crucial factor in their willingness to get interviewed on camera or reveal their name as well as the name of the hotel they work for. However, the group did not experience big problem with respect to using the sources as maids were willing to see their views getting published, some of them under the source anonymity though.

Moreover, Dr. Drakopoulos was willing to get interviewed as the then representative of ELINYAE but in present he preferred referring to him as an occupational doctor and Vice president of the Laboratory of Labor Medicine and Environment of our country, but not as an employee of ELINYAE because he did not have the authorization to speak from the new Board of Directors of the Institute.

6.9 Evaluation of different aspects of evidence

First of all, we evaluated the maids' claims that are suffering problems that would qualify them for being part of the KBAE list. Not only did we get in contact with more maids to ask if this is real but also with occupational doctors; Elias Tantis and Vasilis Drakopoulos to get a scientific perspective.

Moreover, we verified and subsequently evaluated the exclusion of the maids from the unhealthy jobs by finding the official KBAE list which included the comments of those disagreeing with that action; also a proposal for a risk evaluation. Besides, the reportage requires documentation to support or deny the declarations of sources (Hunter et al., 2011: 11).

6.10 Evaluation of hypotheses in the light of evidence

The aforesaid evidence proves the hypothesis "Maids wrongly cut out from KBAE", because there is proof that there were scientific views that were not taken into account (e.g. proposal for a risk evaluation that was never done) and also there is scientific proof that maids should be in the list as they suffer musculoskeletal problems that would qualified them for being part of it.

6.11 Discussions with editors and/or others

The discussions with our professor and supervisor were mostly regarding evidence. In particular when the idea was first presented during a class discussion he was interested to see what we can make out of it. However, in the private meeting with him, he pinpointed all the weaknesses, probably for the shake of debate, focusing especially on the fact that we were missing official documents/proof at that period of time. He did have a valid reasoning that made us prove our point true. Even after finding documentation, he was constantly reminding us that we should always link our findings with the sources, which in my opinion was one of the most important lessons learned during that course.

Pretty sure about our sources and general evidence, I recently met an editor from Inside Story.gr, Mr. Christos Ioannou, to "sell" our project. He has impressed by the topic, our findings and sources as well. He further mentioned a few other aspects of the topic that could be investigated further or even become another stand-alone article such as the lack of risk assessments for 8 years or the correlation of the benefits that maids in Greece receive with another country which is either completely similar in terms of economical-political status or completely different. The overall discussion inspired us to expand the investigation and helped me understand how many different aspects a story can take when there are sources and valid proof.

7. How the finished report was produced

7.1 How we opted to structure the feature

Having on mind that writing an investigative story is not the same task as writing a news story (Hunter et al., 2011: 11), we opted to structure the feature following the chronological narrative of present - future - past (Hunter et al., 2011: 67).

After discussions with our supervisor, we decided to begin with with the moment that will hook the viewer; a human-centric problem, Myrofora Stamopoulou, a hotel maid who suffer the occupational health problems. Later the story takes the reader into the past, and lets him/her stay there long enough to see what happened during the Standing Committee who decided for KBAE list in 2011. Then we bring the story back to the present to allow the reader to absorb the story and understand the progress made (zero studies and inspections), and we conclude with the possible future resolution (Hunter et al., 2011: 67). Hunter et al. also say that whether you speak yourself, or someone speaks for you, you should be sure that the last word is a true word (p. 67). Based on that, for the ending we chose a quote of Drakopoulos who pinpointed a scientific view on the issue.

7.2 Use of quotes

Following many times of reediting we finally weaved sources' statements into our own texts as if we had written them, allowing them to advance our story. Besides, people are not just listening to us for the facts. They want to know the character, the tone, the colour of the sources you will present to them.” (Hunter et al., 2011: 71).

7.3 Considerations regarding an accompanying news item

The unscientific process that followed during the Standing Committee was proved to be the most newsy side of our story.

The structure begins with the four-paragraph lead that many other news outlets follow as well in order to make their stories sell;

1. Present what and why
2. Add details
3. Present a strong quot
4. Continue with a nutshell paragraph.

We further aimed to grab the reader's attention using precise language.

7.4 Any ethical dilemmas identified during your investigation

Many of the statements - complaints that we collected were making serious allegations for large hotel complexes. The risk to include these quotes in case of publication was big. According to Calvert (1999), journalists have to be very careful when making serious allegations against people, then the evidence really matters.”

At some point our supervisor warned us that if we miss a quote from the other side, we could be sued for libel. Therefore, although we believed in our sources, we only published what we had confirmed from both sides.

8. The results of the investigation

8.1 What results we chose to omit from the journalistic report

Apart from the aforesaid statements that we could not use without presenting comments from the other side, we further omitted legal terms or figures as they would make the story difficult to read. Also, many facts that were very interesting for us were not relevant information to the story such as the wages of maids.

8.2 Reflections on the investigation with regard to course literature

Hunter et al. state that viewers love stories that bring them added value and that Investigative journalism is not only or mainly a product; it is a service, and that service is making peoples' lives stronger and better. Through this project we tried to gather information that people - basically employees - can't find anywhere else, information that they can trust, and that gives them power over their lives(Hunter et al., 2011: 10).

We further stuck to the idea that our subject is something we should know about in effect by saying "look at this, isn't it shocking!" (Hugo de Burgh, 2008)

Investigative reporter's Nils Hanson advice for line-by-line editing had the most intense reflection on our final product. Especially the part of asking ourselves, "What might generate criticism?" Helped us not to take those parts out, but instead, address those critiques in our story.

Therefore, we edited our final product based on what Nils Hanson describes as a good story: it has impact, drama, emotion and "colour". The story adds a new aspect to a broader story (working conditions in the tourism sector), gets people talking and tells you that "something must be done". Above all, we did not only want to show the facts, but "the truth about the facts."

8.3 Choice of photographic images used in the feature

From a technical point of view, filming b-rolls and capturing images inside hotel rooms was not doable, so we chose to film façades instead. Same happened with the Ministry of Labor Social Insurance and Social Solidarity. Moreover, maids did not want to get pictured or share pictures from their working environments.

8.4 Full and detailed list of all sources

The team organised all our sources according to the suggestions of 'Story-Based Inquiry' (p. 55-60): https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1fbOExN-xus2vzaHB0T6BISydp5JB0R5zir_AbD1R_sA/edit#gid=1063080649

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