



## ENVIRONMENTAL MONITORING: THE MULTIMEDIA TRANSFORMATION OF INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM (BASED ON THE EXPERIENCE OF THE USA)

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**Annotation.** *In this thesis analyzes innovative methods of investigative journalism in covering environmental issues within the contemporary media landscape. Using major media projects of the American newspapers — USA Today and The New York Times — as case studies, the research examines the impact of Big Data and interactive visualization on public environmental policy.*

**Keywords:** *investigative journalism, data journalism, environmental security, multimedia technologies.*

In the era of environmental crises, mass media have become not only a means of reflecting reality but also a powerful force capable of exposing systemic problems and contributing to their resolution. Environmental investigations conducted by the American newspapers USA Today and The New York Times between 2008 and 2010 demonstrated the significant socio-political power of journalism. Both publications were awarded the John B. Oakes Award in 2009 in recognition of their outstanding achievements in environmental journalism. In 2008, the newspaper USA Today, in cooperation with two American universities, launched the project “The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America’s Schools”<sup>18</sup>. Within the framework of this project, a study was conducted on the presence of toxic substances in the air around school areas. Scientific research institutes, public organizations, and schools themselves actively participated in the process.

The use of computer modeling and cartographic mapping methods enabled journalists and researchers to work effectively with large volumes of data. Over an eight-month period, the air quality around schools was continuously monitored, and the project covered more than 128,000 schools across the United States. The research revealed that the air around thousands of schools was at least twice as toxic as the air in surrounding areas. Beginning in December 2008, USA Today published a series of articles and special reports based on the findings of this investigation. In addition, the newspaper created a special page on its official website featuring an interactive database that allowed users to monitor information about school environments across all states<sup>19</sup>. The project generated significant public resonance in

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<sup>18</sup> B.Morrison, B.Heath. “The Smokestack Effect — Toxic Air and America’s Schools”, article. USA, 2008. URL: <https://peri.umass.edu/research-areas/environmental-and-energy-economics/toxic-100/air-toxics-at-school/about-air-toxics-at-school/>

<sup>19</sup> “The Smokestack Effect: Toxic Air and America’s Schools. Investigative Series”. USA Today. 2008.





American society and drew the attention of government agencies to the problem of protecting children's health.

As a result of the media coverage published in USA Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) launched a program in 2009 to monitor air quality around general education schools<sup>20</sup>. The findings of the investigation were also reflected in the report "Sick Schools — 2009", prepared by the national non-governmental environmental organization Healthy Schools Network, Inc.

Another major investigative project was conducted by The New York Times between 2009 and 2010 under the title "Toxic Waters: The Worsening Pollution of America's Waters and the Response of Regulators." This multimedia investigative series focused on water quality in the United States and the problems related to the implementation of existing environmental legislation, particularly the enforcement of the Clean Water Act and the Safe Drinking Water Act. Through the articles and accompanying databases, the author demonstrated with convincing evidence that the legal system designed to protect the nation's water resources was insufficient to prevent pollution<sup>21</sup>.

The investigation revealed that in most states more than 50% of businesses violated the federal Clean Water Act, yet polluters were rarely held accountable. This situation clearly illustrated that environmental legislation was not functioning effectively in practice. The primary sources of information for the research included data from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the California State Water Resources Control Board. The website also featured graphical statistics showing violations of environmental regulations by industrial enterprises.

In addition, the newspaper created a database containing information on more than 200,000 industrial facilities and developed an interactive map titled "Find Water Polluters Near You." This map enabled users to visually track environmental problems in their local areas<sup>22</sup>. Furthermore, the publication invited readers to participate in discussions about these issues together with the authors of the articles.

In conclusion, the success of these projects was closely connected with their multimedia architecture. Interactive tools such as the map "Find Water Polluters Near You" transformed the audience's perception by showing that environmental problems were not happening "somewhere far away," but rather close to their own homes or workplaces. This form of investigative journalism forced governments to adopt evidence-based policy approaches. For example, the adoption of a new monitoring program by the EPA in 2009 demonstrated that the mass media had evolved from merely criticizing problems to becoming an institution capable of proposing systemic solutions. The report produced by the Healthy Schools Network also confirmed that journalistic investigations had reached a level where they could be recognized as significant documents by the scientific community. The multimedia

<sup>20</sup> Duhigg, C. "Toxic Waters". The New York Times. 2009-2010.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "School Air Toxics Monitoring Initiative". 2009.

<sup>22</sup> Healthy Schools Network, Inc. "SICK SCHOOLS 2009: America's Continuing Environmental Health Crisis for Children". 2009.





transformation of investigative journalism serves as one of the most effective mechanisms for raising environmental awareness in society and achieving the goals of sustainable development.

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