

Helsingin Sanomat Foundation

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I studied at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism for the academic year 2016/2017. Institute is an excellent example of what kind of place Oxford is to study: it is small and big at the same time. It is big in that sense that there are about 23 000 students and University has spread all over the city.

Being small means that University is formed of many parts. There are 38 colleges and several other research units, like the Reuters Institute. At the Institute, there are approximately ten research fellows, a handful of other staff members and us, almost 20 journalist fellows from all over the world.

As a journalist fellow, my main project during the year was to write an academic research paper. I had to decide the topic of my research already when I applied for the grant from Helsingin Sanomat Foundation. My research was about social media. Very often at work I had talked with my colleagues about social media: which platforms we should use and what can we reveal from our private life or personal opinions. Also, I wanted to find out what journalists think about the question of objectivity on social media.

At the Reuters Institute, I really felt I wasn't left alone with my research: I got enough help and support. Before arriving to Oxford, I got an email from the Institute where they told who is my supervisor and when I will meet him for the first time. My supervisor was Richard Sambrook, Professor of Journalism and Director of the Centre for Journalism at Cardiff School of Journalism. He was such a wonderful supervisor, we met occasionally and talked about my research. He had a clear vision what kind of expectations and standards my research should meet.

My main research question was what kind of professional identity journalists build on social media. I found out this by interviewing journalists in Finland and in the UK. Previous journalist fellows had told that in the UK, reaching interviewees can be tricky. Finally, I got contact with my interviewees in two ways: if I was listening (for instance lectures, panel discussions) a journalist worth interviewing, I went to ask him directly. Some interviewees I found with help of my supervisor's contacts.

In Finland, I had been thinking about doing a doctoral thesis, so Oxford gave a chance to try how does it feel to write a research paper. I started my research by reading a lot, for example about theories of identity and objectivity. My style to do a research is to read theories, write the paper and conduct research interviews concurrently. It was a good method and I finished with my research well on time in May.

The weekly program at the Institute included three lectures. The idea of one of the lectures was that we journalist fellows teach each other. In other words, we all had to give a talk which was something related to own country or its media – but something different from the research. In my lecture, I told how my employer Finnish Broadcasting Company tries to reach young audiences. I enjoyed other fellows' lectures: it was interesting to hear about experiences covering North Korea, challenges of covering environment issues in China and new ways to get revenue in Spanish media companies.

On two other lecture series, we had guest speakers from Britain and other countries. The other lecture series concentrated more on current issues in journalism. We heard, for example, about investigative journalism in BuzzFeed, Panama papers and the situation in Turkish media. The topics of the other lecture series were more personal to the speaker, sometimes with a little bit of philosophical twist. These lectures included talks about press freedom in South Africa or working as a political correspondent in the UK or covering Donald Trump.

With my journalist fellow friends, we also started spontaneously a workshop. We thought that we all have professional skills which would be worth sharing with others. In these workshops, we learnt how to shoot a mobile video, how to use Snapchat and some basics about data journalism. In addition to all these lectures, we visited many media companies, like BBC, Financial Times, Al Jazeera and The Guardian.

On top of the weekly program at the Institute, I attended to many lectures at the University. I studied political history in Britain, gender studies, refugee studies and Russian studies as well as some South African studies. The University has so much to offer, but the best way to make most out it is to think in advance what one would like to study.

Life in Oxford was busy - but busy in a nice way. There were lots of social activities: dinners at the University, drink receptions after evening lectures, gatherings at pubs, different sport activities and trips. I enjoyed dinners: it was a brilliant opportunity to meet students from other subjects than journalism. During a dinner, I ended up talking about penguins, cancer treatments or classic Latin. Very often we talked about Brexit.

I couldn't write this final report without mentioning Brexit. People at the University were very disappointed to the referendum result – in Oxford, majority would have wanted to stay in EU. For a top university, the free movement of people – students and researchers – is a vital part of the success. Now no one know what

will happen. In a practical level Brexit was a part of the University life in a form of various lectures and seminars covering the issue. Also, pound lost its value against euro.

Oxford itself is a beautiful, small city to live where famous scenes from different television series are a part of daily life. During my year, I cycled a lot because it was the best way to get around. Oxford is quite an expensive place to live: rents in private market are almost as high as in London. I stayed in a student accommodation which was a good deal regarding my budget. First, I was a little bit suspicious moving in to a student accommodation because I thought I would be too old for that and, I have heard horror stories about accommodation conditions. However, I was very lucky: my accommodation wasn't a luxury place but it was clean and quiet with a convenient location. We had a big common kitchen where I could always find company.

The best thing about my year was my fellow journalists at the Reuters Institute. It was interesting to hear about life and work as a journalist for example in Gaza or Havana. For instance, when South Korea got a new president, immediately next morning I could talk about this with my two South Korean friends. This is a cliché but it feels like the world came to very close to me and now I have friends and contacts all over the world. With fellow journalists, we even got an idea to go to International Journalism Festival which took place in Perugia, Italy in April. In the festival, we all gave a talk about our research projects.

To prospective fellows I want to say that Oxford is suitable for that kind of person who wants to do a research and enjoys spending time in libraries. Even though the Reuters Institute looks after journalist fellows, the year requires an independent attitude to take care of own timetable and to stick in to it. Often there are lectures in evenings, therefore combining family life or child care can be challenging.

My year in Oxford was the best, the most rewarding and the most fantastic year in my life so far. During my last weeks in Oxford, I have said many sad good byes to the people who I have met along the way and to all my favourite places in Oxford. I want to thank you Helsingin Sanomat Foundation from the bottom of my heart. This year gave me an opportunity to detach myself from my daily life in Finland and also look at Finnish media and Finland as an outsider.