



## Article

# Media and Natural Disasters: Organising Storytelling in the Age of Climate Change

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**Abstract:** Starting on 2 November 2023, some territories in the Region of Tuscany in Italy were hit by exceptionally intense meteorological and calamitous events. The Region of Tuscany's government was immediately at the forefront of relief, assisting the population, and aiding restoration. On 3 November, a national state of emergency was declared due to flooding. Journalistic communication is an essential aspect of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. In terms of protecting people and reducing damage, journalists and the media have an important role to play. This article reports an Italian case study analysing the behaviour of local media in cases of natural disaster. Nine focus groups were conducted with local journalists covering the flood emergency. The results highlight the role of social and institutional mediation, rather than mere dissemination, played by the local press in emergency situations, a central element in the construction of a community bond, precisely in moments of insecurity and disorientation. The narration of a disaster from the inside seems to have allowed the emergence and representation of hitherto unknown social realities in Tuscany. The goal of the news coverage was widened, making it possible to respond better to the diverse interests of the reading public and to satisfy in a short time and exhaustively the information needs of individual communities in difficulty.

**Keywords:** Tuscany; floods; local news; natural disaster; local communities



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## 1. Introduction

### *How Is Climate Change Affecting Floods?*

This is the title of a New York Times article published on 10 July 2023 in which journalist Elena Shao wonders how floods, like other disasters, involve a number of competing factors that can influence their frequency and intensity in opposite ways. Climate change, which is exacerbating extreme precipitation in many storms around the world, is an increasingly important part of the mix.

In the European landscape, the situation is no more reassuring than in the United States. In an article entitled *Europe's flood management: Navigating with data* (2023), published on [data.europa.eu](https://data.europa.eu), a detailed and alarming picture of flood management in Europe emerges, highlighting the critical importance of data in risk assessment and flood management.

The European Union Directive 2007/60/EC is at the heart of flood risk assessment and management. This legislation aims to mitigate the negative impacts of floods through tailor-made solutions, regional cooperation, and the development of detailed flood hazard maps. The European Commission stresses the urgency of tackling these problems, in line with the priorities set out in the European Green Deal.

Data provided by the European Environment Agency (EEA) can be used to map flood risks at the European level. This type of information enables efficient disaster preparedness and response, allowing authorities to allocate resources and plan evacuation strategies effectively. Such data help to develop flood risk assessment and management strategies, which are essential to minimising the impact of floods on communities, infrastructure, and the economy. In addition, flood data at the European level promote cross-border cooperation.

In the past two years, the catastrophic effects of intense weather events have resulted from a combination of heavy rainfall and wet land conditions due to precipitation.

The magnitude of such events is often caused by extreme hydro-meteorological phenomena. For example, a series of persistent and continuous rains that in recent years have concentrated a mass of water well above the re-ordered averages in central Italy has meant that soils have rapidly exhausted their saturation capacity while at the same time predicting an extremely dry period. (CIMA Foundation 2023).

The Italian civil protection system and the relevant institutions were ready to act, and many measures were taken in advance of the weather emergency, such as closing schools, monitoring waterways, and evacuating large numbers of people. But now it seems that this is no longer enough.

In these situations, media presence on the ground and coverage of disasters are crucial elements of disaster communication. Alongside the authorities, civil society, affected businesses, and citizens, the media is also an important actor.

The working conditions, situational competence and management of journalists working in a disaster area are important factors in the complex field of crisis management and disaster communication.

But increasingly, in global or local emergencies, without medium- to long-term economic support, the losses suffered by community media can have a profoundly negative impact on the information of (and for) the community (Comunello and Mulargia 2018). In these circumstances, there is almost never an overarching narrative of events; on the contrary, a myriad of narratives tend to emerge that need to be contextualised and explained to different communities (Radcliffe and Wallace 2021).

Although local newsrooms, like all information agencies, are now operating with reduced margins, forced to deal with changing news consumption habits and the transition from print to online news, which reduce the functioning of current business models and the desirability of existing information products and services, it is in these situations of social and information disorder that the centrality of territorial-based journalism is revealed.

A single newsroom can no longer do all the work of “shaping the news” and intervening by verifying its veracity, nor can it put dozens of updated articles online and at the same time work with the timescales of the printed paper in the newsroom. The presence and, in part, the success of the local press today are not so much due to the more general economy of news but rather to the cognitive and in-depth economy, or rather to its ability to explore and describe its own community from within.

This may be particularly true in our country, given that the public’s interest in local journalism continues to be particularly high. As highlighted by the survey conducted by AGCOM (2018) and, more recently, by Mangani (2022), 86% of Italian citizens habitually obtain information on local events through television channels, radio stations, newspapers, or online services.

The percentage of provincial newspapers is quite high, growing for paper newspapers and over 75% for online newspapers.

## 2. Local News, Local Proximity

The value of proximity circumscribes a communicative service space in which the public finds useful tools to operate practically in everyday life and to nourish the bond with the community to which they belong (Usher 2020).

In this regard, Ahva and Pantti (2014) propose a typology of approaches to the study of “proximity,” identifying four dimensions that are closely linked to the field of journalism and that are particularly evident in the practices that characterise journalists and local journalism (even in the digital age);

1. *Proximity as newsworthiness.* A fundamental question of newsworthiness that has to do with “what is included,” “what is excluded,” and “why” (O’Neill and Harcup 2008, p. 162);

2. *Proximity as a working practice.* This aspect refers to daily journalistic work and focuses on the relationship between journalists and events or sources. In this case, proximity as a journalistic working practice refers to the need to be physically and temporally close to the stories being covered;
3. *Proximity as presentation-interpretation* is a further concept of proximity and refers to the narrative means used to “create a sense of closeness and familiarity between the audience and the event” (Clausen 2003, p. 47). A range of ‘dramaturgical tools’ can be used to create a sense of proximity to a local story, such as emotional discourse and dramatised narrative structures;
4. *Proximity as a strategy.* The most important relationship is that between media organisations and their audiences, understood as citizen-customers of a specific place. As well expressed by Hjarvard (2000, p. 42), “‘proximity’ has become a key word that allows newsrooms to develop a closer relationship with their audiences.” As a strategy, proximity shapes the way news is selected, sourced, framed, and narrated with the aim of “cultivating the perspective of the common man” (Wahl-Jorgensen et al. 2010).

Considering these multiple elements, territorial journalism can still be a potential driver of local identity as long as it offers opportunities for the recognition and reworking of the social, cultural, and political richness that inhabits its microcosm, especially in crisis and emergency contexts (Nielsen 2015; De Vincentiis 2018).

In the face of socio-natural disasters, which can be defined as exceptional events that disrupt daily routines and destabilise the social structure, it can happen that information does not fully respect the vocation to the territory that should be its own, yielding to narratives promoted and coordinated at the national level. Or, on the contrary, a tribal community narrative may be constructed without taking into account what is communicated outside the community or region but limiting itself to recalling the strong sense of belonging and identification typical of tribes (Bayard 2022).

However, in the case study we are dealing with, local news is necessarily the reference of the main national newspapers, precisely because of the knowledge of the context that allowed reporters to provide their colleagues with clarifications and details for the story, as well as technical and logistical support for the fieldwork.

At the end of the study, the media narrative proved to be a support, or rather, a public voice within the disaster, necessary to imagine a way out of the disaster. A flood, the one that hit Tuscany in November 2023, affected the north of the region in the days from 2 to 5 November 2023, characterised by torrential rains that caused flooding of rivers (including the area of Bisenzio), damage, and eight victims.

### 3. Methodology

Just starting from the general concepts of ‘proximity’ in journalism by Ahva and Pantti (2014) and on the theme of local information in emergencies by Radcliffe and Wallace (2021), our study analyses the behaviour of local media during the recent floods that hit the Tuscany (region of Italy) in the first days of November 2023<sup>1</sup>. We tried to understand how journalists operated within the affected community and organised their work in giving shape to information, inside and outside the editorial offices, how and if they changed routines, and which channels were used the most.

The dominant theme of the study revolved around two macro-topics that we could in this paragraph translate into research questions: how does the media agenda change during emergencies? How is editorial work reorganised during a flood?

To answer these questions and best represent the topic analysed, a qualitative methodology was used: the focus group. The focus group is an unstructured group interview method through which it is possible to understand the specific needs of the final recipients of a project or users of a service, starting from a representative sample of them and analysing in depth what people think beyond the superficial opinions they may have.

This type of methodology is built on the idea that by collecting people’s different opinions and points of view and observing how participants interact within a group and

modify their initial opinions, it is possible to gather more information than through simple individual interviews (Corbetta 2014).

Between the end of December 2022 and February 2023, 9 focus groups (consisting of 5–6 people) were carried out, involving journalists in the sample (men and women, professionals and non-professionals), freelancers, or people with different roles within the local editorial offices of the cities in the north of Tuscany<sup>2</sup>.

The study involved editors-in-chief, department heads, editors, and occasional collaborators who worked for the main local newspapers in Tuscany during the weeks of the flood. The exploratory nature of the research and the qualitative approach chosen allowed us to focus more on the depth of the information collected and to capture in detail the motivations of the interviewees in their own words (Vettehen et al. 2005).

The aim is to collect opinions and comments that perhaps were not detected in the preparation phase and which will have a definitive impact on the continuation of the project (Corbetta 2014).

This methodological choice therefore appeared to be the most appropriate in terms of openness and flexibility, with the freedom to broaden the questions and ask for further clarifications if necessary.

The interviews lasted approximately 55 minutes, were conducted via the Teams platform, and were video-recorded and later transcribed in full (Bloor et al. 2001). The textual corpus resulting from the interviews was processed according to an inductive procedure aimed at identifying, on the basis of the interview scheme, the most relevant and significant thematic categories (Ryan and Bernard 2003) to describe the perceptions, opinions, and behaviours of the subjects interviewed by journalists during the flood emergency.

At the end of the fourth paragraph, a few journalistic images will conclude the analysis to give the reader a visual dimension of what local journalists said about the November 2023 flood in Tuscany. The images were collected from the websites of the local newspapers involved in the indication of the interviewed sample but selected by the undersigned in relation to what emerged from the interviewees' voices regarding the extent of the disaster.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. The Field of Community Journalism

Information about the territory, interest in what is close by in terms of culture and space, but also the usefulness of obtaining precise information that allows one to better manage one's daily life—from transport to work, from the schedule of evening shows to strikes in public services—are all elements that confirm the necessity and importance of the presence of journalism that knows and "serves" the community in which it lives.

Local news has also probably been the first place where journalistic information has opened up more to the diversity of the social system and represented previously unknown realities (Sorrentino and Bianda 2013).

Local newspapers have managed to expand the news field, also following the acceleration of information, and have managed to better satisfy the wide range of actions, social issues, and opportunities that make up each local reality.

Local information has the exclusivity of much information from the territory, especially in cases of serious emergencies, when the news value of territoriality takes on great importance. The more limited the context in which the newspaper is distributed, the more relevant what is happening in that context.

Technological development has also made it possible to produce local information in an incredibly short time. The dynamics imposed by the medium and the new digital environment make it necessary in many cases to be essential, short, dry and telegraphic (Schudson 2013).

The choice of format affects not only the quantity of news published, but also the identity of each local newspaper and the quality of its relationship with its audience:

We see ourselves as a full digital ecosystem. We are local, but we think global. We write for Tuscans, but we always imagine new audiences (J,12).

A 'historic,' 'known,' 'loyal,' and 'close' audience that buys and reads the local paper; an unknown, diverse, and 'distant' audience that uses the version of the same digital newspaper in an uncritical and careless way, commenting on the article without knowing the subject matter (Figure 1):

When we have received, and still receive, reports on what has been published in the newspaper, we often recognise the name of our reader because he or she has been following us for some time, or has already written to us, or we have even met him or her in the square or at the bar, to say (...) and they are comments, useful comments. (...) and they are comments, useful, understandable, constructive comments (J, 9).

The Tuscan citizens who write to us via Facebook are unknown subjects, sometimes not even Tuscans (...) maybe they have been to Prato once and claim to know how local politics or the organisation of some event works (J, 8).

The field of local journalism thus seems "renewed."



**Figure 1.** Source: Today/Citynews<sup>4</sup>—Firenze Today.

Not only hypertextuality, multimedia, immediacy, but also personalisation, contextualisation, and ubiquity (Deuze 2005; Pavlik 2007). However, there is a difficulty in managing information and its audience on the part of local journalists, which is growing and changing, sometimes with the risk of producing or fuelling incivility, understood as a set of behaviours and discourses that violate the customs and norms of the public sphere, or rather a communication method that has become a strategic resource for seeking online consensus (Bentivegna and Rega 2022).

This is exactly what happened during the first week of the floods. The information overload and the numerous rumours circulating in the media environment risk affecting journalistic styles and forms, as well as the most consolidated personal and professional values, thus endangering their positioning in the field and their reputation (Paulussen and Harder 2014).

As two journalists who took part in the research pointed out:

In addition to publishing the various institutional and emergency press releases, in the first day of the disaster we found ourselves acting as moderators on our online page. We often received insults and criticism from readers on issues that had nothing to do with the ongoing emergency (...) In these circumstances, the most difficult thing is to maintain calm and professionalism (J, 2).

## 5. The Local Journalists in the Disaster Field

Taking into account the transformation of the traditional and digital journalistic fields and the repercussions of these at the local level, emergency reporting still presents logics

that are by no means taken for granted and that must take into account local journalistic resilience, as well as citizen participation and the journalistic culture of that area in relation to the ongoing natural disaster (Pantti 2020).

In this sense, the element of ‘proximity,’ already mentioned in connection with the work of Ahva and Pantti (2014) and traceable in the study presented here, is a significant and inevitable aspect of the emergence of a culture of emergency that can be traced both within newsrooms and in local emergency policies.

The focus groups focused more on local journalistic activity, news production, and the internal organisation of local newsrooms. We tried to understand, from a comparative perspective, how the latter are structured during a “normal” working day and how everything changes in an emergency:

In general, we try to distribute the information fairly evenly between the different topics. For example, by delving into some topics that seem to be of greater concern to the citizens, also according to their reactions on social media (. . .) But starting from the night of 01 November, we completely changed our agenda (. . .) 95% some news related to weather forecasts and floods (J, 4).

During the flood, the emergency messages and therefore the news increased in a frightening way (. . .) from citizens, authorities, mayors (. . .) So we started to collect and select what we thought was more urgent and what could help citizens understand how to behave (. . .) From that night on, our work was on the flood, nothing else existed (J, 3).

According to Lombardi (2006), when unexpected disasters occur, contemporary media have, on the one hand, the important function of informing the population in real time through digital channels and, on the other hand, the possibility of extending the narrative by communicating the data or details of the event through traditional means.

This balance depends on the organisational efficiency of the local newsroom and the right choice of media that journalists use during the “life cycle” of the disaster.

The selection and verification of news are more difficult in the early stages of an emergency, as there is a risk of oscillating between an uncontrolled overdose of information and moments of information blackout. In addition, after the first reports, the journalistic editors try to reconstitute roles and tasks, limit and specify the scope of the event, monitor all communication channels, and, at the same time, contact the bodies—such as civil protection, the carabinieri, and technical-scientific organisations—whose skills may be required in order to verify them and bring them back to the scene (Bourke 2007; Ligi 2009).

For a local newspaper, managing all this becomes a complex task because there are fewer and fewer editors. Even in the case of Tuscany, the newsroom had to face these problems immediately, working in places that were almost completely flooded, with telephone lines down and the internet out for hours at a time (Figures 2 and 3):

Within a few hours, the disaster struck between Prato and Florence (. . .) That day, there were three of us in the newsroom... we did everything we could, we felt very responsible. Meanwhile, we were receiving reports, phone calls from people who were scared and had climbed to the higher floors, as indicated on TV, by ourselves or on social media, from the authorities (. . .) asking us for help because they couldn’t contact anyone, the police, relatives, the emergency lines were overloaded (. . .) Between one article and another, we became a kind of psychological help desk for the community for almost two days (J, 31).



**Figure 2.** Source: Vigili del fuoco—Today/CityNews.



**Figure 3.** Source: Intoscana.

The dynamics of the disaster and the subsequent interventions of the rescue services and institutions were different in each place. This led journalists to act by controlling the so-called “news anxiety” (De Vincentiis 2018) generated by the national media; on the other hand, they investigated not only the consequences of a disaster by recording the damage but also by collecting and describing people’s moods, trying to “extend a certain critical view of reality” that journalism should account for on a daily basis (from Dal Lago and De Biasi 2006).

In cases of overload, it was decided to leave the in-depth analysis to paper and instead to share flash news, using different formats and also some of the material sent by the inhabitants (photos of people in the street, flooded cellars, cars submerged by the waterfall):

After some hours the case of Tuscany has become national (...) During some of the nights I spent in the newsroom, I was contacted by Rai 1 and SkyTG24, who asked me for details on the construction of this or that dam, trying at all costs to find those responsible or to frame someone (...) Or other colleagues wanted to know the number of relatives of the victims (among other things, still not determined). In a situation like this, out of control, we sometimes preferred to partially photograph the disaster and give more voice to the citizens (...)

Shooting random numbers of deaths or creating more anxiety and fear is not a sign of responsible journalism (. . .) We have already seen something similar with COVID. And we felt very responsible at the time (J, 17).

The lack of useful and verified information from national newsrooms forced journalists to contact their local colleagues directly. Particularly in emergencies, the presence and knowledge of the territory become a strategic condition for local journalists, useful for gathering the voices of the community and reporting what is clear and visible, building a bridge between daily and emergency, local and national media agendas, and between internal and external points of view.

Often the news took on an imprecise, very fast, and poorly edited format, with the headline simply followed by photos or video news, live, sometimes with almost no text.

Despite the need for newsrooms to always have “their own news package” and a good connection to work, often standing or moving, outside or inside the newsroom, the presence of water and mud in the streets caused numerous and prolonged blackouts of electricity and telephone lines.

This situation forced journalists to use the context in which they found themselves to gather as much information as possible and to select the content shared by the readers, where possible (Figures 4 and 5):

Some colleagues were unable to return to work for days because of the amount of mud on the road. So he went on foot, from home (. . .) We made a lot of use of the material sent by the inhabitants. We already had their emails or numbers, some of them are almost friends. There was no need to check the content (J, 21).

In an emergency, the routinization of journalistic work becomes more complex due to the intensive communication between journalists and the public.

In the words of the journalists interviewed, we witness an accelerated selection, hierarchisation and presentation of news. Communication between those working at the desk and those in the field is intensifying to ensure greater and better coordination and involvement of the population.

The risk of coming across partially or false news, reported or published by online users, both from Tuscany and elsewhere, forces the local journalist to divert his resources and attention to an issue that would risk creating further chaos, even at the institutional political level, due to the interest shown by national newspapers trying to build a media case on this “rumour”:

The monitoring and management of information on the Internet under these conditions is an additional stress factor and a waste of time for us journalists (. . .) People who write a lot of “rubbish” and then you are forced to talk about it, whether you want to deny it or not, you find yourself in the middle of completely inappropriate issues (. . .) Our job is to narrate and reveal unclear or unknown aspects of the territory, to give the reader the right tools to form their own opinion on the subject. It is not to moderate verbal conflicts or justify every comment that comes (J, 12).

The impression is that all the local newsrooms have structured their agendas in a very similar way in order to try to disprove false news and control the noise of information, allowing themselves greater autonomy in the narrative of events.

From the interviews, it appears that during the days of the floods, the local media chose to give space to institutional communication over and above the problems that arose in each urban context. From the press releases published online by the civil protection services to the contributions of the mayors, from the infographics to the messages published on the websites:

It was necessary to provide them with precise information, through official channels and in formats that were informative and stood out from the chaos (. . .) What people needed, as soon as the water began to enter their homes, was not just the number of missing people or the damage (J, 17).

In the first day of the emergency, we decided to publish in the paper edition the most important useful instructions to follow in order to avoid damage to property or people and, if possible, to contact the local authorities through the emergency numbers (J, 3).

As “brand journalism” and regional institutional newspaper, our main source has always been the world of institutions: Tuscany Region, President’s profile and civil protection channels. Even if we had an operator in the field, our way of providing live news was more of a translation of institutional communication aimed at citizens (J, 1).



Figure 4. Source: Intoscana.



Figure 5. Source: Pisa Today.

In addition to the institutional messages, which could not be ignored, there were the stories of the people and the great solidarity immediately shown by young people from the communities of the affected municipalities and neighbouring regions. This choice of field seems to be very close to the ideas of Pierre Bayard (2022), who states that precisely because of the increase in false information and harmful theories in journalism, every writer and communicator should try to alleviate human suffering since man, even more than his language, is “a being of the story”. For the French philosopher, stories help to make the world less hostile and to satisfy a common need to listen to personal stories.

As some journalists in Tuscany said:

We collected the testimonies of more than a dozen volunteers, young and old, and shared probably a hundred photos (. . .) Stories and gestures of courageous and hopeful people who, in the midst of the mud, turned to the institutions of the media to ask for help (J, 33).

To give space to solidarity, to the suffering of a whole community, I think it is important for them and for us (. . .) It is a kind of local information that gives hope and strength (J, 25).

Information that aims to represent the positions and conditions of disadvantaged citizens or those in critical situations. Local journalism that, during the emergency, seems to have almost taken on the appearance of advocacy (local) journalism a form of (local) journalism in which the need to take the parties of the weakest or least protected to represent their interests.

## 6. Conclusions

Journalistic communication is an essential aspect of disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. In terms of protecting people and reducing damage, journalists and the media have an important role to play. Perhaps the most basic of these is to broadcast warnings before a disaster and to report on an incident when it occurs (describing what has happened or is happening). Journalists can also be involved before, during, and after an event, examining mitigation and preparedness initiatives, facilitating long-term recovery, and promoting resilience among individuals and communities.

The aim of this article was to analyse the role of local journalism and journalistic practices in emergencies, taking as a reference the recent floods in Tuscany in November.

An emergency that quickly became a national and then an international story, through news and images taken from all the main Italian and European networks and newspapers. A story, however, was born in the local newsrooms, some of which were almost submerged in water just a few hours after the heavy rains began, where editors and chief editors quickly moved from their desks to the field, using every possible medium to cover the emergency live and respond to citizens' requests.

On the basis of what has been discussed, the first thing that emerges is the function of social and partly institutional mediation carried out by local media in emergency situations.

Local journalism has shown that it is able to perform the function of territorial link, also thanks to an intense negotiation with the reading public, which has allowed it to be a place of "meaning" and relationships, open to listening and entertainment.

Local journalism in Tuscany, resisting the "temptation" of the national media to organise real "disaster marathons" (Liebes 1998), has focused attention on the stories and needs of the displaced, rather than on the destruction caused by the rains. It shows how the media can help integrate communities.

To do local journalism, to be local journalists, means to research and find an element of characterisation that distinguishes this type of press, capable of creating an "intimate" place of knowledge shared with its audience (Hjarvard 2000).

This condition is very evident when the community is (dis)overwhelmed by the emergency.

According to the interviewees, the new information technologies, when used strategically, favour forms of communication, cooperation, and immediate intervention.

The sense of belonging to a community, typical of the citizen-journalist, has led information professionals to fully explore the hardships and difficulties of Tuscany, sometimes going beyond the specific logic of modern media ecology, experimenting with languages, giving voice to colleagues, and "old and new" audiences, even those outside the community, or, as in the specific case reported, to the victims themselves (primary or secondary) of the natural disaster.

The experimentation of these practices seems to be linked to the "three virtues" of information, well described by Silverstone (2002), which could be useful in the management of an emergency to create a clear and participatory narrative of meaning:

- *Precision*: understood as the ability to commit resources and ensure that what we communicate is clear and precise in order to encourage feedback;
- *Honesty*: is about being willing to say what is actually happening, creating discussion, active participation, and criticism;
- *Healing*: it has to do with knowing how to “heal” the consequences of communication; any content put into circulation can annoy or interest, and it is necessary to be able to anticipate this double effect.

Virtues that are in danger of being forgotten when local news takes on national and sometimes international importance. That is, when the mainstream media re-thematise what is reported at the territorial level without considering its impact (Rodríguez 2011; Nielsen 2015; Marini 2021).

For this reason, unlike national media, local media allow communities to tell their stories and shape their identities by discussing political, economic, and cultural issues relevant to their daily lives.

From this point of view, local information confirms that it can bring together the various policies aimed at managing emergencies and the living conditions of citizens in the area, going beyond the logic based on speed and the spectacularising of disasters.

The “information dialogue” between local media and the public improves “emergency journalism” through the participation of citizens, also thanks to content produced from below, which often redefines the information priorities of the mainstream media.

In conclusion, this study provides a first glimpse into the combination of professional perspectives on covering a major natural disaster event through the experiences of journalists in their own words.

Levels of professionalism, coping skills, and resilience were high among the respondents, despite being a professional group tasked with witnessing and reporting in very difficult circumstances. The majority of the interviewees showed few signs of post-traumatic stress or poor mental health during the interviews, although this was not investigated in this research. This finding is worth highlighting in conclusion.

Covering a major disaster can be an eye-opening and life-changing experience for journalists on the ground. The assignment can be life-enhancing, educational, insightful, inspiring, and developmental, as well as a test of one’s abilities that can boost self-confidence. At the same time, an experience such as the one in Tuscany can be a burden to bear and a powerful memory that lasts for years.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Regione Toscana 2023. “Emergenza alluvione 2023”: <https://www.regione.toscana.it/-/emergenza-alluvione-2023> (accessed on 1 December 2023).

<sup>2</sup> The newsrooms considered here belong to the Italian publisher “Toscana—Firenze—Prato—Pistoia—Pisa Today/CityNews”, which hosts more than 50 local publishers throughout Italy, including in the entire region of Tuscany) and it has been involved one other local online newsrooms “Intoscana”, an institutional and journalistic platform that is directly linked to the regional offices. The research involved a total of around 45 journalists (men and women).

<sup>3</sup> This material has been sent directly by the journalists who were interviewed.

<sup>4</sup> As indicated earlier in the methodology, at the end of the fourth paragraph the author has collected some journalistic images to give the reader a visual dimension of what local journalists said about the November 2023 flooding in Tuscany. The images were collected from the websites of the local newspapers involved at the indication of the interviewed sample but selected by the undersigned in relation to what emerged from the interviewees’ voices regarding the extent of the disaster.

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