



## INITIATIVE FOR MEDIA INNOVATION, SWITZERLAND JOINING FORCES FOR MEDIA INNOVATION



**Mounir Krichane**  
Director  
[mounir.krichane@epfl.ch](mailto:mounir.krichane@epfl.ch)

### TAKEAWAYS

- Public and private media organisations are able to collaborate in the field of innovation if the decisions are made at a strategic level within organizations. Successful collaboration requires a clear governance structure, clear commonly agreed objectives and principles, and clear decisions on funding.

- Universities that are used to applying their research to various industries, in conjunction with specific companies, can add value to these current projects aimed at helping media organizations.

- Collaboration can be interdisciplinary, combining expertise in the fields of technology and social sciences, for example.

- The IMI is a young organization. It remains to be seen what kind of disruptive innovation it can foster through this kind of financing policy.

In Switzerland, public media SRG-SSR has joined forces with two private media houses and five universities to jointly fund research for break-through innovations in media. With the funding provided, six projects have already started, four of them applying artificial intelligence. Each project has one media partner and one university partner, but results are shared with all alliance members.

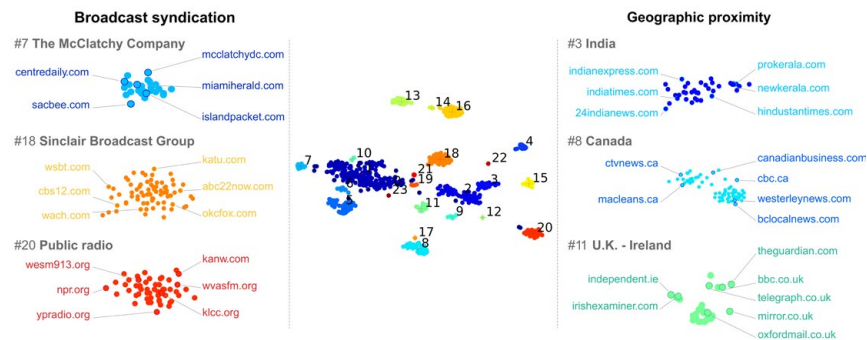
“Ten or five years ago this would not have happened. People were not ready to collaborate this way. This has now changed,” says Mounir Krichane, Director of the Initiative for Media Innovation (IMI), Switzerland. The initiative is a consortium between, on the one hand, public and privately-owned media companies in Switzerland and, on the other, some of the most prominent research universities in Europe. The aim is to combine scientific research with professional practice to create breakthrough innovations that have real value for media organizations.

IMI was founded in January 2018. The first year was spent building the initiative and launching the first call for proposals, on misinformation and public trust. There's money available too. The founders are financing CHF 700,000 (EUR 635,000) worth of research project costs per year, with some additional funding from investors and even public sources like Ofcom, the Swiss communications watchdog. The media companies also provide expertise and a first-hand understanding of the media environment. Two people work full time at the initiative's Media Centre in Lausanne.



“WE WERE VERY LUCKY TO HAVE THE RIGHT PEOPLE WHO WERE SMART ENOUGH AND OPEN-MINDED ENOUGH TO COME TOGETHER, SIT AT THE TABLE, AND START TO COLLABORATE.”  
(MOUNIR KRICHANE)

“The big challenge is that you are bringing in people from very different backgrounds to work on an initiative they are co-financing and from which they all want to gain something. It’s one of the challenges but also one of the success factors,” says Krichane.



A similarity map, where distances between channels represent the similarity of their coverage.

“We propose a model of the media landscape that automatically maps news sources based on their selection of subjects. By tracking sources over time, we can identify driving forces– from the influence of ownership to large-scale content diffusion patterns. We have produced a dynamic map of the media landscape over the past 3 years, based on coverage from 500 million articles shared by around 8,000 sources.”

“We were very lucky to have the right people who were smart enough and open-minded enough to come together, sit at the table, and start to collaborate.”

Mounir Krichane, a former applied researcher who built cutting-edge distributed wireless weather sensors at EPFL and who also has experience with RTS and its Digital Lab, underlines the applied nature of the projects IMI is funding.

“Any project funded has to come up with something that’s beneficial to media.” All partners share the results of the research, even if only one of them acts as the media partner.

Founding members include SRG-SSR, a private media group Ringier, technical university EPFL of Lausanne and the universities of Geneva, Lausanne and Neuchâtel, through their common platform Triangle Azur. Others have since joined. EPFL competes with the likes of Cambridge, Oxford and ETH Zurich for the top European spots in university rankings in the field of engineering and technology.

According to Krichane, both private and public media now understand that this kind of common initiative is needed. Digital transformation has resulted in both societal and business pressures that threaten the future of established organizations. “People are more inclined to collaborate because of that. Everybody has understood that they can’t do it on their own.”

The initiative’s first call for proposals was on the subjects of fake news and public trust. Close to 30 came in; 10 candidates were then asked to submit a full application. Six projects have now been launched, and four of them use sophisticated machine-learning models to deliver practical solutions for partner media organizations.

SRG is media partner for two of the published projects, both of which use machine learning and data science. The first uses deep-learning techniques to reduce the risk of picking false or irrelevant content in automatic aggregations. In the second, the aim is to understand social-media activities for which the data is not transparently available. The researchers are analysing networks with machine learning to discover hidden patterns.

The funding decisions are for a single year, so the initiative is only at the very beginning of reaching its goals. To achieve really substantial results, longer projects with additional funding may be needed. The second call for proposals has already been published, specifically looking for projects to strengthen the relationship between media organizations and their audiences. Projects involving new approaches for content recommendations and predicting audience needs would be especially welcome.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

<https://www.media-initiative.ch/>