

Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung

The »Top Ten Forgotten News of 2024«

Topics that have been neglected by the German media

Once a year, the non-governmental organization »Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung« (INA), in collaboration with the Deutschlandfunk (a German public radio) news department, releases a list of ten important issues that have been overlooked by the mainstream German-language media. Our goal is to draw attention to agenda-cutting and disinformation, as well as to highlight some topics for further investigation. Given the extensive coverage of the Russian war against the Ukraine and the Gaza conflict, along with the ongoing threats faced by journalists, investigators, and whistleblowers worldwide, the search for »forgotten news« is particularly crucial.

This year, a jury comprised of experts in communication and media studies, as well as professional journalists, selected the top ten topics of »Forgotten News«. Students from various German universities assessed the relevance of the proposed topics and whether they had indeed been neglected by most mainstream media. All qualifying topics were presented to the jury with detailed reports. During a one-day meeting, jury members convened in person to determine which proposed topics they deemed most significant.

Individuals can reach out to Initiative Nachrichtenaufklärung via email, mail, or web form to highlight important yet overlooked subjects. This ensures that concrete experiences from the public, rather than just the agendas of interest groups and other institutions, are reflected in INA's top ten lists for news enlightenment.

Top 1: Phytoremediation: How plants remove heavy metals

Certain plants, referred to as »hyperaccumulators«, have the ability to absorb heavy metals through their roots and store them in their biomass. The process of

phytoremediation leverages this capability to clean up areas and regions contaminated with heavy metals in an environmentally friendly manner. Additionally, phytomining can be employed to extract the absorbed heavy metals from the plant. Despite the potential for these processes to effectively and affordably remediate the environment and restore habitats, this topic is rarely covered in media reports.

Top 2: Tech monopolies and the internet graveyard: A threat to democracy

Despite the appearance of a colorful and diverse meadow full of unexpected and varied offerings, the vastness of the Internet is actually dominated by a few monopolistic corporations. A vast array of online content, not limited to the German-language, can be likened to a graveyard, underneath the Tech giants' web platforms YouTube, Facebook, X, or Tiktok . Media scholar Martin Andree's empirical analyses highlight the detrimental effects on democracy. This issue remains, however, largely unreported.

Top 3: When Google pushes boundaries

Numerous borders around the world are subject to disputes, such as those in the Middle East (Israel/Palestine, Golan Heights), South Asia (Kashmir between India and Pakistan), China (contentious land borders with India, Taiwan, maritime boundaries), Ukraine's territories occupied by Russia, Western Sahara annexed by Morocco, and the »independent« Turkish Northern Cyprus. Google Maps holds a dominant position in the global online mapping market with over one billion users. While Google claims to strive for accuracy in its map representations, the reality often varies depending on the country network from which the map is accessed. For instance, users in India may see Kashmir depicted as part of India, whereas this may not be the case for users elsewhere. Similarly, users in Turkey may view the »Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus« as independent from the rest of Cyprus, a perspective not shared globally. This uncritical adoption of political biases reinforces nationalistic views as absolute truths, hindering efforts towards compromise and balance. Surprisingly, this practice receives minimal attention in Germany.

Top 4: What a disaster: potholes in Germany and the UK

In Germany, potholes are a challenge for all road users and pose considerable risks to road safety, especially in North-Rhine-Westphalia. Their number and

degree of risk is set to increase significantly. But the public in Germany lacks reliable evidence, even the sheer number of potholes is not recorded centrally. The UK provides a precise insight into the extent of the problem through detailed data and estimates from transport service providers such as the RAC and AA, enabling targeted measures to improve road quality and safety. In the media, Germany's infrastructure problems are mainly reflected in dilapidated major projects such as motorway bridges, but the real problems literally lie deeper, in the pothole.

Top 5: Noma: A little-known tropical disease kills tens of thousands of children every year

Noma, a tropical disease, is prevalent in African and Asian countries, posing a significant threat to children under the age of seven and pregnant women due to its bacterial nature. Untreated, the disease typically results in fatality, with survivors often left severely disfigured, particularly in the facial region. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 80,000 to 90,000 children succumb to Noma annually. Despite its devastating impact, Noma has yet to be classified as a »neglected tropical disease« (NTD) by the WHO, rendering it even more overlooked among neglected diseases and virtually unknown in Germany.

Top 6: Titanium dioxide: Banned in food – allowed in medicines?

The white pigment titanium dioxide was banned as a food additive by the European Commission in the summer of 2022 due to concerns about its potential to alter genetic cell material, posing health risks. Despite this ban, titanium dioxide is still allowed and present in medicines. This discrepancy affects numerous individuals but has received minimal media coverage thus far. Given its significant social relevance and potential impact on public health, the media should address this issue more prominently.

Top 7: The World Social Forum: A counter-model to the World Economic Forum Davos

The World Social Forum (WSF) is a globalisation-critical event that has been taking place since 2001 and is supported by numerous (international) NGOs. It takes place annually at various locations in the »global South« and offers an open space for peaceful dialogue, primarily on social, economic and environmental

issues. The WSF advocates globalisation »from below«, with participants arguing and protesting against neoliberalism. Although the World Social Forum and the issues discussed there have not lost relevance, it is losing media attention and financial support, which jeopardises its continued existence.

Top 8: The crossover kidney donation

In Germany, approximately 100,000 patients suffer from severe functional limitations and require renal replacement procedures. Due to a shortage of post-mortem kidney donations, the healthcare system heavily relies on dialysis as the primary treatment option, despite it being intended as a temporary solution. Currently, only close relatives are permitted to donate kidneys to affected individuals, but compatibility issues often arise. The implementation of crossover kidney donation (CNS) could address this issue by matching new transplant pairs. However, CNS has only been conducted in legal grey areas without a nationwide register in Germany. In addition to ethical concerns, expanding CNS offers new hope for patients and should be more prominently discussed in the media and political spheres.

Top 9: Between bureaucracy and school – the double burden for children in migrant families

Language barriers and complicated bureaucratic processes make it difficult for migrants to deal with their concerns. In many cases, the children of the families act as translators, counsellors or doctors. The pressure on the children is high, and school and extracurricular activities often suffer due to the high level of responsibility for the family. Migration helpers and volunteers now offer support services, such as accompanying children to appointments, translation services or help with filling out forms. However, this support only reaches a fraction of the families affected and there is no holistic approach to solving the problem.

Top 10: Alone in the field – suicides of farmers

Farmers are increasingly suffering from depression and burnout due to their high workload. The risk of burnouts, which in some cases leads to suicide, is said to be up to 4.5 times higher in this occupational group. There are no official figures for this, although two per cent of the German labor force work in agriculture. Trade journals and associations have been warning of an

occupation-specific suicide risk for some time and are trying to raise awareness. However, there has been no reporting in the national media, nor has there been any public data collection.

Further information: www.derblindefleck.de