



**A bottom-up approach for the design and pilot
of a joint Master Course in Cross-Media Journalism**

Active audiences in participatory news organizations

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Participation and journalism

- «*The people formerly known as the audience*» (Rosen 2006)
- In the digital era, audiences have the possibility to create, challenge and take part in journalistic activities more than before → they can participate
- Participation is becoming more important for how journalism is shaped, understood and enacted. Journalism is not only in the hands of the professionals anymore.
- What is meant by participation?
 - In the “mild” version, it counts as participation if citizens have presence and recognition in the media (Turner 2010)
 - In the “strict” version, participation is considered to exist if citizens are able to influence the decisions (co-deciding with professionals) that are made in the media (Carpentier 2011)
- I propose to use journalistic participation as a notion that focuses on **co-deciding**, which has various *degrees* (maximalist or minimalist) and *orientations* (in or outwards of journalism).

Participatory news organizations

- There are journalistic outlets built almost entirely around the idea of citizen participation.
- In those cases, participation is such an essential part of their operations that the organizations would be nearly unable to function without the practice.
- They are: **participatory news organizations**
- These organizations typically have
 - 1) Central newsroom of employed journalists
 - 2) Large network of participating contributors

Three case studies from Europe

CAFÉBABEL<http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/>

A transnational NGO-based online magazine *Cafébabel*. It is 'pan-European' and multilingual, based in Paris, France (established 2001) and a number of voluntary city teams contributing from all over Europe. *Cafébabel* aims for youthful and lifestyle-oriented discussions about European matters.

<http://www.stockholmdirekt.se/sodrasidan/>

A local weekly print newspaper called *Södra Sidan*, published in the southern suburbs of Stockholm, Sweden (est. 2006). Participation manifests in the newsroom's orientation to the multicultural local community: the paper organizes reader panels, public discussions to find solutions to common problems.

voima<http://uusi.voima.fi/>

An monthly alternative print and online magazine *Voima* in Helsinki, Finland (est. 1999). *Voima* provides a professionally edited outlet for a large network of authors. The stories feature politics, environment, economy, human rights, arts etc. Contributors are paid, but the monetary compensation is not competitive with regular journalistic freelancing rates.

Central newsrooms:



- The (a) newsrooms and (b) contributing networks *together* form the **community of practice** (Wenger 1998) that produce journalism in a participatory style.
- There is a need to pay attention to the entire community together – not journalists and former audiences separate – if we want to understand how participatory news organizations work.

Communities of practice



voima

CAFÉBABEL

Newsrooms

Artists

Activists

Academics

Interns

Freelancers

Aspiring journalists

Students

City team
volunteers

Citizen
panel members

Local residents

What are the elements that are required for participatory news organizations to function?

Community building

In participatory organizations a lot of energy is put into fostering and activating the community of practice.

Requires a lot of **emotional work** (e.g. support, encouragement, conflict resolutions).

Use of **communication technology** is vital, when there are limited face-to-face meetings. But also **events** organized to meet with people.

Community building results in a sense of **belonging** to the organization.

Mobility

Participatory news making requires a lot of flexibility and movement from people as work force: high **turnover** in the newsrooms as well as networks.

Due to various physical locations where people work (at home, cafés), the use of **mobile technology** is vital (laptops, phones). E-mail still very central.

Travelling, flexible working possibilities and “going on the ground” are also an important motivations.

This results in a **vibrant pool of actors** that is necessary to provide enough material. Also: the need to cope with unpredictability.

Resource management

Participatory news making is defined by **scarcity of resources**. Therefore a lot of the practices that keep the organizations going are related to resource management.

Constant need to keep up with funding applications, advertisements, subsidies, expansions – plus all the work that is required for people to remain happy to work for free or with little compensation.

Results in a situation where **economic aspect is always present** and creates project mentality.

Learning

Participatory organizations function as important hubs for learning, which can be **personal** (e.g. gaining better knowledge of local politics) or **career-oriented** (e.g. learning how to write reportage).

Here the practice of **feedback** (via chat, mail, skype or word documents) is important. Organizations are also important sites for aspiring journalists, because they welcome (and need) a lot of **interns**.

This results in a situation where the entire organizations also continuously learn, and therefore adopt a sense of **developing and progress**.

Quality control

As news organizations, all the organizations aim for quality in their coverage **to build trust**. But because they are open and participatory, it requires a lot of work to exercise quality control with people from various backgrounds.

There is need to balance between the fact that material is needed but not all can be published. Therefore the **selection** stage and **editing** processes become central ways to maintain quality.

Also pride over won **prizes** and other acknowledgements are highlighted tokens of quality.

Results in a creation of **evaluation standards**, but they are not always explicit.

What could this mean for journalism education?

- Journalism training cannot be all about “making stories”: it might be useful to **learn ways to manage and maintain communities**.
- It might be beneficial to encourage **openness in adopting different kinds of positions** in news organizations: Not all can write or present, but the work of editors, managers and coordinators is becoming more important.
- The **use of mobile technology** becomes ever more important for future journalists.
- Journalism is a unpredictable and project-based business at the moment: therefore **project management skills** can prove useful.
- General **communication skills** are also vital: it is important to teach how to give and receive feedback or pitch stories for different outlets.

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