Baines D. Hyper-local news: A glue to hold rural communities together?.
Local Economy 2012, 27(2), 152-166.

Copyright:

© The author, 2012.

DOI link to article:

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0269094211428860>

Date deposited:

04/03/2016

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/3.0/)

Paper 2

Hyper-local news: a glue to hold rural communities together?

David Baines

Local Economy 27(2) 2012 pp152-166

Abstract

A growing body of research interrogates the implementation of communication infrastructures such as broadband connectivity in rural areas, but little has been undertaken into the potential for collaborative production of 'local news' to generate Habermasian public spheres supportive of sustainability. European and US media organisations are developing such 'hyper-local news sites' to serve small rural and urban communities. This paper is based on a case study of a rural hyper-local project launched by a major regional media company in England's most sparsely-populated county, Northumberland, to help establish 'more sustainable communities, where people want to live and work'. Such sites are usually conceived of as 'town criers' but being web-based, they position communities both locally and globally, a process which has been conceptualised as 'glocalization'. The article is informed by theoretical understandings of communicative spaces and places, monitorial citizenship and 'liquid life' and journalism developed by Jurgen Habermas, Michael Schudson, Zygmunt Bauman, Mark Deuze and Manuel Castells.

KEYWORDS: community sustainability; glocalization; hyper-local journalism; local media; public sphere; rural media; sustainable communities

2.1: Introduction

There is a substantial literature documenting processes of marginalisation in the development of cultural, economic and political disadvantage which rural communities suffer through isolation, poor transport, lack of employment, lack of leisure opportunities and a contested construction (in part by the media) of the 'rural idyll' (for example, Cloke *et al* 1997, Little, 1999). Development media theory (Sparks 2007) suggests that the 'public sphere' (Habermas 1989; 1996) can be a valuable resource to rural communities and work in Australia (Forde *et al* 2003; van Vuuren 2006) and Canada (Bakardjieva and Williams, 2010) supports this view. A growing body of research is interrogating the implementation of ICT infrastructures, such as broadband connectivity, in rural areas, (eg Preston *et al.* 2007; Stenberg *et al.* 2009; Tookey *et al.* 2006) but little has been undertaken into the potential for emerging collaborative communication sites of 'hyper-local news and information' for creating public spheres supportive of rural community sustainability.

In April 2009 a single unitary authority took over the administration of England's most sparsely-populated county, Northumberland, replacing a county council and six second-tier authorities. It contracted a regional media company to establish 'hyper-local' news and information websites serving small geographically-defined communities as part of its strategy 'to establish more-sustainable communities, where people want to live and work,'¹ and 'increasingly engage with communities at a local level'. Hyper-local news sites, increasing in number throughout Europe and America, are usually collaborative enterprises informing community members about local affairs, but inevitably positioning those communities within global perspectives. This process has been conceptualised as 'glocalization': "interpenetration of the global and the local ... resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas" (Ritzer 2003 p193).

This paper reports on the early stages of a continuing research project interrogating developments of hyper-local journalism in different contexts: rural, urban, corporate, entrepreneurial. It reports on one of the hyper-local sites set up in Northumberland in 2008 as a case study to illuminate a) an area of significant transformation within the practice of journalism which is developing across Europe and America and b) the potential of hyper-local journalism to support the sustainability of rural communities.

¹ Northumberland County Council: Invitation To Tender For Communication With Communities. Par2.4. Feb 28, 2008

The study which informs this article concerned a hyper-local journalism site serving an isolated community, 'Market Town', of some 1,800 people in Northumberland (2007: Population 310,600, area 5,013 km²)². Market Town is primarily economically dependent on agriculture and tourism, is 72km from the nearest city, 16km from a main highway and 25 minutes by road from the nearest railway station and substantial towns.

The research is informed by theoretical understandings of communicative spaces and places, monitorial citizenship, 'liquid life', 'liquid journalism' and network society developed by Henri Lefebvre, Jurgen Habermas, Michael Schudson, Zygmunt Bauman, Mark Deuze and Manuel Castells. The article begins by contextualising media and mediatization in rural and 'local' spaces and exploring critical transformations in Britain's local media which have led to a growing interest within corporate media in 'hyper-local' journalism. The article then interrogates the concept of collaborative journalism which underpins this case study and hyper-local journalism in general. Finally the article analyses the outcomes of the project within this rural community and the potential it indicates for hyper-local journalism to support community sustainability. In this I follow Andre Jansson's definition of community sustainability in his study of ICT networks in rural Sweden:

'The enduring potential of a particular community to maintain the social and cultural interests of its inhabitants, including equal access to various services, good opportunities for political and cultural participation, expression and integration and an enduring sense of community.' (Jansson 2010 p180)

² Statistics derived from Northumberland County Council. Available at: <http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=398>

2.2: Mediatisation and 'local media'

'Mediatisation' refers to more than the notion that the media 'mediate' to persuade or promote understanding, but rather they 'alter the possibilities for human communications by reshaping relations, not just among media organisations and their publics, but among all social institutions' (Livingstone 2009 pX). The mediatisation of the social space in which that community lives is characterised by Lefebvre (1974/1991) as a triadic structure depending on interrelationships between *perceived space* (people's activities in a landscape); *conceived space* (or spatial representations) and *lived space* (imagined through its myths, symbols and ideologies). Jansson (2010, p180) points to resonances between this analysis and Kaeith Halfacree's similarly triadic conception of rural spaces as processual entities evolving through the relationships between *rural localities*; *formal representations of the rural* and *everyday lives of the rural* (Halfacree 2006, 2007). Local media play a multifaceted role in building networks and maintaining connectivity, generating and reinforcing representations of place and community and, through dimensions of connectivity and representation, reinforce people's sense of belonging. Such media create a communicative space of civic, social and cultural engagement, which in turn fosters economic interactions. They host spaces for advertising and economic activity, but are also actors in local economies. Local newspapers proclaim themselves to be 'part of the community' (see the British Newspaper Society's Local Newspaper Week 2011 publicity³). Such media clearly sit within both Lefebvre's and Halfacree's analytical framework in their mediatisation of social, and rural, spaces and places.

But for media organisations, 'local communities' are also markets, and commodities to be sold to advertisers. The conception and identification of a 'community' by media corporations may be determined not by the community's own sense of identity and space it occupies (materially and conceptually), but by the manner in which that community-commodity can be packaged and sold. Many regional newspaper companies and corporations enjoy local monopolies and some refrain from competition with each other within circulation boundaries (Murphy 1998: 82; Franklin and Murphy 1991) in order to efficiently commodify communities. But new technologies have led to conflict. Hargreaves and Thomas (2002 p64) noted that in

³ <http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/local-newspaper-week>

Britain 'most television news does not even attempt to focus at the truly local scale'. Britain's public-service, publicly-funded broadcaster the BBC (conscious of its duty to serve all who finance it through a compulsory licence fee) planned in 2007 to launch web-based local news services. Britain's Newspaper Society, representing regional and local publishers, and Society of Editors, protested about 'unfair competition' and the BBC withdrew its plans for finer-grained news for smaller communities (Linford 2008). Yet Hargreaves and Thomas (ibid) also noted that newspapers, which can reach small localities do not necessarily engage with all communities which occupy those spaces. They have, for example, 'a tenuous hold on young readers and a very weak position among the black and Asian population'.⁴ Aldridge holds that weekly-papers, usually based in small towns are conceptually 'closest to the everyday term "local paper"' (2007 p27). But many such newspapers have closed (Franklin 2008, p7⁵) and many rural communities have lost access to a local paper - and local papers to rural communities/commodities/markets - as village shops have closed.

The term 'local media' can also be contested, however. Local papers carry news about localities in which titles circulate, but ownership of 'local' titles has migrated and concentrated in national and multinational corporations (Aldridge 2007; McNair 2003; Murphy 1998; Williams and Franklin 2008). Many local weekly – and daily - papers are now produced far from their circulation areas (for example Luft 2011). Local reporters are less likely to be local people than graduates in an occupation 'people pay to enter'. (Journalism Training Forum 2002 p25. See also Aldridge 2007 p155; Delano and Henningham 1995).

⁴ Young people are seen a commodity group attractive to advertisers, ethnic minorities have often been seen as less attractive to advertisers and British newspapers have historically done little to engage with them, indicating that commercial utility trumps 'localness'.

⁵ The 1,306 paid-for weeklies in the UK in 1948 had fallen to 526 in 2005 (Franklin 2008)

2.3: Why go hyper-local?

Across the US and Europe, newspaper circulation is in long-term decline and titles have recently experienced sharp falls in circulation and revenue: indeed, '2009 was one of the blackest years yet for the newspaper industry in North America and Europe' (World Editors Forum 2010) and circulation loss is most precipitate among young people (Aldridge 2007 p33).

Some media organisations responded by attempting to engage with more localised audiences and developed internet-based 'hyper-local' news and information websites dedicated to city suburb, small town, village, or post-code (US zip-code) areas (UK Press Gazette August 9, 2007; August 4, 2006; Foster, 2009 p213; Flew & Wilson, 2010 p136). The *New York Times* has launched hyper-local sites (Jarvis 2009); DM>, owner of Britain's national *Daily Mail* and Northcliffe regional newspapers, launched hyper local sites in 2009 (Luft, 2009) and hyper-local journalism was a central theme of the 2010 European Newspaper Congress⁶.

Hyper-local sites promise the elimination of many production costs and all distribution costs inherent in print, and the employment of audiences in content production at little or no cost: Matthew Engel of Britain's *Financial Times* quotes Roger Parry, outgoing chairman of newspaper publisher Johnston Press, stating journalists' jobs will be done better in future 'by enthusiastic amateurs for next to nothing' (Engel, 2009 p60). Hyper-local communities are thus conceived of as commodities to sell to advertisers *and* unpaid content-providers. Such audiences also offer access to new advertisers, who would not otherwise pay higher rates for space in larger publications.

But none of this necessarily prevents communities using such sites to their own advantage or to support and sustain community life. Furthermore, because much of the content and labour required is not paid for, the site might itself be more sustainable. And collaboration inevitably entails changes in relations of power which shape the content and purpose of the site, and a rethinking of the practice and purpose of the journalism such a site hosts.

⁶ European Newspaper Congress 2010, Vienna, Austria. http://enc.newsroom.de/lang/en/enc-2010/lokalinformationen-local_information/ (Accessed April 10, 2010)

2.4: Glocalization

Internet-based hyper-local news sites perform local paper functions as ‘town criers’, informing local communities about local affairs. But because they are web-based, they inevitably position addressed communities within globally interconnected perspectives – a process which has been conceptualised as ‘glocalization’. This global-local interaction is characterised by a complex range of dynamics. Douglas Kellner, citing Allan and Carmen Luke (2000), points out that these dynamics are different, and generate different outcomes, in each locality because ‘every local context involves its own appropriation and reworking of global products and signifiers, thus encouraging difference, otherness, diversity and variety’ (Kellner 2002 p293). George Ritzer defines glocalization as ‘the interpenetration of the global and the local ... resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas’ (Ritzer, 2003, p193). Giulianotti and Robertson (2006 p171) find value in the concept as a means to ‘analyse the ways in which social actors construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization’ and Herman Wasserman and Shakuntala Rao (2008 p163-4), use it to discover nuanced, two-way relationships between global and local epistemologies and practices, rather than a one-way traffic from centre to periphery.

2.5: Theoretical perspectives: journalists and citizen

Jurgen Habermas's concept of the 'public sphere' (Habermas 1989; 1996) is of a communicative space that emerged from 17th and 18th century coffee houses to afford openness and plurality and allow active participants in public life to generate an 'influential and informed' public opinion. His conceptualisation is contested on grounds that he viewed the public sphere as a unified entity; his concept excluded many (on grounds of gender and class, for example); it emphasised consensus over difference and contestation (Calhoun 1992). But the public sphere remains a strong model to inform understanding of deliberative democratic culture. For Habermas, the spread of news, which accompanied the spread of commerce, made possible a sense of common interests and the connection between private economic interactions and political discourse is of vital importance for the developing meaning of 'public'. But he held that consumer capitalism contributed to the decline of the public sphere and made cultural production a matter of passive consumption, rather than participation (Habermas 1996). He argues that corporate interests have colonized the public sphere (including the media and cultural production) to their own benefit and in their own interests. Yet hyper-local news sites depend on collaboration and active participation in cultural production.

Peter Dahlgren argues that the conceptualisation of the public sphere remains compelling in the internet age, but redefines it as 'a constellation of communicative spaces' (Dahlgren, 2005 p148). He puts forward an analytical model of the public sphere(s) in three dimensions: structural, representational and interactional. The *structural* relates to media institutions and their political economy, ownership and control which define freedoms and constraints on publication. The *representative* dimension has to do with the content of the sites and relates to the 'pluralism of views' and 'ideological tendencies' in the communicative space. *Interaction* relates to citizen's encounters with the media – and how they make use of, meaning of, and engage with that content. This conceptualisation of the public sphere maps on to and complements both Lefebvre's and Harlafacree's inter-relational triadic analyses referred to above and concerning, respectively, social and rural space. Dahlgren says that when civic communication goes online 'empirically, the categories of representation and interaction on the Net often blur into each other' (Dahlgren, 2005 p149) and this was

reflected in the hyper-local site and community this study explored. The *structural*, *representational* and *interactional* dimensions each bear on the collaborative conceptualisation of the site: the power-relationships which underpin collaboration; the pluralism of views the site facilitates and the interactions of the producers/users of the site's content.

Mark Deuze has been to the fore in conceptualising media work as essentially collaborative processes and media texts as collaborative artefacts (Deuze, 2007, 48). But the collaboration in producing *journalism* need not necessarily involve a '*journalist*' – or media organisation. Social media sites such as Twitter, MySpace, Face Book, LinkedIn deliver networks of connectivity which allow ordinary citizens collaboratively to produce media artefacts: Dahlgren's 'constellation of communicative spaces'. They also facilitate economic interactions. Such media products chime with Manuel Castells's definition (2010; Vol1, pxliv) of a network society in which organisational arrangements of humans in relation to everyday life-issues such as production, consumption and experience are made of networks. This does not undervalue proximal, localised and lived interactions – interactions within and beyond the community are complementary. Urry (2007) sets forth a valuable conceptualization of 'network capital', which Jansson (2010 p182) applies to explore 'how new technological networking resources in countryside regions may contribute not only to network sociality, but also to social capital, a sense of stability and spatial coherence'. (For more on social capital, see Putnam, 1995).

Michael Schudson discovered in his empirical inquiries that modern citizens act in what he terms a 'monitorial' manner.

'... it does not imply that citizens should know all the issues all of the time. It implies that they should be informed enough and alert enough to identify danger to their personal good and danger to the public good. When such danger appears ... they should have the resources—in trusted relationships, in political parties and elected officials, in relationships to interest groups and other trustees of their concerns ... to jump into the political fray and make a lot of noise.' (Schudson, 2000 p16)

These 'trusted relationships' and 'trustees of their concerns' offer once again, a place for the journalist in a collaborative representational/interactional relationship with the active citizen - if the citizen finds reason to engage in such a relationship. The potential to develop the trusted relationship lies in the 'professionalism' and skills of journalists; their routines of working and access to democratic and commercial institutions; their perceived role as brokers of reliable information, analysts, monitors and investigators. Downie and Schudson (2009 p3) cite Alan Rusbridger, editor of British newspaper and website *The Guardian*, who sees a collaborative journalism emerging in what he calls a 'mutualised newspaper'. Schudson's research further suggests that this relationship, should it develop, would be one of a number of such trusted relationships upon which citizens and communities could draw. Deuze compares the monitorial citizen to 'the consumer, browsing stores of a shopping mall' (2008, p848) and, citing Zygmunt Bauman's concept of 'liquid life' (Bauman, 2000), holds that in order adequately to service the networked society, to find acceptance in a 'trusted relationship' the role of journalism and the journalist has become 'liquid'. 'Living a liquid life involves a complex dance between work, play and life in the context of a rapid(ly)-changing "glocal" environment, which life gets enacted in and through media,' (Deuze, 2007 p42). Liquid journalism, he says, 'deeply respects the rights and privileges of each and every consumer-citizen to be a maker and user of his own news, and enthusiastically embraces its role as, to paraphrase James Carey, (1989) an amplifier of the conversation society has with itself' (Deuze, 2008 p848).

Thus, the concept of the collaborative hyper-local news site, resonates with conceptualisations of the public sphere, the roles and responsibilities of journalist and citizen and with the economic, social and cultural changes taking place in society, and the media industries.

The sustainability of hyper-local journalism sites is thus dependent on successful developments of collaborations. But issues of control and ownership between journalist/media organisation and communities they serve are critical to the successful development of such collaboration. John Myles, exploring ways in which community internet sites can help sustain communities in Manchester (UK), argues that the

'... meaning of community in community networks is the outcome of relations of power and there needs to be critical awareness of this in local

authority community telematics policy formation. This critical awareness may well be threatened in partnerships with the commercial sector, and the priority must be ... putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use'. (Myles, 2004 p487)

The project subject to this inquiry is clearly a partnership between a local authority - Northumberland County Council (NCC) - and the commercial sector, but the media company gave 'community journalists' editorial autonomy over material they published on the site, which would seem to address Myles's demand that 'the priority must be ... putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use'.

2.6: Methodology

This study interrogated five data sets to explore the conceptualisation of the hyper-local project; its development; roles of professional journalists in this enterprise and ways in which the community concerned engaged with the sites – and with their wider media environment.

1) Documentation related to the 2008 tender by Northumberland County Council (NCC) and Media Company's bid allowed exploration of the project's conception and intended development.

2) Intensive semi-structured interviews with the three journalists who created and maintained the 20-plus hyper-local news sites explored how conception compared with practice.

3) Analysis of all content posted on the hyper-local site from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2009 enabled cross-referencing of interview data and interrogation of the site's development over its first full calendar year of operation. The site had been launched in August 2008 and the study thus began when people had had four months to get to know and use it.

4) A 'Knowledge Café' workshop – a creative discursive process in a café setting - was held with engaged and participative members of Market Town to explore the communicative spaces and networks in which they engaged. The café setting produces a relaxed ambience conducive of open discussion and the knowledge café is a useful tool for 'cultural probes' (Gaver, Dunne and Pacenti, 1999) and a creative and inclusive technique for sharing knowledge and stimulating new thinking (Involve, 2007).

Participants were recruited via snowballing. The group was not statistically representative, but composed of individuals involved in the life of their community and knowledgeable about its needs. For three weeks before the café, participants were asked to regularly visit Media Company's and other websites serving their community. Discussion groups formed round four tables and at 20-minute intervals dispersed and differently-constituted groups reformed. Each table had a menu of open questions to prompt discussion on a different theme related to the community's media use and engagement with the hyper-local project. These were: content for a hyper-local site; content production by the community; a critique of the media company's hyper-local site; advantages and disadvantages of commercial and amateur community sites. This

generated 16 X 20-minute discussions by differently constituted groups of three or four, each producing fresh discourses around the four themes. A further 4 X 10-minute discussions were then held on metropolitan-based media provision in peripheral rural areas. Dynamics of discussion tended, however, to converge into two overarching themes: the development of public spheres of engagement in a glocalised media environment and the groups' local and global interests and concerns; and collaborations between amateur and professional media producers in construction of these spheres.

5) Participants completed questionnaires on their backgrounds and media use.

All interviews and discussions were transcribed in full and a 'framework' approach (Richie et al, 2003) adopted to analyse datasets relating to the conceptualisation of the hyper-local sites, interviews with journalists and knowledge café discussions. This allowed the construction of a framework of emerging themes and subthemes concerning engagements and interactions between institutions, journalists and community; journalists' conceptions and performance of their role(s) and community perceptions of engagements with and relationships within their local and global media environments.

2.6.1: Conceptualising the hyper-local sites:

This investigation took place during a period of significant transformation for both Media Company and NCC. Between late 2007 and early 2010 the company imposed several rounds of redundancies. Local government in England was also reorganised and in Northumberland, district councils with defined areas and a county council with supplementary responsibilities were replaced in April 2009 by NCC as a single unitary authority which took over all municipal responsibilities.

In preparation for the change, in January 2008, the former county council tendered for a three-year £750,000 contract to improve communications between the council and its communities and within those communities. Media Company won the contract, local government transformation took place in April 2009 but two months later the new council ended the contract on cost grounds. Media Company decided, however, to maintain the hyper-local sites and published a supplementary free weekly newspaper in the county.

NCC's 2008 tender document, '*Communication with Communities*' explained:

'In order to establish more sustainable communities, where people want to live and work, the Council is looking at local delivery arrangements in a number of services and needs to increasingly engage with communities at a local level to provide a more joined up approach. ... (para 2.4)

'Consideration should be given to methods which engage and facilitate community discussions and feedback as well as informing at a local level.'(para 4.3.2) (Emphasis added.)

Media Company, in its successful bid document offered a quarterly magazine and hyper-local websites for 27 'belonging communities' (defined by NCC as 'places that local people would regard as where they come from if asked by others with a knowledge of the patch [ie, townships, rural areas associated with a particular river or valley]' (para 2.6.2 in the tender document); a quarterly magazine and daily promotion of the sites in its newspapers. The sites would 'contain a mix of useful information on council services, user-generated content, blogs, forums and ultra-local news'. Clubs and organisations would be invited 'regularly to provide grassroots content'. Beyond the £750,000 contract income, the project offered Media Company opportunities to reach new audiences and advertisers and maintain 'brand awareness' while rural shops closed, hitting distribution, and younger people increasingly eschewed newspapers.

The documentation reveals, however, that although Media Company was, in Myles's phrase, 'putting the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use', communities involved were not consulted. The communication strategy 'to establish more sustainable communities' was narrowly framed by the County Council in terms of its requirements and its need better to engage with communities. Media Company's solution, within this frame, was to establish structures which allowed the County Council to engage reciprocally with communities served by each hyper-local site, as if the council were a hub from which discrete spokes radiated to individual communities. Media Company's role was to direct to each site council information and local content, recruit 'community journalists' and grant them autonomy over postings. Media Company assumed that community members would produce content, blogs and discussion forums. The tender stipulated: 'Proposals will need to ensure that the Council's reputation is upheld in all communications with its stakeholders.' (para 4.3.6)

Media Company's response was: 'The general content (of the quarterly magazine) would be sensitive to the council's reputation and standards.' It stated: 'It is possible to maintain editorial integrity while forging commercial partnerships'⁷. The project was thus conceived, top-down, to meet institutional needs, not community needs.

The design emphasised communities' local perspectives but ignored their global networks interests and engagements which contributed to their network – and social - capital, and fell short of Ritzer's conceptualization of the multi-trajectional 'interpenetration of the global and the local resulting in unique outcomes in geographic areas'. Nor did it free communities to 'construct meanings, identities and institutional forms within the sociological context of globalization' (Guilanotti and Robertson, 2006, p171).

2.6.2: Theory into practice

'Alan' led the project for Media Company and an experienced reporter ('Tony') and trainee ('Fiona') were recruited to write for sites and recruit 'community journalists'. They were all interviewed individually.

Alan: 'Once we got to stage of about a hundred community correspondents [we] were really pleased with ourselves and then in the next month only three of them wrote anything. This thing of .. em .. the reality of citizen journalism is that, it's not just a matter of saying, 'well, here's the platforms, you can do it.' ... They don't have the skills, they might not have the motivation ... certainly not without some guidance, and I think I recognised that fairly early in the project and I saw our role isn't just to provide a platform, but also to provide the skills and the training and the encouragement ... And the problem is that resources have got the better of us, the lack of resources.... I think this idea that everyone is a journalist now, isn't true. (A), everyone doesn't want to be a journalist and, (b) doesn't have the skills.'

Fiona was asked if community journalists were invited to the newspaper offices.

⁷ The tender document and the media company's successful bid document were provided by Northumberland County Council in response to a Freedom of Information request. The bid document's pages are not numbered.

‘Never. They were kept at arm’s length... It’s a huge area and we had so many sites. Maybe if we had had more staff or less sites we might have been able to be more in-depth.’

When you say they were kept at arm’s length, do you mean that was a deliberate policy?

‘No. it’s just that ... it might have been a bit rushed in the way it was put together.’

The company saw ‘collaboration’ essentially in terms of the community producing content for the site. All the reporters recognised that for ‘collaboration’ to be successful, it required their personal engagement with contributors, sharing skills, and said that if they began again they would give greater support to contributors. After NCC terminated the contract in June, 2009 Fiona was taken off the project, Alan almost completely taken off and one reporter was left to service the sites and write the new free newspaper.

Alan: ‘While we had the full team there, you know, the traffic was growing pretty steadily. We worked out one month we got to about 20% of the households in the county, which isn’t bad penetration.

‘You have to appeal to the people first and then try and find a way of making it pay ... and we were reaching, I am sure, people who didn’t traditionally read (the main paper) ... and I think we are probably hitting a younger audience and we are hitting an audience in places where (the main paper) had become hard to buy.’

During 2009, Media Company updated Market Town website with 290 articles - 102,000 words of text - but fewer articles were posted in the second half of the year. Most articles were ‘general news’, sourced mainly from press releases. Least well served were categories which relied most on audience collaboration: local sports; what’s on; news from schools, clubs and societies and churches. No forums through which ‘communities hold the conversations with themselves’ emerged.

‘Tony’, the remaining reporter, was asked if the sites were in any way designed to present the communities in a wider network beyond the geographical limits of the community as perceived by Media Company. ‘No, I think it is more a site for local

people,' he said. The journalists' underlying assumption was that the sole purpose of news and information on such sites was to relate to that geographical locality and the sites were not for others to look in to or the local community to look out from.

2.6.3: The community

Fourteen people, recruited via snowballing and selected for their engagement in the community and knowledge about its needs, took part in the knowledge cafe: five men and nine women, predominantly in the 40-50 and 50-60 age groups with one retired and one semi-retired. Four worked in agriculture, three owned businesses, one had worked in education and one was a part time teacher, three were administrators and event organisers, two were self-employed. Several combined occupations. There was a high level of community commitment in terms of membership of local societies and civic organisations. All 14 said they relied heavily on word of mouth for local news. But all used the internet for leisure and to keep in touch with others and 11 used it in their working lives. Four used social media such as Face Book, and three ran websites. All used multiple media platforms to keep in touch with news of their immediate community. This diversity of online communications makes it difficult to separate network sociality from the proximal community – which also emerged in Jansson's study (2010 p.186). Only three habitually used Media Company's Market Town site and five, including those three, those of local weekly papers. Of the 14, 10 bought local weekly papers and seven Media Company's regional paper. They were not statistically representative but did have a rich and textured understanding of their community and the surrounding region.

At the beginning it was held to be axiomatic that word of mouth kept everybody fully informed about local affairs, but this was soon challenged:

'It's not that long since somebody said to me, "What exactly do you do?" I've only been in this business for, what, 17 years, and you still don't know what I do!'

Concerns emerged about elderly people who lay outside key communicative networks and several times knowledge gaps were cited about critically important community events such as births and deaths.

‘...Thursday sometime I saw a hearse driving down the high street and I am yet to find out who it is one of my customers was following and I saw them later on and said, Whose funeral was that?’ She said, ‘I don’t know I just got stuck behind the hearse.’

‘... I said to this lady “So what are you two up to this weekend?” She said: “You do realise my husband passed away five months ago,” and err honestly..’

It emerged that networks of friendship and kinship spread throughout the county and beyond and there was a sense of community identity that went beyond Market Town. Word of mouth – and existing media– also failed adequately to support and inform cultural life. There was no single listing of what was happening in nearby villages and towns:

‘I would like to see somewhere a date-orientated events list that covers quite a big area, because so often, you don’t see the notice until after it has gone.’

The importance of networks to forge social and commercial connections between residents and with visiting tourists were also highlighted.

‘I’ll tell you has got it nailed is erm ‘Grace’ ... She has a beauty room at the back of (her shop) .. She’s got on FaceBook so she’s added everybody as her friend and she does special offers so she’ll have on next week facials £10 usually £18 all next week ... and she puts these on constantly ... then you don’t need to phone her you just send her a message.’

‘We thought one thing that could be ... better is perhaps some forums ... and within that forum you would have perhaps one for the running club one for the tennis club one for the camera club one for the Brownies ... so

that if somebody was coming on holiday visited ... and were interested in oh gosh this camera club has a really interesting ... or oh running club 'Oh that's great perhaps I could run with them'.

The Market Town group were immersed in web-based networks. Their perceptions of the public spheres in which they engaged included spaces for interactions locally and with visitors, potential visitors, communities nearby and distant and communities of interest. Interactions took place along economic, social, cultural and political trajectories. They fitted Schudson's 'monitorial citizens' model. But no single news site supported the social, economic, familial and cultural networks within which they lived and sought to develop.

The possible establishment of Schudson's 'trusted relationship' between community and journalist was challenged: 'I would still question whether they were there to serve our needs, or to serve their needs, which would be to sell papers.' But potential benefits of collaborations were recognised and perceived benefits valued. Journalists' skills and knowledge were seen as potential assets – championing the community with local government and big business: 'To put it bluntly, they will smell bullshit a mile away' and in terms of establishing trust in information: 'There has to be someone who can say, "Just slow down a bit ... are you sure of your facts here?" '

2.6.4: Metropolitan media and the rural periphery

Some believed mainstream media ignored rural communities, but that distance from metropolitan centres and size of population made that inevitable. Others concluded that despite its isolation, the area had a relatively wide range of media – two daily and three weekly papers; BBC local radio; commercial radio; two regional TV channels and several locally-relevant websites. Importance was placed on news about the local community – and on their community being globally visible.

'We do need some sort of news and promotion to make this area be known about to people come and visit, so I think it does matter from that point of view because if it is never mentioned, it certainly, from a tourism point of view ... so yes, it does matter from a financial point of view.' (Female participant in the final

set of discussions on metropolitan-based media provision in peripheral rural areas)

But a further reason resonates with Wasserman and Rao's ethical perspective on glocalization: a nuanced, two-way relationship between global and local epistemologies and practices, rather than a one-way traffic from the centre to the periphery.

'It matters to a community ... it should matter to the people in a bigger area that others are either doing a good job or having problems, shouldn't it?' (Male participant in the final set of discussions on metropolitan-based media provision in peripheral rural areas)

2.7: Conclusions

This project set out to interrogate processes of glocalization; negotiations over collaborative media-making and how hyper-local journalism could support community sustainability. It discovered a geographically isolated, but widely networked community (regionally, nationally, globally - socially, culturally economically), intensely curious about local news. The community, containing active producers of cultural and media content (re Habermas) recognised the potential of a hyper local news site to facilitate local economic and cultural interactions and circulate news (such as births, marriages and deaths) critically important to maintaining and sustaining community identity and relationships of care and concern, but were little engaged with the Media Company site.

The proposal for a hyper-local site sought, in Myles's phrase, to put 'the networks more thoroughly in the hands of the community of use'. Media Company's journalists were supportive of and enthusiastic but ultimately unable to deliver 'liquid engagements' that might have encouraged those monitorial citizens to develop collaborations and trusted, valued relationships with journalists. This was in part because of a lack of resources, but also because the sites were designed primarily to meet NCC's political and Media Company's corporate needs, not the community's. Media Company did not recognise the need community members readily identified: interactivity - network capital that reinforces social capital. Community members needed to engage in - and be visible within - global, networked communicative spheres, as well as those which sustained and supported relationships in their lived-environment. Community identity depended in part upon being recognised as such by others: 'It matters to a community ... it should matter to the people in a bigger area that others are either doing a good job or having problems, shouldn't it?' But the architecture of the hyper-local site offered a 'one-way traffic from centre to periphery'. The neglect of global interactions and visibilities – central to the concept of the public sphere and its potential to support community sustainability - tended to reinforce this community's isolation. The uniformity of the 22 sites restricted the development of 'difference, otherness, diversity and variety' to which Kellner points in processes of glocalization (2002 p293).

The research project on which this article is based is currently interrogating the role in emerging glocalities of more entrepreneurial models of hyper local news sites and

their potential within urban communities. However, obstacles to 'the interpenetration of the global and the local', could begin to be addressed in this instance by changing the architecture of the Media Company sites from a series linked individually, discretely, to a single hub, into an interconnected matrix more supportive of the glocalized networks and interactions which the people of Market Town seek.

References

- Aldridge M. (2007) *Understanding The local Media*. Maidenhead. Open University Press.
- Bakardjieva M. Williams A. (2010) Super Network on the Prairie: The Discursive Framing of Broadband Connectivity by Policy Planners and Rural Residents in Alberta, Canada. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research (Thematic Section: Rural Media Spaces)* 2, 153-175.
- Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Calhoun C. (1992) *Habermas and the Public Sphere*. Massachusetts. Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press.
- Carey JW (1989) *Communication as culture: Essays on media and society*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Castells M. (2010) *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed) Vol 1. The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture. Oxford. John Wiley & Sons .
- Cloke P, Milbourne P, Thomas C. (1997) Living Lives in Different Ways? Deprivation, marginalization and changing lifestyles in Rural England. *Transactions of the institute of British Geographers*, 22(2) June 1997 , 210-230
- Dahlgren P. (2005) The Internet, Public Spheres and Political Communication: Dispersion and deliberation. *Political Communication*, 22 147-62.
- Delano A. and Henningham J. (1995) *The News Breed: A report on British journalists in the 1990s*. London: London Institute.
- Deuze M. (2007) *Media Work in a Digital Age*. Polity. London
- Deuze M. (2008) The Changing Context of News Work: Liquid Journalism and Monitorial Citizenship. *International Journal of Communication* 2. 848-865
- Downie L Jr. and Schudson M (2009) The Reconstruction of American Journalism. New York. Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. (Oct 20) Available at http://www.journalism.columbia.edu/system/documents/1/original/Reconstruction_of_Journalism.pdf (Accessed May 23, 2011)
- Engel M. (2009) Local Papers: An obituary. *British Journalism Review*. 20 55-62
- Flew T & Wilson J. (2010) Journalism as Social Networking: The Australian youdecide project and the 2007 federal election. *Journalism*. 11, 131-147
- Forde S, Foxwell K, Meadows M. (2003) Through the lens of the local: public arena journalism in the Australian community broadcasting sector. *Journalism*. 4(3) 314-335

- Foster, A. (2009) Information Industry: Structure, partnership and change. *Business information Review*. 26, 207-227.
- Franklin B. and Murphy D. (1991) What News? The Market, Politics and the Local Press. London. Routledge
- Franklin B, ed (2008) *Pulling Newspapers Apart: Analysing Print Journalism*. Sage, London
- Gaver, W.W., Dunne, A., and Pacenti, E. (1999) 'Cultural Probes,' *Interactions*, 6(1), 21–29.
- Giulianotti, R., & Robertson, R. (2006). Glocalization, Globalization and Migration. The Case of Scottish Football Supporters in North America. *International Sociology*, 21(2) 171-198 (2006)
- Habermas J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Polity Press. Cambridge.
- Habermas, J. (1996) The Transformation of the Public Sphere's Political Function. *The Habermas Reader*. Outhwait W, Oxford. Polity Press: 28-31.
- Halfacree K. (2006) Rural Space: Constructing a Three-Fold Architecture. Cloke P. Marsden T. Mooney P.H. (eds) *Handbook of Rural Studies*. London. Sage
- Halfacree K. (2007) Trial By Space For A 'Radical Turn': Introducing Alternative Localities, Representations and Lives. *Journal of Rural Studies* 23, 125-141
- Hargreavess I and Thomas J (2002) *New News, Old News*, London Broadcasting Standards Commission / Independent Television Commission. Available at: <http://legacy.caerdydd.ac.uk/jomec/resources/news.pdf> (Accessed May 23, 2011)
- Involve (2007) World Café. Available at: <http://peopleandparticipation.net/pages/viewpage.action?pageId=18219161> (Accessed Feb 16, 2009)
- Jansson A. (2010) Mediatization, Spacial Coherence and Social Sustainability: The Role of Digital Media Networks in a Swedish Countryside Community. *Culture Unbound: Journal of Current Cultural Research (Thematic Section: Rural Media Spaces)* 2 177-192.
- Jarvis J. (2009) The Times and CUNY and Others Go Hyperlocal. Jeff Jarvis blog, posted Feb 28, 2009. <http://www.buzzmachine.com/2009/02/28/the-times-cuny-and-others-go-hyperlocal/> (Accessed April 9, 2010)
- Journalism Training Forum (2002) Journalists at work: their views on training, recruitment and conditions. London: Publishing NTO/Skillset
- Kellner D. (2002) Theorising Globalization. *Sociological Theory* 20(3) (Nov) 285-305
- Lefebvre H. (1971/1991) *The Production of Space*. Oxford. Blackwell

- Linford P. BBC Trust rejects local video plan. Holdthefrontpage, November 21, 2008.
 Accessible at: <http://www.holdthefrontpage.co.uk/2008/news/bbc-trust-rejects-local-video-plan/> (Accessed March 23, 2011)
- Little J. (1999) Otherness, representation and the cultural construction of reality. *Progress in Human Geography*. 23(3) 437-442
- Livingstone S. (2009) Forward: Coming to Terms with 'Mediatization' in Mediatization: concept, changes, consequences. Knut Lundby (ed) New York. Peter Lang
- Luft O. (2009) Daily Mail owner launches websites aimed at 'hyperlocal' communities. *The Guardian*. July 2. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/jul/02/daily-mail-hyperlocal-websites> (Accessed April 10, 2010)
- Luft O. (2011) Johnston Press plans 'hub' to sub all its southern titles. *UK Press Gazette*, February 1. Available at:
<http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=46625&c=1>
 (Accessed May 23, 2011)
- Luke A and Luke C (2000) A Situated Perspective on Cultural Globalization, 275-98 in *Globalization and Education* Nicholas Burbules and Carlos Torres (eds) London. And New York. Routledge.
- McNair B. (2003) *News and Journalism in the UK*. Routledge. London
- Murphy D, (1998) Earthquake undermines structure of local press ownership: many hurt. In *Making the Local News*, Murphy d and Franklin B (eds) *Making the Local News*. Routledge London.
- Myles, J (2004) Community networks and cultural intermediaries: the politics of community net development in Greater Manchester. *Media Culture Society* 26 467-490
- Preston P. Cawley A. Metykova M. (2007) Broadband and rural areas in the EU: From technology to applications and use. *Telecommunications Policy* 131(6-7) (July-August) 389-400
- Putnam RD. (1995) Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. *Journal of Democracy* 6.(1) 65-78
- Ritchie, J., S. Spencer, and W. O'Connor, (2003) Carrying out qualitative analysis, in *Qualitative Research Practice*, J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, Editors. Sage: London. 219-262.
- Ritzer, G. (2003). Rethinking globalization: Glocalization/globalization and something/nothing. *Sociological Theory*, 21 (3), 193-208.
- Schudson M. (2000) Good Citizens and Bad History: Today's Political Ideals in Historical Perspective. *The Communication Review*. 4(1) 1-19

- Sparks C. (2007) *Globalization, Development and Mass Media*. London. Sage
- Stenberg P. Morehart M. Vogel S. Cromartie J Breneman V and Brown D. (2009) Broadband Internet's Value for Rural America. Economic Research Report No. (ERR-78) August 2009 US Dept of Agriculture
- Tookey A. Whalley J. Howick S. (2006) Broadband diffusion in remote and rural Scotland Telecommunications Policy 30(8-9) September-October, Pages 481-495
- UK Press Gazette (2007) Trinity Mirror hints at more hyperlocal titles. August 9, <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=38431> (Accessed February 17 2009)
- UK Press Gazette (2006) Associated 'hyperlocal' sites to broaden regional empire. August 4. <http://www.pressgazette.co.uk/story.asp?sectioncode=1&storycode=35180> (Accessed February 17, 2010)
- Urry J. (2007) Social Networks: travel and talk. *British Journal of Sociology*. 54(2) 155-175
- Van Vuuren K. (2006) Community broadcasting and the enclosure of the public sphere. *Media Culture and Society*. 28(3) 379-392
- Wasserman H. and Rao S. (2008) The Glocalization of Journalism Ethics. *Journalism*, 9(2) 163-181
- World Editors Forum (2010) *Trends in Newsrooms Report*. Available at <http://www.trends-in-newsrooms.org/articles.php?id=75> (Accessed May 23 2011)
- Williams A and Franklin B (2008) *Turning Around the Tanker: Implementing Trinity Mirror's Online Strategy*. Jomec. Cardiff University Press.