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Reconsidering Participatory Journalism in the Internet Age

Igor Vobič[*]
Peter Dahlgren[**]

SUMMARY

Participatory journalism is embedded in larger dilemmas of access, interaction, and participation, where it is used as a general rubric to refer to all forms of non-professional activities of journalistic conduct that capture the ideas of collaborative and collective action. The article suggests that the relations between journalists and the audience have changed significantly in the last decade or so: where the members of the audience have started to operate as co-producers of the news. Simultaneously, journalists are beginning to develop a sense of how to reinvent themselves as the co-creators of the content. In this regard, thinking about, and exploring, participatory journalism demands some conceptual precision; we will not be helped if it becomes a signifier for any- and everything that is not mainstream journalism. The article discusses the contexts, practices, and dilemmas of participatory journalism in three sections. In doing so, it looks at the key conceptual difficulties regarding the complexities of citizen access to public life, where various interactive possibilities of online platforms are evolving. These are set against the manifold difficulties of contemporary democracy and traditional journalism. In the concluding section, the article sets possible future paths for participatory journalism research.

Key words: participatory journalism, democracy, Internet, news, audience

[*] Igor Vobič, Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. E-mail: igor.vobic@fdv.uni-lj.si.
[**] Peter Dahlgren, Professor Emeritus at the Department of Communication and Media, Lund University, Sweden. E-mail: Peter.Dahlgren@kom.lu.se.

Introduction

In the last decade or so, scholars have been empirically exploring numerous and various forms of journalism that have overcome the traditional boundaries between journalists and the "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2012), as well as conceptually investigating the notion of participatory journalism (see Allen and Thorsen 2009; Papacharissi 2009; Rosenberry and Burton St. John III 2010; Singer et al. 2011). Although, many related terms have been coined in the previous years, such as "pro-am journalism" (Bruns 2009), "interactive journalism" (Nip 2006), or "wiki-journalism" (Steensen 2011), it appears that participatory journalism has been consolidated as a phrase signifying a general rubric to refer to all forms of non-professional activities of journalistic conduct that captures the ideas of collaborative and collective action. In this context, research (see Borger et al 2013) shows that news institutions and their journalists around the world experiment with technology-enabled forms of audience participation, where journalism schools have started courses on online journalism and social media, and journalism scholars, in their turn, study the phenomenon from a wide range of research perspectives. Despite a lot of attention in different milieus, participatory journalism is far from being a fixed notion, but remains somewhat conceptually contingent. Since the debates on what counts as journalism, and what does not, are becoming ever more complicated (see Papacharissi 2009; Zelizer 2009; Wright-Lee et al. 2012) and since people's linkage to public life has become accompanied with a growing sense of cynicism and disempowerment (see McNair 2006; Dahlgren 2009; Schudson 2011), the multifaceted phenomenon of participatory journalism calls for additional attention.

Despite the fact that the idea of participatory journalism engages people inside and outside the newsrooms to communicate, not only to, but also with each other, there have been indications of inclusionary, and also exclusionary, principles and practices in collective news making (see Dahlgren 2013b). Considering the possibilities and the constraints for audience participation, can we speak about the dominant models of participatory journalism or the common modes of audience-engaged news making? How has the relationship between journalists and audiences changed with the rise of interactive forms of public communication? How have these dynamics reshaped the prevailing societal roles of journalists and the established the social meanings of news?

The objective of this article is to conceptualise the notion of participatory journalism, to discuss it within the context of what is often loosely labelled as the crises of democracy and journalism, and to relate classic virtues of journalism, such as ac-

curacy, transparency, accountability, and impartiality, with contemporary participatory dynamics in the news environment. In this presentation, we probe the key lines of practices jn participatory journalism and sketch its main conceptual dilemmas in regards to the complexities of citizen access to public life, where various interactive possibilities of online platforms are evolving. This is set against a background where the manifold difficulties of contemporary democracy and journalism of the traditional media institutions run deep. In the concluding remarks, we explore some possible future trajectories of participatory journalism scholarship.

Contexts: How to access public life in the crisis of democracy and journalism?

In the last two decades, articulations of democracy and journalism have often been subjected to crisis discourses (Hardt 1996; Splichal 2005; Gitlin 2009; Ryfe 2012). Some observers note serious emerging problems that are becoming all the more salient in the way that existing democracies function. Despite contextual variations, the basic list of dilemmas is common: political stagnation, the tendency for real power to relocate from formal democratic institutions to the private, corporate sector, the corruption of democratic procedures by political-economic interests, the declining civic support for political parties, and a growing sense of cynicism and disempowerment among citizens (see Dahlgren 2013a). In these contexts, the journalism of traditional media institutions is framed as an inherent part of these processes, often flagrantly failing to live up to its accredited fundamental obligation, that is, to link people to public life.

The counter-trend to these developments is a growth in extra-parliamentarian alternative politics that address a wide range of issues, not only locally, but often at the global level (see Cammaerts et al. 2013). Yet, democracy remains a contested vision, and such political expression is not universally met with enthusiasm. While lauded by many observers, others contend that in terms of participation, these developments are largely limited to small sections of the citizenry, and also include far right groups and parties. Regardless of how they formulate the ideals of democracy, most analysts concur that the present difficulties have been growing since the collapse of the Communist system and are intensified by the on-going financial and social crises, at least within the European Union.

The economic dimensions of the crises manifested, not least in journalism. Here, the situation is quite complex, since the dilemmas derive, not only from the outside in the form of economic downturns, but also from within, in terms of rapid

restructuring of the media landscape, and the altered circumstances this creates for journalism (see Russell, 2011). The crisis of journalism – and a crisis it is, given the historical turning point it has reached and the depth of the changes taking place – can be analytically seen as a particular set of dilemmas within a specific "field", to use Bourdieu's term (see Benson and Neveu 2005). Framing – and isolating – the phenomenon in this way allows us to focus the attention on selected aspects of the problems. However, the crisis in journalism is ultimately and inexorably tied to the larger issues facing democracy; indeed, some kind of functioning journalistic system is a major prerequisite for a viable democracy. The dependency is also reciprocal: without the guarantees, protection, and support of something that we would call a democratic system, journalism cannot operate in a manner that will serve democratic ends. Ultimately, journalism on its own cannot 'save' democracy, but it is essential for its survival. It is evident, for example, that in the long run, even quality journalism cannot help to keep citizens connected to the political system if they experience that the (often informal) power relations of the system are such that they objectively are, and/or subjectively feel, excluded (see Couldry et al. 2007).

The crises facing journalism in democratic societies have been amply recorded and analysed to date (Hardt 1996; Splichal 2005; Gitlin 2009). One obvious sign is that major newspapers, especially the elite press, are facing major challenges in many places in the world today (Ryfe 2012). Especially in the United States, a number of important dailies have disappeared in the last few years (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2010–2013). The rising costs also encumber traditional journalism, but there are also several other factors at work. The relative standing of independent journalism is eroding as more and more news is being produced, or at least initiated, by non-journalists, such as interest groups, the state, the military, and their various PR-agents, spin doctors, and think tanks (see Carpentier et al. 2013). Market analyses point towards the strategy of shorter, more sensational pieces; tabloidisation is hardly a new phenomenon, but it is deepening as journalism tilts more towards celebrity gossip and lifestyle features. There is no doubt there is a vicious circle here: as citizens see less point in engaging in electoral politics and feel that there is not much they can do to alter circumstances, and hence they are less likely to be drawn to traditional political journalism. This in turn reduces audiences, which negatively impacts on advertising revenues, and leads to cuts in newsroom resources.

Technological changes in the media landscape are also obviously having a broader impact. For instance, newspapers and other major news organisations still have not, after two decades, developed a solid economic model for dealing with their online versions. News organisations go online, but increasingly become content suppliers for other, online distributors – who often have no anchoring in the practices and

values of professional journalism, such as Yahoo and Google. Cadres of new occupations have sprung up, which engage in packaging and editing of content for various platforms (see Deuze 2010). The digital revolution and the affordances of Web 2.0 have also helped to transform the overall patterns of behaviour in media use: for example, in regard to journalism, citizens are increasingly moving away from mass-mediated journalism and putting their own daily packages tighter.

Also, there is not least a cultural crisis in the professional identity and values of journalism, where issues about who is and who is not a journalist, and what counts as journalism and what does not journalism become all the more pivotal (see Fenton 2009). Corporate commercial logics have been the main platform for the majority of journalism in democratic countries since the 19th century, so this is hardly novel; in fact, the tensions between liberal democracy and capitalist imperatives have had to be negotiated on society-wide levels, not just within journalism (see Ryfe 2009). But until rather recently, the norms of the profession and the calling of editorial responsibility have managed to maintain some enclaves of journalistic practices that could serve as the benchmarks for the less impressive efforts. These bulwarks are rapidly eroding (see Gitlin 2009).

Moreover, in the ways that journalism today is increasingly organised, the distinctive character of the field – its foundation in explicit values, its identity as a set of unique practices guided by ethical horizons – is being undercut, since it is mixed with other forms of media activities – advertising, public relations, entertainment, public information, and marketing. As journalism increasingly becomes a freelance occupation, professional identity becomes watered down, and many freelance practitioners even mix journalistic assignments with other kinds of media activities, even in the course of a single work week (Deuze 2010). It is especially on the terrain of online media that the future of journalism is being established (Hirst 2011).

The forces that impact journalism are many and also quite contradictory; some of them indeed seem to be ‘forces’, that is, impersonal historical factors that reside beyond intentional human choices and practices. Others can more easily be traced to interests, policies, and decisions. The future of journalism lies within this complex force field. From our horizons, it may be useful to think of ‘journalism’, not just as a concrete institution and its practices, but also as a function needed by democracy, keeping in mind the various perspectives on this ideal. If journalism as a social phenomenon is rapidly evolving, what key functions should we want to retain the health of the democracy. How might these functions be fulfilled by new institutional arrangements, practices, forms, and legal frameworks?

It is through this lens that we see the growth in participatory journalism. It obviously offers the possibilities for new arrangements, practices, relations, and forms of journalism. If the boundaries of journalism are no longer so assured, if the definition of a journalist is no longer self-evident, then this evokes problematic uncertainties, yet it also offers opportunities. Thus, how can these participatory developments serve the journalistic functions that enhance (even newer understandings of) democracy? What issues, problems, and threats do they raise? How might these difficulties be productively encountered?

Practices: How is participatory journalism manifested?

The manifestations of participatory journalism have often been among the primary interests of media and journalism scholars in recent years (Allen and Thorsen 2009; Rosenberry and Burton St. John III 2010; Singer et al. 2011). By analysing the construction of participatory journalism as an object of study from 1995 to 2011, Borger and her colleagues (2013) identify different dimensions of the scholarly discourse on the phenomenon: on the one hand, enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities, and, on the other hand, disappointment with professional journalism's obduracy, economic motives to facilitate participatory journalism, and news users' passivity. Furthermore, some authors try to provide complex schemes for classifying the practices of participatory journalism in regard to the extent and the form of participation by ordinary people in news production (Nip 2006), or according to the degree of control by the news organisation (Nip 2010). Yet, at this stage, in the rapid historical evolution of the journalistic field, it may be premature to militantly insist on a specific nomenclature; we will see, not least, that the terminology in the articles in this issue somewhat vary. However, just to enhance the clarity of the rest of this discussion, and to begin to specify the different kinds of journalism that is visible and growing today, we offer a suggested terminology, keeping in mind that the boundaries between the categories are porous and that, when taken together, all of these developments raise issues about how we should define journalism and journalists.

Beyond 'traditional' or 'mainstream' journalism – sometimes called 'corporate' or 'commercial' journalism' by critics or the 'liberal media' by the conservatives in the United States – we use the term *participatory journalism* as a general rubric to refer to all forms of non-professional activities in journalism provision that capture "the ideas of collaborative and collective – not simply parallel – action", as Singer et al. (2011, 2) suggest. Just as participation is not a fixed notion, the different manifestations of participatory journalism are also deeply embedded within our political

realities, and thus, are also embedded in ideological struggles. In literature, we can identify seven overlapping practices or manifestations of participatory journalism at times that differ in terms of subject positions in articulations of power in society, and in regards to the ways of linking citizens to political life. In this manner, the modes of participatory journalism somehow span across the notions concerning the conflation of access, interaction and participation, as Carpentier (2011) understands it – that is, being part of the struggle between minimalist and maximalist articulations of participation.

Citizen-assisted journalism refers to the practices where citizens, often with the encouragement of mainstream news organisations, contribute material to established news organisations (see Allen and Thorsen 2009). Various kinds of citizen-assisted journalism are promoted by mainstream news organisations, particularly when their own journalists do not have direct access to breaking stories. Despite nurturing various kinds of audience participation in news production, research finds that newsrooms and journalists tend to retain control on the published content (Nip 2010).

Community and grassroots journalism indicates non-professional citizen initiatives, where the creation of the community is spontaneous and its actions are guided by the need for a more local and bottom-up perspective (Gillmor 2004). Various online platforms operating on the hyper-local levels emerge as open and non-hierarchal initiatives that might take an important role in developing more cohesive communities, identifying the problems of these communities, as well as proposing suggestions on how to resolve these problems (Jones and Salter 2012). Yet, at the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Barnett 2009) scholars are quite sceptical about the potentials of the "we media" (Gillmor 2004) to fulfil the vital civic functions of journalism, particularly by providing in-depth analytical reporting and interrogating power holders which often require substantial resources and institutional backing to be effective.

The above category may blur into *advocacy journalism* at times, which is pursued by interest groups to promote particular causes (Christians et al. 2009). The advocacy character of journalistic conduct resides in relation to a facilitative role of media, since advocacy could not be fulfilled without a flow of articulated positions on controversial issues affecting community and society. Yet, advocacy journalism should not be misunderstood as a legitimation for biased coverage (Hanitzsch 2007), but rather as a means of improving public life and contributing to participatory forms of democracy, as opposed to procedural and constitutional liberalism (Christians et al. 2009). In this sense, advocacy journalism strives to connect the lives of ordinary people with the words and the actions of political movements, and

also political parties, to show how these action domains relate to each other and to mobilise people to politically participate (Strömbäck 2005).

Advocacy is even more characteristic for the radical role of the media, since effective criticism is typically based, not on evidence and expert analysis, but rather on alternative visions of what is right and good (see Christians et al. 2009). In this context, we understand *activist journalism* as the news arm of political organisations or social movements struggling for societal change. The provision of online platforms is reflected in the introduction of new models of activist journalism – on the one hand, activist news outfits focusing on progressive movement-oriented news, and, on the other hand, social movements focused on specific issues and which also provide news (see Wall 2003). What is even more evident within web activist journalism is that it reflects the connection between the progressive social ideas represented in its outlets, while facilitating accessibility and interactivity (see Carroll and Hackett 2006).

Alternative journalism depicts the activities of full-blown news organisations that have a strong anchoring in professional norms, but which position themselves differently in relation to prevailing political hegemonies (e.g. Indymedia). As such, alternative journalism poses challenges to, and recontextualises, dominant representational practices of mainstream news, particularly by disrupting the professional ideal of objectivity (see Pajnik and Downing 2008). In this sense, alternative online news departs from the different assumptions about power, and provides different perspectives to mainstream news, indicating that the virtues of online communication, in fact, increase the multiplicity of content and the polycentrality of news (see Redden and Witschge 2010).

What is left over, as a sort of remainder category at this point in our rough classification scheme, is the large amorphous manifestation of individual (micro-) bloggers and other voices in social media who offer news, commentary, and opinion, as well as, topics ranging from traffic reports to health and fitness tips to hobby suggestions. In the context of social media, foremost Twitter and Facebook, one can identify an "ambient" character in these dynamics where "broad, asynchronous, lightweight and always-on communication systems" are creating various kinds of interactions around, and within the news, and enable citizens to maintain a mental model of the news and events around them (Hermida 2010). All manner of 'amateur', as well as 'para' or 'quasi journalism' are juxtaposed and blended with each other. Facts and opinions, debates, gossip, nonsense, misinformation, the insightful, the deceptive, the poetic, are all mixed together, scrambling the traditional boundaries between journalism and non-journalism. We simply call this heterogeneous domain *citizen journalism*.

The situation of online journalism today is difficult to grasp in its totality. This sprawling domain is comprised of mainstream online media, together with the various types of participatory journalism. Participatory journalism has grown markedly in the past few years, as the news industry has undergone a serious transformation, not least in regard to its use of social media. The growth in journalism, as a facet of user-generated content on the web, is, of course, also dramatically altering its parameters and even its professional centre of gravity. With non-journalists using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs to generate and share information and interpretation, journalism is gradually becoming more multiplied, collaborative, diverse, partisan, and immediate. This has unquestionably deepened and broadened the public spheres of democratic societies and helped to challenge the power structure in authoritarian ones, but at the same time, brought additional complexities to permanent conceptual dilemmas of journalism.

With the emergence of the Internet as a mass phenomenon, the use of the web for political participation began and still continues to grow (see Lievrouw 2011). The fact that political engagement turns to journalistic forms is not a new phenomenon. Historically, there have been many versions of an alternative or radical media, often connected to particular social or political movements (see Atton 2002; Downing 2000; Ostertag 2007). On the web, we see the continuation of these traditions, as well as the emergence of new ones, facilitated by the unprecedented technical affordances. At the same time, much of participatory journalism has no particular intended political angle, it just represents citizens trying to do journalism as they see it or to augment what they feel is missing from traditional forms. Yet, the relevance and validity of journalism's classic virtues, while challenged, have not dissipated.

Dilemmas: Are the classic virtues of journalism still valid and relevant?

While there is a justifiably celebratory tone in much of the discussions about how the web facilitates the participatory character of journalism, we should try to keep a clear sociological eye on these developments. For one thing, it is perhaps easy to lose sight of just how prominent mainstream reporting still remains, particularly in the coverage of international affairs. Also, much citizen-generated journalism operates symbiotically with mainstream material, even if commenting or contesting it; in other words, it is not necessarily generating much new material. Moreover, there is a strong tendency for professionals to maintain a tight gate-keeping function and editorial grip on submitted material, and we see little of the new angles or formats

emerging in this context (Thurman and Hermida 2010). Further, the vast amount of information available on the web can in itself serve to destabilise traditional journalism, in that it implicitly demands that the audiences filter it – and this is done according to their own political perspectives or values (Campbell et. al., 2010).

Indeed, unofficial "relayers" of information and interpretation have emerged, packaging and filtering journalism to share it with their "followers" or "friends" (see Jenkins et al. 2013). In this sense, we might think, not only about "people formerly known as the audience" (Rosen 2012), but also of a new category of intermediaries who help to shape news flows and pass them to the targeted recipients in their social networks.

Civic initiatives in participatory journalism, thus, inevitably give rise to many questions (see Papacharissi 2009). Especially the practitioners and defenders of traditional journalism who underscore the quandaries that emerge. The issue of journalism's definitional boundaries becomes all the more acute as mainstream journalism concurrently grapples with its professional identity in the wake of infotainment's hybrid formats, and the marked increase in the forms of opinion journalism. Releases from public relations offices of special interest organisations are at times disguised as news. When the boundaries of journalism become unclear, the norms of its practices and the criteria for its evaluation in turn become slippery. Issues of accuracy, transparency, accountability, and impartiality move to the fore, even if critics may rightly claim that these attributes have always been somewhat deficient.

In rather simplified terms, we could say that today we have two modes of journalism that coexist as mixed systems of public communication. On the one hand, there is a mode that Hallin (1992) refers to as *high-modernist journalism*, with origins in the institutions of the mass media. By basing it on liberal ideals about democracy and citizenship, it lays claim to accurate and impartial renderings of a reality that exists independently of its telling, and which is external to the institutions of journalism. Journalism in this mode tends to appear as an integrative force through accurate and fair reporting, emphasises the distinction between facts and emotionality, and allows for rational judgment and moral response. However, the subject position of *spectator* is largely cemented – yet, in the contemporary world it finds itself on the defensive, economically and culturally.

On the other hand, we have what might be termed as *late-modernist journalism*, which emerges with interactive and multiplying media. This mode claims to underscore experiential witnessing, authenticity, and directness, and it allows for networking, invites potential practice, and encourages participatory narratives. The doctrine of 'objectivity' gives way to a stream of multiple voices and more com-

plex relations among social actors. This mode of journalism reinforces the ambient quality of public communication, that is, as omnipresent, polymorphous, and a collective communication system involving different actors from various domains. The strengths and weaknesses of each mode come into focus, and we can almost hear the echoes of the intense debates that have ranged over the past two decades.

Non-professional civic agents engaging in journalism in its many forms often explicitly refer to the ideals of democratic participation, perceiving themselves as embodying these ideals in their journalistic practice. At the same time, it is not possible to simply ignore the norms of journalism, even if they are less fixed and more problematic today than before. These norms remain ultimately tied into our understanding of democracy. And, if that concept has also become more multivalent and contested, we need to continue to grapple with both of them, in relation to each other.

A cornerstone of traditional journalism has always been its commitment to truth. Yet, one need not be a philosopher to understand that the notion of 'truth' is fraught with difficulties. Once we move beyond correspondence theory and basic factual reality, things get complicated. The description and the characterisation of factual reality, of the events and developments, are in principle not problematic, assuming that the information is available. The number of civilians killed or wounded by a bomb, the location of rebel headquarters, or the extent of the proposed cuts in social services, can all be verified and journalists can be held accountable. However, even with 'solid facts' there can always be different ways of slanting them, giving them different significance by using different news frames, narrative structures, value premises, vocabularies, and so forth.

As we move into the more complex domains of human activity and its meaning, reporting becomes open for more contestation. Yet, mainstream journalism tends to cluster its interpretive horizons fairly tightly. As socially situated storytellers, news organisations usually deploy well-embedded, taken for granted discourses that prestructure many of the dominant meanings to be conveyed, as for example Robert Fiske (2006) demonstrates his coverage of the Middle East and in his critical reflection on Western reporting on the subject. As Nick Davies (2008) depicts in his book, traditional news institutions almost solely rely on official sources or major news agencies with a particular hegemonic framing of the world.

Language use is always and already implicated in the social horizons, the preunderstandings, and the power relations; where ideologically-charged discourses can shape the meaning of reported events, whether intentionality or not. As Kant, among others, pointed out, the conditions of our knowing are always complex and our knowledge of the world (and of ourselves) is always mediated and filtered in

various ways. Journalism – professional as well as participatory – is always confronted by the epistemic challenge of grasping and transmitting knowledge in an ever-changing world. The problem of knowing is never secure. The amorphous character of much of today's journalism (and media patterns generally) adds the 'late-modern' epistemic complexity to the relatively monolithic representations of reality reproduced and disseminated by the mass media, and challenges the way 'high-modern' journalism provides a (hegemonic) common communicative ground as the basis of meaningful political engagement.

One conceptual starting point for dealing with these issues lies in acknowledging that the truth about the social world may, in fact, be multi-dimensional. And, even if not, all versions have equal validity in our own eyes, others may see it differently, depending on how they are situated in the world. Thus, for journalism's professional tradition, while the commitment to the truth remains crucial, this stance will not alleviate it from having to deal with the plural nature of social reality, by taking into account the multiplicity of valid frames of perception in the world today. Further, if the distinction between fact and value seems less self-evident today, the solution lies not in abandoning the idea of the distinction, but rather in finding more useful ways to conceptualise it. This is particularly important as the opinion side of journalism expands, even within mainstream journalism.

The participatory advocacy thrust in journalism is democratically healthy, yet must be counterbalanced by a traditional view that, while sensitive to multiple realities and modes of perceptions, emphasises the quest for truth. Tensions within the traditional journalistic ideals and norms are inevitable, but hopefully they will serve the goal of truthfulness, rather than hamper, in the context of an ever-pluralising world. If the notion of objectivity is not so helpful these days, there are other traditional attributes or criteria that we have already mentioned, which can at least help to direct journalism closer to the truth, even if their application is not always easy: *accuracy*, which reminds us that the adherence to the facts, as best understood, remains indispensable; *transparency*, which requires self-revelation as well as self-examination, making the journalistic production process visible; and *accountability*, which involves checks and consequences for deliberate malpractice, such as lies, errors, and disinformation.

The most difficult classic virtue, however, may well be *impartiality*, which demands a fair representation of differing voices and points of view (see Barkho 2013). Journalistic practitioners with political commitments will tend to downplay its significance, seeing their efforts as needing antidotes to dominate journalistic discourses. Yet, even for those intended on adhering to the classic professional model, impartiality is becoming all the more difficult to maintain. In the world today, it is not just

concrete issues, beliefs, and worldviews that clash, but even language and symbols as well. It becomes all the more of a challenge to find a discursive position 'outside' those of the conflicting actors, a language use that is not already embedded and 'tainted' through its premises and historical associations.

Yet, for all their difficulties, accuracy, transparency, accountability, and impartiality can continue to serve both professional and participatory journalism; these criteria supply no easy solutions to the many dilemmas, but can at least help to define the problems and clarify alternatives. While for many professionals these criteria are second-nature, for many civic journalists, learning to struggle with them to improve their practices would be an important step.

Conclusions: What are the future paths of participatory journalism scholarship?

From the above reconsiderations, it is clear that participatory journalism as a phenomenon and as a concept is embedded in larger dilemmas of access, interaction, and participation, that is, themes that have been relevant in previous debates on journalism's relevance and its role in the public sphere (see Zelizer 2009; Papacharissi 2009; Russell 2011; Christians et al. 2009). We have suggested that the relations between journalists and the audience have changed quite a bit in the last decade or so: where non-professional practitioners have increasingly come to operate as in a "co-creative news production" environment as journalists, and are beginning to develop a sense of how to reinvent themselves as "co-creators of culture" (Deuze 2009). In this regard, thinking about, and exploring, participatory journalism demands precise manoeuvring between conceptual contingency and fixity in order to avoid adding to the slipperiness of the term – which often appears to signify almost everything and anything that is not mainstream journalism. Looking ahead to possible future research agendas in participatory journalism, we organise our reflections around the meta-themes of theoretical horizons, empirical focus, and methodological innovation.

Participatory journalism, like all social phenomena, can be fruitfully illuminated to a large extent through its interfaces with other domains with which it shares some degrees of relevance and/or which shape its development. Thus, at the theoretical level, while we would continue to attend to participatory journalism per se, we also suggest that contextualising within key conceptual frameworks will help to illuminate its development. Concretely, we propose that participatory journalism be analytically situated in relation to: the field of mainstream journalism and its border-

lands; prevailing societal power relations; online media culture more broadly; and shifting epistemic premises within society generally, and in journalism specifically.

The field of mainstream journalism – and here we are well-served by Bourdieu's field theory (see Benson and Neveu 2005) – is comprised of institutional arrangements, professional identities, spheres of interest, technological affordances, and sets of practices. Moreover, the journalism field is impacted on by other fields – the political, the financial, and the cultural. All of these elements are in transition to various degrees. We can go a long way in charting the evolution of participatory journalism by charting the dynamics emerging at the borderlands of the mainstream – precisely where participatory journalism is flourishing. It is in the interfaces, the cracks, the tensions, the new alliances and collaboration, issuing from these borderlands where the new forms of journalism are thriving. In short, to illuminate participatory journalism, we need to keep a keen eye on the mainstream.

The concept of power relations is broad, but what we have in mind are few specific aspects. First of all, we underscore the importance of the more formalised force fields of the power between journalism and its adjacent institutional configurations, mapped in the field approach noted above. The economic/financial sector and its imperatives, the state and its efforts to regulate, control, or censor, come into play (see Ryfe 2012). Secondly, the vicissitudes of political climates, crises, atmospheres of hope and despair, can also impact the development of participatory journalism (see Gitlin 2009). Thirdly, the larger domain of democratic participation has great relevance for non-mainstream journalism: advocacy, activist, community, and citizen journalism are all manifestations of civic engagement (see Dahlgren 2009). It makes a big difference if, in specific contexts, the various groupings of citizens feel themselves empowered or dis-empowered, if there are robust movements engaged in alternative politics, if there is a surge of energised civic culture, or if it is on the defensive.

The terrain of online media (and popular) culture also has significance for participatory journalism. It provides discursive templates, generic modes of expression, inspiration, and different modes of subjectivity that feed into participatory journalism. We should avoid the dead-end approach of bifurcating 'journalism' and 'popular culture' since it would handicap us in conceptualising participatory journalism: the borderland with popular culture has long been understood as a significant terrain of journalism's identity and practices (e.g., infortainment, tabloids, satire).

And finally, the epistemic premises that undergird the legitimacy of knowledge in the public arena, has, as we discussed earlier, a major significance for the character and the quality of participatory journalism. These premises are contested, in transition, and need to be analysed and incorporated into our understanding of

participatory journalism. Different articulations of embedded, interconnected, and multi-modal character shape contemporary life and the human condition, as well as the media (see Deuze 2011). Such articulations are messy and complex, reflecting the fluid and the hybrid nature of relationships between the media, society, and everyday life. Yet, such perspectives are vital when thinking through the practical realities of participatory journalism in the digital world.

Turning to the empirical focus, we feel that research would do well to apply the classic journalistic questions to the evolution of participatory journalism:

- *Who* are the actors of participatory journalism? What are their allegiances, organisational arrangements, ideational vistas, and collective identities?
- *What* are the actors of participatory modes of journalism actually doing? How do they operate in terms of roles, perceptions, and practices? How do they apply journalistic criteria to the uses of technology?
- *Where* is participatory journalism articulated? What are the spaces used and/or created for participatory journalism? How are they situated in relation to the mainstream? How widespread and accessible are these spaces?
- *When* are participatory forms of journalism relevant for political life? What are the timing and the periodicity of participatory journalism? How does it manifest itself in relation to major news developments and the flow of mainstream news?
- *Why* do journalists, citizens, and other actors get involved in participatory journalistic practices? What are the motivations, the subjective dispositions that give rise to these practices? How do they relate to other forms of non-journalistic democratic participation?
- *How* are the various versions of participatory journalism facilitated? What are the strategies, the tactics, the organisational manoeuvring in place?
- *With what effect* for larger societal issues is participatory journalism articulated? What are the long-term consequences and the short-term impact on efforts within participatory journalism in terms of the society as a whole, the functioning of democracy, and in relation to mainstream journalism?

Obviously, these journalistic road-marks would not necessarily constitute to the formal framing or the analytic dress of the research projects. Yet, we suggest that the basic logic that they reflect can be very usefully applied to an unfolding phenomenon, such as participatory journalism.

With regard to methodological considerations, it is our contention that a first important step is gained by translating some classic methodologies into the newer

online terrain. While this may only be partly "innovative", it is an important and indispensable step; by now there is a lot of literature explaining such approaches. As a next step, we would advocate combining qualitative and quantitative methods to enable comprehensive studies of participatory journalism on the production, textual, and reception levels. To investigate various multifaceted empirical issues of participatory journalism, researchers might attempt to overcome traditional divisions between these three stages of the "media lifecycle" (see Boczkowski 2011) by triangulating methods. Let us look briefly at these levels and the need to overlap them in order to better grasp participatory modes of journalism.

On the production level, it would be valuable for researchers to adopt a simultaneous combination of 'offline' and 'online' ethnographies to extend the traditional notions of a field study from face-to-face interactions with various forms of participatory journalism to mediated spaces used and/or created for participatory journalism. These can include both the rather standardised interactive platforms of mainstream journalism, as well as the more open environments in social media, for instance Twitter and Facebook. This, we believe, would allow scholars not only to directly witness unfiltered views in the practices of different forms of participatory journalism – from the newsrooms at mainstream media institutions to public or private places of citizen journalists' conduct (see Paterson 2008) – but also the insights into the messy online settings of the different actors involved, in terms of their societal roles, the power relations among them and their perceptions (see Hine 2000).

On the textual level, the archival character of online communication makes it relatively easy for researchers to gather content that emerged on the web – whether in mainstream journalism or in different participatory journalism forms. This allows scholars to analyse the interconnectedness of social and discursive structures within the larger domain of journalism and to investigate how participatory journalism manifests itself in relation to major news developments and the flow of mainstream news. Particularly, the combination of quantitative computer-aided content analysis (see Klippendorff 2003) and critical discourse analysis (see Fairclough 2003) in case-specific mix-method approaches, which would provide journalism scholars with the ability to ascertain systemic dynamics of forms and formats, and at the same time, identify more delicate discursive patterns across platforms and outlets.

On the reception level, audience research has shown the call for multi-method designs in order to capture the range of people's practices and meanings in relation to media and communication technologies (see Patriarche et al. 2013). By bridging the epistemologically distinct approaches of quantitative methods, such as audience meters, surveys, and qualitative approaches, for instance focus groups, in-depth in-

terviews, observations, and diaries, we believe that researchers would benefit from gaining a wider reach into what is still known, as audiences and the deeper understanding into the character of people's involvement in different forms of participatory journalism. In this way, scholars might develop toolkits to explore, not only the short impacts of participatory journalism in what used to be known as the audience, but also – particularly, with longitudinal research designs – the long term consequences within participatory journalism in terms of society, the functioning of democracy, and in relation to mainstream journalism.

Beyond that, we see two other major domains that require new methodological departures for research in participatory journalism, which both have to do with the digital environment: mapping the flows of journalistic content, and charting the interaction networking among its users. In the past, all too often research on participatory journalism has, for obvious reasons, dwelt on the analyses of formats and contents, as well as the perceptions and reasoning of the "produsers". These have been the most accessible aspects empirically, but now it is time to go further. First, we need to probe the diffusion of participatory journalism's efforts. What is the spreadable potential of participatory journalism? How does it compare with mainstream news sources and opinion manifestations? Second, we have to get a better grasp of the catalytic consequences – its stimulus to public sphere activity. This not only involves the production and sending of content, but also the kinds of discursive civic interactions that it generates. What kinds of public sphere interaction do specific participatory forms of journalism engender? What is the role of participatory journalism in opinion making processes in relation to mainstream journalism?

In both cases we are talking about what is called big data – massive aggregates of web traffic that are registered. Big data has of course been increasingly raising issues about surveillance and privacy on the part of Internet actors like Google and Facebook, as well as in governments, most recently the news about the American National Security Agency's global surveillance has evoked worldwide scandal. Thus there are serious ethical issues to be taken into account. Moreover, big data is also hugely expensive, and most researchers will have to be very selective about what they target. Yet, at this point, we cannot leave the gathering – or at least not the analysis – of big data to just the corporate sector or the state. We, as researchers with a progressive agenda, must also take steps in this direction, armed at least with the knowledge of the difficulties involved.

But one thing is clear – journalism in its numerous modes will remain a terrain of institutional difficulty, professional uncertainty, and political contention, as well as, hopefully, scholarly imagination and investigation. As far as the latter is concerned, the articles in this special issue take some fine steps in this direction.

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Preispitivanje participativnog novinarstva u internetsko doba

Igor Vobič
Peter Dahlgren

SAŽETAK

Participativno novinarstvo ugrađeno je u širu dvojbu pristupa, interakcije i participacije, gdje ono služi kao generalna rubrika referiranja na svaku vrstu neprofesionalne aktivnosti novinarskih postupaka koje obuhvaćaju ideju kolaborativnih i kolektivnih djelatnosti. Članak pokazuje na koje su se načine odnosi između novinara i publike uvelike izmijenili u proteklih deset godina, tijekom kojih su članovi publike počeli djelovati kao ko-producenti vijesti. Istodobno, novinari počinju tražiti načine za reinovaciju samih sebe kao stvaratelja vijesti. U tom smislu, promišljajući i istražujući participativno novinarstvo, ono zahtijeva određenu konceptualnu preciznost; neće biti od koristi ako ono postane označitelj za sve što nije mainstream novinarstvo. U članku se raspravlja o kontekstu, praksama i dvojbama participativnog novinarstva u tri dijela. Na taj se način promatra ključ konceptualnih poteškoća vezanih za složenost građanskoga pristupa javnom životu, gdje se razvijaju različite interaktivne mogućnosti internetskih platformi, koje su postavljene uz mnogostruke poteškoće suvremene demokracije i tradicionalnog novinarstva. U zaključnom dijelu, u radu se postavljaju mogući budući pravci istraživanja participativnog novinarstva.

Ključne riječi: participativno novinarstvo, demokracija, internet, vijesti, publika