

European Science Foundation  
Standing Committee for the Social Sciences (SCSS)

**ESF SCSS EXPLORATORY WORKSHOP**

# **Public Participation In Multi-Platform Media**

## **SCIENTIFIC REPORT**



Lysebu  
Oslo, Norway, 1 - 3 September 2006

**Convened by:  
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## **1. Executive summary**

An ESF Exploratory Workshop on “Multi-platform media and public participation” was held in Oslo, 1-3. September 2005. It included 16 participants from 11 European countries, coming together to hear 11 papers and to discuss possible research cooperation in group and plenary settings. The workshop consisted of 8 female and 7 male participants in different age groups (see statistical information on participants further down).

The workshop focused on how the public participation of so-called “ordinary people” in the media increases with the growth of new digital media, and on how this growth centrally involves media output spread and coordinated over several media platforms (such as television in combination with mobile phoning, or console games in combination with web pages). The workshop addressed three main research areas in three paper sessions:

- Media participation, with a particular emphasis on digital media use
- Media industries’ strategies for media participation
- The encounter of media professionals and participants within a media-institutional setting

The papers and the plenary session’s summary discussion together paint the picture of a highly promising research agenda, in several respects. Papers on industry strategies clearly bring out the strategic importance of both multi-platform format development and public participation for the European media industries. Papers on actual participation document a spread of participatory activities that have implications both in social and political fields. As for producer/participant relations, issues of producer control versus creative freedom emerge as highly salient.

These are issues of major concern to media industries, and to varying degrees they are also subjects of public debates. In particular the democratic potential of new forms of media participation is an issue of strong public interest. Thus the Workshop’s research agenda has strong potential for contributing both to European public discourse and to the development of knowledge industries. In terms of the development of media/communication/ICT research, these are some of the main areas of research

presented at the Workshop that carry promise for the future:

- Social and democratic aspects of digital return channels' possibilities for participation
- Industry strategies of multi-platform presence and return channels for participation
- The interplay of producers' strategies of control and participants' strategies of expression and performance

Workshop participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the seminar. The last day's sessions, dedicated to possibilities for further research contributions, brought a number of ideas and propositions. A final plenary session discussed and assessed these. The following activities are now being followed up by the Workshop organisers:

- A network has been set up, entitled Media and Participation (MAP). It includes researchers from 9 research institutions in the media, communication and ICT areas that were represented by Workshop participants.
- Within this network, concrete research initiatives have already been initiated, directly following the Workshop. These include cooperation on interview guides for replicating research designs in several countries.
- A proposal is being drafted for an anthology based on the Workshop to be included in the ECREA book series, published by Intellect Books.

## **2. Scientific content of the event**

The Workshop was divided into four sessions: 1) Audiences and participants; 2) Industry challenges and strategies for participation; 3) Producer/participant relations; 4) Summing up and further research. The structure was chosen with a view to cumulative-ness throughout, leading from discussions of research substance to concrete initiatives in the areas of research collaboration and publication.

### **Audiences and participants**

A key issue in the study of audience participation is the size and composition of audiences and their involvement in participatory activities. Sádaba's report from a survey in Spain shows that youth audiences see less TV than their parents and express a preference for interactive content. Interactive media have been ascribed a potential for enhancing civic participation and democracy; however Sadaba finds a majority disinterest in social issues, negatively defined as "politics". Karlsen's presentation of a Norwegian survey of audience-based programming and actual participation found empirical evidence to support hypotheses both about the importance of participation-based programming and about the penetration of participatory activities in the Norwegian population. Colombo's presentation dealt with ways of conceptualising issues of audiencehood. Critically reviewing among others the diffusionist perspectives that have largely dominated ICT research he proposed a "generationalist" approach. Christensen engaged with the question of how television's shift toward a multimedia platform involves new forms of mediated sociability for audiences. In evidence throughout these presentation was an attention to shifting forms of audience engagement, individually and socially, with media technologies.

### **Industry challenges and strategies for participation**

This session dealt with media industries' development and adaptation in the realms of multi-platform media and participation – two developments that tend to be closely interconnected, as broadcasters and mass media operators take up (Web or mobile) digital platforms that allow for extended participation and user generated content. With a reference to the television medium, Cardoso termed this development "network television". Sundet and Ytreberg reported form a survey of Norwegian industry decision-makers that demonstrated the importance, across media sectors, of

the view that audiences want to be active. They explained this attributed active-ness in terms of the industries' need to improve audience loyalty. In his review of BBC's future strategies, Hibberd similarly documented the key importance attributed by the BBC to promoting active audience engagement, and to multi-platform presence. Enli continued the theme of participation's role for public service broadcasting, with particular attention to the use of text messaging as a means of providing return channels for participation. A strong sense of similarity in media industry development across national boundaries came out of this session.

### *Producer/participant relations*

This session was devoted to case studies of media participation as it is realized in a media-institutional context. Jones' paper dealt with issues of producer control over the participation in *Indymedia* and *Big Brother*, discussing how producer control is asserted in both cases, albeit by different means. Sihvonen discussed the way that computer/console games such as *The Sims* become the subject of extension and repurposing by means of Web resources – presenting a different case of cross-platform participation than those offered by broadcasting's extensions into digital media. Use-generated content and its exploitation by broadcasters was discussed by Carpentier in the context of community and participatory media. The cases provided much variety; however a tension between producer-side needs for control and participant/user freedom was in evidence throughout.

### *Summing up and further research*

This session started up as sub-groups discussing networking and publication opportunities (discussed in section 3), and then shifted to a plenary format that combined summing-up contributions from Maier-Rabler, van Zoonen and Syvertsen with general discussion. The following notes on threads of joint research interest and on possible future research agendas are drawn mainly from Maier-Rabler's and van Zoonen's contributions.

#### *Audiences*

- Meta-analyses of existing audience/participation surveys
- The role of gender and generation in shifting forms of audiencehood and audience engagement with media
- The social potentials of digital media technologies

*Institutions*

- Participation and strategies of multi-platform presence as common strategies for European media/television industries
- Participation's role in the remit and practice of public service broadcasting institutions

*Producer/participant relations:*

- The variations and combinations of user-generated forms of output
- Editorial dilemmas in the processing of audience participation

*General:*

- Democracy and civic-ness in the context of ICTs and multi-platform formats that extend participatory possibilities
- Meta-theoretical examination of the different meanings and theories of "participation"
- The meeting of community and mainstream media in the context of the spread of digital return channels

### **3. Assessment of the results, contribution to the future direction of the field**

The general discussion on the last day of the Workshop demonstrated widespread interest in the areas of both networking and publication. The research agenda was almost universally considered to be state of the art, generating a number of fruitful avenues for further research. Several concrete initiatives were agreed upon, as described below.

#### *Publishing*

A number of options were discussed at the workshop. Most centred on the possibility for guest-editing a journal themed according to the Workshop's area(s) of interest. Currently the ambition has been raised, in that a pitch is now planned to the book series of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), published by Intellect Books. This would allow the research presented at the Workshop to be published more broadly, and also presents an opportunity for engaging more researchers. If this pitch does not succeed, the idea of guest-editing a themed journal will be tried. Possible outlets are the journals *New Media and Society*, *Convergence* and *International Journal of Communication*, all of which have advisory board members participating at the Workshop.

#### *Networking*

In the plenary session, participants agreed to set up a joint network to promote research on media and participation, with a particular focus on digital media. The network is set up as a collaboration between 9 European research units in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, and the UK. Its short-term purpose is to organise initiatives for publication and research collaboration. The long-term goal is to prepare and submit applications for a European-wide research programme from ESF or COST sources. At the time of writing, the following concrete initiatives are being coordinated by means of the network:

- A collaboration to use a Norwegian interview guide in a Portuguese survey
- Panel proposals for the upcoming MeCCSA (Norwich) and ICA (San Francisco) conferences
- ECREA book proposal (see above)



Here is the research network's mission statement:

**Media and Participation (MAP): Involving ordinary people through broadcast, web and mobile platforms**

The development of digital media platforms has brought new salience to an old issue: how media involve the participation of so-called "ordinary people" with no professional performer status. The MAP network researches participation in the broad sense of taking part in the media, as well as in more specified senses such as civic participation. Issues of media participation today span both mass-mediated, Web-based, personalised and mobile media, and MAP features research on all of these. The Network takes a particular interest in cross-media and multi-platform development.

The MAP network is set up to facilitate European collaborations on research and publication in the area of media and participation. It follows an International Workshop in Oslo, September 2006, financed by the European Science Foundation. Here, a set of common research interests were formulated. Also the Network was initiated to develop them, in a European context and at an international level.

## 4. Final program



ESF SCSS Exploratory Workshop:  
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### PROGRAM

#### Friday 1 September 2006

11.30 - 12.30: Lunch

12.30 - 12.45: Eli Skogerbø: Welcome

12.45 - 13.00: Espen Ytreberg: Information on the workshop agenda as outlined to ESF

#### Session: Audiences and participants

13.00 - 13.35: Charo Sádaba: Could the young teach us anything about the future communication scenarios?

13.35 – 13.55: Discussion

14.00 – 14.35: Faltin Karlsen: Media participation: Opportunities and use

14.35 – 14.55: Discussion

15-minute coffee break

15.10 – 15.45: Fausto Colombo: Uses of the Internet, digital TV and mobile telephony

15.45 – 16.05: Discussion

16.10 – 16.45: Lars Holmgaard Christensen: User generated sociability

16.45 – 17.05: Discussion

19.00: Dinner

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## Saturday 2 September 2006

### Session: Industry challenges and strategies for participation

09.00 – 09.15: Official ESF representative Asbjørn Rødseth: Presentation of the ESF

09.15 – 09.50: Gustavo Cardoso: Networking Television and Internet

09.50 – 10.10: Discussion

10.15 – 10.50: Vilde S. Sundet and Espen Ytreberg: Born to participate: Media industries' conceptions of the active media participant

10.50 – 11.10: Discussion

15-minute coffee break

11.25 – 12.00: Matthew Hibberd: Play, Find and Share: The Development of the BBC's Creative Future Strategy

12.00 – 12.20: Discussion

12.25 – 13.00: Gunn Enli: Audience participation and public service broadcasting in the digital age

13.00 – 13.20: Discussion

13.20 – 14.15: Lunch

14.15 – 16.30: Visit Holmenkollen ski stadium and museum

### Session: Producer/participant relations

16.30 – 17.05: Janet Megan Jones: "The Rhetoric of the Technological Sublime": The ideology of making truth claims through interactive media

17.05 – 17.25: Discussion

15-minute coffee break

17.30 – 18.05: Tanja Sihvonen: Modding *The Sims* – Blurring the boundaries between fantasy worlds and real life?

18.05 – 18.25: Discussion

18.30 – 19.05: Nico Carpentier: The BBC's Video Nation as a participatory and multi-platform media practice

19.05 – 19.25: Discussion

19.30: Dinner

## **Sunday 3 September 2006**

### **Session: Summing up and further research**

09.00 – 10.45: Group work on future research agenda: subdivision into groups

10.45 - 11.00: Coffee break

11.00 – 13.00:

- Short plenary presentations of group work.
- Discussants for the presentations, drawing in paper contributions: Liesbet van Zoonen, Trine Syvertsen, Ursula Maier-Rabler. General debate
- Course evaluation

13.00 – 14.00: Lunch and departures

## **5. List of participants**

### *International participants*

Professor Liesbet van Zoonen  
Professor Ursula Maier Rabler  
PhD student Tanja Sihvonen  
Dr. Nico Carpentier  
Dr. Matthew Hibberd  
Professor Fausto Colombo  
Senior lecturer Janet Megan Jones  
Dr. Charo Sádaba  
Senior lecturer Lars H. Christensen  
Dr. Gustavo Cardoso

### *Norwegian participants*

PhD student Vilde Skancke Sundet  
PhD student Gunn Enli  
Professor Trine Syvertsen  
Professor Espen Ytreberg  
PhD student Faltin Karlsen

### *Local administrator*

Karoline Andrea Ihlebæk

## 6. Statistical information of participants

NAME	AGE	GENDER	COUNTRY OF ORIGIN
Liesbet van Zoonen	45-50	Female	Holland
Ursula Maier Rabler	45-50	Female	Austria
Tanja Sihvonen	30-35	Female	Finland
Nico Carpentier	30-35	Male	Belgium
Matthew Hibberd	35-40	Male	Scotland, UK
Fausto Colombo	50-55	Male	Italy
Janet Megan Jones	40-45	Female	Wales, UK
Charo Sádaba	30-35	Female	Spain
Lars H. Christensen	30-35	Male	Denmark
Gustavo Cardoso	30-35	Male	Portugal
Trine syvertsen	45-50	Female	Norway
Espen Ytreberg	40-45	Male	Norway
Gunn Sara Enli	30-35	Female	Norway
Vilde Schanke Sundet	25-30	Female	Norway
Faltin Karlsen	30-35	Male	Norway

AGE	NUMBER
25 – 30	1
30 – 35	7
35 – 40	1
40 – 45	2
45 – 50	3
50 – 55	1

GENDER	
MALE	7
FEMALE	8