Media innovation and social impact:
the case of living documentaries

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This scholarly essay discusses one particular form of documentary production: interactive documentary. It does so in the larger context of media innovation research. Its main aim is to shed light on how those thinking and creating living documentaries define and frame social impact. The thesis behind this essay is, that contrary to media innovation happening within the paradigm of what scholars and practitioners call the 'media industries' - which are largely tributary to capitalist impact criteria, living documentary producers are mainly driven by the potential social impact that their work might have. By presenting and analysing the living documentary Field Trip (2019), a project in which I assumed a combined role of practitioner-researcher, I offer a case study that illustrates and tests my assumptions. I complement my observations within the case study with interviews and other practices. My findings indicate that from a media production perspective, the impact expectations of those making living documentaries can loosely be as-sociated with a commons-based production paradigm. Yet, producers of these documentaries constantly need to renegotiate and compromise on their social impact expectations because of internal production affordances and the (external) dominance of the 'media industries' paradigm.

INTRODUCTION

> The whole 'Gemeinnützigkeit' [benefit to the public] of our technology and our content is an aspect of creating more equality. In combination with the visual story that we tell, that is quite a statement within and for social change. (Eva Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019)[1].

In a book chapter published in January 2019 media scholars Arne H. Krumsvik, Stefania Milan, Niamh Ní Bhroin and Tanja Storsul state that "a key to understanding innovation is that existing knowledge is implemented in new contexts and that this opens up new possibilities" (Krumsvik et al., 2019, p. 14). When applied to their field of study, they specify that "media innovation can include change in several aspects of the media landscape — from the development of new media platforms, to new business models, to ways of producing media texts or genres" (Krumsvik et al., 2019, p. 16).

When it comes to social change, Niamh Ní Bhroin and Stefania Milan, in the introduction to this special issue stress that it is the ethical interpretation of this concept, as it relates to the importance of minimum/basic wages and human rights including communication rights and democracy, that they focus on (Ní Bhroin & Milan, 2020).

In this scholarly essay in the field of production studies, I will build upon these two theoretical strands by connecting media innovation to social change. Yet, discussing these two concepts in the realm of documentary film production requires me to point at the production paradigm in which these types of media innovations take place, and to develop an understanding of what characteristics digital documentaries possess. Once this is achieved, I posit that it is important for scholars to revisit a notion that in the media sector is both over-used and ill-informed: that of impact. I focus on the notion of social impact and how this is negotiated at the production level, thereby informing the potential that I-docs might carry for social change.

Drawing on media innovation theory, impact studies, interviews, I-docs in the field and, *Field Trip* as an I-doc and case study, I aim to address two research questions:

- *Can 'living documentaries' (Gaudenzi, 2013a) be considered media innovations?; and,*
- *How do the producers of living documentary approach social impact?*

My focus lies not on how we live with technology at an individual level — which would require an enquiry of media use — but rather how the process of using technology to bring about media innovation can generate social change. Thus, unlike conventional media

impact studies, my focus deliberately excludes reception, audience and other external parties' considerations. It instead takes on the challenge of exploring the mostly ignored perspectives of those making or pioneering media. Adding a nuance here, I do include knowledge distilled from 'produsers' (Bruns, 2008, p. 21)[2] and co-creators that are outside the immediate production team.

METHODOLOGY

Employing a participatory action research approach, I shed light on a form of media in which I am personally involved as an author and producer. More specifically, I use collaborative and analytic autoethnography in action research (CAAE), as outlined by Acosta, Goltz, & Goodson which employs "action research as a tool for improving the quality of practice" (2015, p. 412). This framework for research implies four phases, including an inductive stage, a pre-deductive stage, a deductive stage, and a synthesis stage (2015, p. 415). Through this analytical autoethnographic perspective (Anderson, 2006), coupled with desk research in the field of production studies, I offer a critical reflection on media innovation.

The practice foundation employed in this paper draws on my doctoral fieldwork since April 2017, observation over the last decade as a practitioner of interactive documentary, as well as 7 formal and in-

formal interviews conducted between 2017 and 2019. The semi-structured interviews I conducted were held via phone, and in person. They lasted on average one hour. I transcribed while interviewing and sent a clean copy of each interview to the interview partner within a week, to get clearance. From the 7 interviews, four were proper semi-structured interviews, including two with *Field Trip* team members, and two with interviewees with whom I had collaborated on other I-docs in the past. The three other interviews were done in an unstructured way, as part of formal settings, such as workshops e.g., Docmedia (2018) and Social Storytelling Lab (2018), and conferences e.g., I-Docs (2018).

I interviewed producers that are especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the phenomenon of interest (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In addition to fulfilling the criteria of "knowledge and experience", as described in Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan & Hoagwood (2015, p. 2), drawing on Bernard (2002) and Spradley (1979), the selection of producers is related to "the availability and willingness to participate, and the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner" (Palinkas et al., 2015, p. 2).

I used the technique of purposeful sampling to identify and select information-rich I-doc examples and implemented a typical case approach by focusing

on the single case of *Field Trip* (Patton, 2002, ch. 5, module 30).

The observation component for this essay was carried out over the same period that I worked on *Field Trip*. I acted as an "exclusive informant", as referred to in Bruun (2016, p. 134). Bruun suggests that exclusive informants "are investigated not as representatives of an elite, but as means to gain insight into the production of media texts. Media producers often have exclusive knowledge, making them irreplaceable as research participants" (Bruun, 2016, p. 139).

In this autoethnography, it is reasonable to ask how tainted the researcher can possibly be. The fact that perceptions of practitioners and researchers can differ and be conflicting — particularly on the notion of impact, is something I address by running the last two phases in CAAE after the active production phase. Zooming-out from production itself enables me to deduct and synthesize with critical distance.

Putting the market bias in context

Discussions about media innovation in the media sector are generally market-driven. The assumption is that "the media" is an industry with underlying capitalist imperatives. This has to do with the fact that many technological innovations need start-up and investor funding. They tend to "speak louder" than their non-profit or social entrepreneur counterparts,

and use all marketing tricks in the book to occupy the field of media innovation.

Following from this, it would be easy to affirm that the market bias in the media sector is what conditions scholarly literature on media innovation — where such a bias also exists. But in my reading, the bias goes back to the origin of innovation research, which developed as part of the field of economics and "the advent in the theoretical work of Schumpeter (1934)" (Dogruel, 2014, p. 52).

More recently for example, Krumsvik et al. limit their analysis almost entirely to economic discourse: disruption and radical innovation (2019, p. 194, 197), when discussing long-term change brought about by media innovation. They do include the notion of social innovation[3] (2019, p. 196) and discuss the importance of accounting for socio-cultural factors and power relations (2019, p. 201), but they stop short of developing the non-commercial paradigm, as if the study of innovation was the sole domain of economics.

A trace of this bias, to take just another example, can be found in Hawkins and Davis' writing (2012), which *en passant*, makes a true contribution to innovation studies by exploring so-called 'experience goods' (and services). The authors offer a broader understanding of the 'value' that is created by innovation and they do so by distinguishing between *hard*

and *soft factors* of innovation. Further drawing on Gallarza et al. (2011, p. 179), they state that "the challenge has been to unpack hedonic value in order to yield a multidimensional set of value constructs that would encompass utilitarian as well as other kinds of perceived value." Although there is an advancement on expanding Schumpeter's innovation typology, the authors limit themselves to unpacking the so-called hard factors. They stay within their disciplinary compound.

When looking at media innovation in the public and non-profit sectors, and particularly at innovative long-form journalism and film, a few adventurous academics like to refer to an open-source and/ or commons-based production logic (Velkova & Jakobsson, 2015). As demonstrated in the Velkova and Jakobsson article however, the 'market vs. commons production lens' does not really stick with the reality of open digital production (2015, p. 16). "By focusing on dichotomous relationships at the macro-level, previous studies have often ignored the organizational sociologies of free and open-source software and thus failed to understand the often mixed and conflicted ethics, politics and economics of open production" (Coleman, 2013, p. 207). In the realm of long-form journalism and documentary film, innovations are often non-commercial by nature, but as pointed out by Velkova and Jakobsson (2015, p. 16), products

and producers "move between what Arjun Appadurai has referred to as 'regimes of value' (Appadurai, 1986, p. 4), and what, in other literature, has been discussed as 'systems of belief' (Bolin, 2009; Bolin, 2011; Bourdieu, 1993).

I offer to move beyond the dominant market perspective and, beyond the 'big bad business narrative' on the one hand and the 'pure and romanticized commons-based production logic' on the other. Thus, one pragmatic way to look at media innovation beyond the above-mentioned ideological divide, is offered by a close reading of scholar-practitioner Aymar Jean Christian's 2018 book "Open TV: Innovation Beyond Hollywood and the Rise of Web Television". There, the author draws on a large body of interviews (100) with independent makers of media to create a socially-conscious understanding of how media innovation unfolds. In his analysis, he puts 'legacy TV' up against 'Open TV' on a technological spectrum, to emphasize how "open or networked television […] is digital, on-demand, and peer-to-peer, meaning any participant in the web, a producer, fan or sponsor, can directly connect to another at any time" (Christian, 2018, p. 13). By revealing the characteristics that make up the fabric of open TV and drive independent TV production, Christian argues that "network control over programming falls short of balancing art, culture and commerce" thereby pointing at elements of value outside the sole financial impediment.

By getting a more informed sense of some of the social impact criteria at the production level, I argue, independent media producers can reach two goals at once: firstly, to help define media innovation beyond the restrictive category of 'media industries', and secondly to close in on what media innovation means for social change. Before doing so, the next section defines the object of study.

Digital documentary and reportage

Back in 1933, John Grierson defined documentary as "the creative treatment of actuality" (Grierson, 1933, p. 8). Although Grierson's focus lied in the question of the truth or rather, constructed truth portrayed in a documentary, this well-known phrase also suggests that documentaries imply a creative process, which can be more or less artistic. Grierson, like many pioneers of the documentary genre before and after him (e.g., Michel Brault, Frances and Robert Flaherty, Esfir Shub, Dziga Vertov, and many others) attest to how innovative the documentary practice has been over time[4].

In the realm of digital journalism and documentary, interactive documentary is still a recent, albeit constantly developing, opportunity for documentary makers and online journalists to tell their stories and publish their findings (Mundhenke, 2017). Topics covered in interactive documentaries are often of high social relevance and great complexity.[5]

The genre has since been defined in many different ways, starting with the most widely used interactive documentary (O'Flynn, 2012), "interactive modes of documentary such as the web-documentary, the docu-game and mobile and immersive documentary" (Nash, 2014, p. 221 – my emphasis), and subsequently moving to the more relational and useful notion of living documentary: "an assemblage composed by heterogeneous elements that are linked through modalities of interaction" (Gaudenzi, 2013a, p. 26). Sandra Gaudenzi further speaks of living documentaries "as dynamic entities that co-emerge while they live through the interactions with the Internet, their users, subject, producers, or any acting entity" (2013, p. 26). The discussion on how to best designate these forms of documentary and reportage would merit a more in-depth exploration (see Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012; Gantier, 2012 & Aston et al., 2017). Yet, as this is outside the scope of this essay, and since I adhere to Gaudenzi's general take on these practices, I will be using the notion of living documentary for the remainder of this text.

Scholarship on living documentary, while rare, has been relatively dynamic during and immediately following the heyday of the genre, i.e., from 2010 to 2015. This can best be exemplified by the rally of aca-

demics working on digital and interactive storytelling around the I-Docs symposium in Bristol, UK - at the intersection of practice and theory (I-Docs, 2018). The number of delegates doubled between the opening symposium in 2011 (120 delegates) and the last one in 2018 (240 delegates).[6]

Dimensions of innovation

Digital and online documentaries do not by default carry newness. When looking at "genre innovation" Carolyn R. Miller (2016, p. 4) distinguishes between the notions of *emergence* and *evolution*, where emergence is closer to a genuine innovation and evolution is the incremental sequence within a given genre. In the field of documentary film, classic linear documentaries that are put online, are in my understanding clearly an evolution in how documentary film is distributed. They do not, per se, present a media innovation. When looking at living documentaries through Miller's lens, I argue that they represent an emergence because the way in which documentary material is consumed and produced is changed. I explain this in the next paragraphs.

Living documentaries, taken together, are close to the concept of media innovation as defined by Dogruel (2014, p. 55) when she writes that this: "needs to distinguish media innovations from routinely produced media products such as a new film, a new book or another episode of a TV show, and focus on those new products and services that include considerable changes with respect to design, functions and use modes."

Living documentaries, in their Gaudenzian expression, have a proper fabric that only comes alive in interaction with their users:

> Their liveness and adaptivity is what permits them to change; it gives them a transformational power …. Transformation will be understood as the power of the interactive documentary to change itself, but also to change what is part of its ecosystem: the user, the author and the interface being just some of the components of such system (Gaudenzi, 2013b, p. 17).

Yet, this characteristic of emergence does not mean in turn, that all living documentaries are media innovations. They are simply part of a genre innovation (Miller, 2016, p. 4) when compared to their linear-set-in-stone documentary counterparts.

Moving beyond the genre, when making the point that media innovations "are characterized by a close interaction between intangible (creative) and "humdrum inputs" namely technological or organisational aspects of innovation (Caves, p. 4, 2000; Handke, 2008) Dogruel (2014), defines four dimensions of change: *technological, organisational, content/de-sign-oriented*, and *functional*. I operationalise these dimensions of change when exploring *Field Trip* as a case study below.

Social impact

When individuals and institutions outside of a given production evaluate or judge the quality of films, they often rely on "subjective and contingent elements" (de Valck & Soeteman, 2010, p. 290). In an era of big data, an increasing group of stakeholders base their judgement on quantitative measurement, where data analytics play a salient role (Lewis, 2014). There are no set criteria to evaluate social change with regard to one single media output, as change in society is multi-factorial, dynamic, ongoing and more often than not, ephemeral. I thus defer to the question of social impact.

Criteria for assessing the value and impact of a living documentary only exist in fragments (see for example the statutes of the Grimme Online Award).[7] Yet, decisions on what has impact are continuously being made by 'judges' external to a production, with decisive consequences for production and distribution.

Here too, the notion of impact is mainly used in a market-biased manner by practitioners, especially with the advent of the private and donation-based funding of journalism (see Nash and Corner, 2016).

Despite this, it is a useful notion. Awareness about the larger societal impacts that media innovators might have, can help recalibrate the dominant fixation on economic (e.g., success at the box office) and/or quantitative impact (e.g., number views, visits, etc.) alone.

There is a long tradition and important body of literature in media studies, marketing and social psychology that explores the impact of mass media on society. Most of these quantitative studies look at "impacts on the public's thoughts, feelings, and actions", which McGuire dismisses as being limited (McGuire, 1986, p. 174). Without pretending to offer a comprehensive account on impact research here, I would still like to stress one aspect: as technology changes, impact assessment methods and techniques also change. In the realm of public interest digital media, which I'm discussing here, the "social value perspective" (Napoli, 2014, p. 4) has surfaced. "Social value in this context refers to analytical approaches that extend beyond financial measures of success to take into account criteria such as improving the well-being of individuals and communities across a wide range of dimensions that are central goals of most public interest media initiatives" (Napoli, 2014, p. 4).

In that same context of public interest media, Sean Flynn identifies "raising awareness, stimulating discourse or inspiring action" as some of the key categories attributed to social impact (Flynn, 2015, p. 143). All of these 'soft factors' are increasingly being monitored, tracked and measured. The result is not one single metric, but is a definite tendency to quantify media impact thanks to the availability of analytics tools. For a robust overview and analysis of the media impact assessment field, read Philipp M. Napoli's Measuring Media Impact report (Napoli, 2014).

The publication of Napoli's research report, along with a number of other "strategic impact documentary" reports over the last decade, such as the eye-opening, detailed and continuously updated 'Impact field guide' by Doc Society (2019), and Finneran (2015), provide a good basis to understand the notion of impact on audiences, as well as how it can be planned, evaluated and developed. But, as Kate Nash and John Corner (2016, p. 229) suggest, these attempts, which focus on linear TV or cinema documentaries, can be framed as strategic communication. What follows is that these endeavours do too little to inform social impact criteria for independent, creative documentaries in general, and living documentaries in particular. In other words, these impact publications have great value for raising awareness on the notion of impact, but they do not a) manage to escape the capitalistic mindset, with its obsession with decontextualized, often short-term, quantitative reach (e.g., number of clicks, number of views) and b) fail to look into interactive and web-based forms, whose impact is unfolding in a networked manner, outside the film festival and broadcasting paradigm.

Long term social impact

In a forthcoming publication, I revisit the previously mentioned living documentary GDP by discussing the question of impact (Dubois, forthcoming). In essence, I'm making two points that are noteworthy for this article. On the one hand, I insist that "even though scholarship is slowly starting to look into the social impact of interactive storytelling", we need to take the "long view of how interactive documentary is challenging our reading of history" (Dubois, manuscript in preparation). The goal of taking a long view on media innovation, is to assess the *critical consciousness* (Freire, 1973) that the innovation has generated in a given community or society.[8] "Critical consciousness posits that the thinking subject does not exist in isolation but, rather, in relationship to others in the world," Arno Kumagai and Monica Lypson wrote in 2009 (p. 783). In their essay on medical education, the two doctors go on to specify that:

> The development of critical consciousness involves a reflective awareness of the differences in power and privilege and the inequities that are embedded in social relationships—an act that Freire calls "reading the world"

(Freire, 1991) —and the fostering of a reorientation of perspective towards a commitment to social justice. The development of this type of consciousness—a process that Freire calls "conscientization"—is both cognitive and affective and leads to engaged discourse, collaborative problem-solving, and a "rehumanization" of human relationships (Kumagai & Lypson, 2009, p. 783).

Social impact expectations during production

The second plaidoyer I make, is for impact evaluation to account not only for long-term reception, but also for "the effects of production processes" (Dubois, manuscript in preparation). Understanding what media innovation means to the makers of media, and how they, as a determining stakeholder group, define measures and criteria of impact, is in my view of utmost importance to shed light on social impact.

On a more philosophical level, Bolin argues that "value is produced relationally" (2011, p. 4). "Irrespective of whether it is the result of work or of negotiation, value is the result of social activity, acted out in a social relationship" (Bolin, 2011, p. 4). It is precisely because of this relational aspect underlying the notion of value production, that I emphasize the need for social impact to be informed by producers' impact expectations. "The generation of value is most often the result of irrational processes, of unforeseen circumstances, and of relations between various wills

in social practice," Bolin continues: "This is not least so when it comes to media production, as much media production today is quite complicated — technologically, organizationally, socially and economically" (2011, p. 4). Within this complexity, I am attempting to identify some of the main "wills" media makers have with regard to impact. This, in turn, informs our understanding of the potential social impact of living documentaries.

The following section, which succinctly explores a single case study, pinpoints some social impact criteria that drive both *participation* in and *relevance* to democracy (Ní Bhroin & Milan, 2020), sowing the seeds for what will become a systematic typology of social impact.

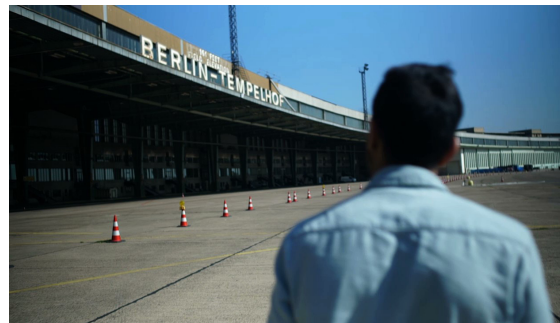## PRACTICING MEDIA INNOVATION IN THE FIELD: THE CASE OF FIELD TRIP

Figure 1: Field Trip - an interactive documentary. License: Creative Commons-Field Trip-Share Alike

I critically assess the production phase of the living documentary *Field Trip*.[9] This web-based documentary is about the Tempelhof Field. Tempelhof is a one of a kind European heritage site where the best and worst of humanity came to be expressed (*Field Trip*, 2019). The 14 video episodes that compose the documentary are 14 facets of this former airstrip in the middle of Berlin which was turned into a public park in 2007. *Field Trip* tells the story of what for some is a 300-hectare free urban paradise, for others a place of terror and forced labour, and for even others, a safe haven. By using the technique of open hypervideo (videos linked together) and on-site and online community development, *Field Trip* is a living and participatory documentary. The on-site component is a former West-German telephone booth turned into a "StoryboXX", a space to exchange books and listen to audio stories that we recorded as part of the documentary production. In addition, people are free to phone-in and leave two-minute short stories on an answering machine. The most interesting stories are then curated and either made accessible via the StoryboXX, or as audio-visual elements in the web-based living documentary.

Figure 2: ´Storyboxx´ Field Trip - an interactive documentary. License: Creative Commons-Field Trip-Share Alike

The documentary was released as a work-in-progress on the website of the daily Berlin newspaper Der Tagesspiegel on 12 May 2019. It was subsequently finalised in original German language in July 2019. The original version with English subtitles and with Polish subtitles, were finalised in September 2019. They are still to be officially launched.

Field trip as media innovation

I apply Dogruel's (2014) dimensions of change to *Field Trip* to reveal its key aspects as a media innovation. First, on the content/design layer, *Field Trip* "portrayed people that didn't have the easiest of biographies, but that were portrayed in empowering moments", my co-author, Eva Stotz, stated (E. Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019). It did so using a new feature, embedded in the open source software FrameTrail. Developed by our creative technologist Joscha Jäger, FrameTrail enables the 14 video-episodes to be linked together via minimalistic animations. Each video, which lasted on average six minutes, portrays one protagonist. The hyperlinking in turn warrants an interactive narrative throughout the whole experience in which the user can either stay in a scene or switch to a new one in an emotional and aesthetic fashion (instead of the "rational" links that we are used to for example in hypertext, or in a Wikipedia post). This cinematographic way of moving through the documentary content at one's own will, is one way in which the team behind *Field Trip* hopes to reshape film language.

Secondly, *Field Trip* is pursuing a participatory goal. Via a collaboration with a book exchange project, as mentioned above, we set up a telephone booth on the Tempelhof Field between August 2018 and August 2019. From the 25 user-generated stories we received, we were able to recycle seven strong ones, five of these were included in parts of an episode in the documentary. The anecdotes were also shared on social media and email subscription lists, including that of our media partner *Der Tagesspiegel*. The documentary production thus uses an old technology (phone link), combined with a digital platform to foster the participation of audiences. In Dogruel's model of dimensions of change the participatory aspect qualifies as a functional dimension, as it is part of "new ways of consuming, discovering and sharing" documentary material (Dogruel, 2014, p. 63).

Third, the lion's share of *Field Trip's* content is licensed under a "Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International" license, which allows anyone to re-use and re-mix the documentary content. It is still to this day fairly rare to see film productions use an open license, as content re-licensing is often engrained in business models (ZDF, 2018).[10] In the case of *Field Trip*, as a non-profit and public interest project, the social impact expectation was to increase the empowerment and appropriation of the content by media makers. To enable this, *Field Trip* set up a user-friendly media repository, where users can see the content, its licenses and download it for their own use in a drag-and-drop fashion. This functional dimension is stressed here, as it is not only the formal license that makes the content accessible and reusable, but also the actual affordance of the interface, which guarantees immediate and unhindered access to the media files. The use of open licenses has plunged the team into ethical dilemmas, on a spectrum between 'full protection of protagonists' on one extreme and the 'full giveaway ideal' on the other. The team has settled for putting about 60% of the content under CC BY-SA licence and the rest under copyright. This functional dimension of change in *Field Trip* is

certainly also what best resonates with Krumsvik et al.'s "new ways of producing media texts or genres" (2019, p. 195).

As the project is documenting an open urban field, we wanted to produce it with an open format where the user can choose their own path. We also wanted the technology itself to be available for use by others under a dual licence (MIT and GPL v3 licences). Thus, from a technological point-of-view (Dogruel, 2014), *Field Trip* is a media project that is indebted to the ideal of an open web, where the technology we use is inspired by previously written open source code. We further developed this code, so as to support other media makers, particularly documentary makers, in reusing FrameTrail's open source software framework. Here, I would argue, that the technological and functional dimensions are not dissociable from each other.

With regard to the organisational dimension, open collaboration was fostered. The core team members[11] and the larger project team[12] learned from each other in an interdisciplinary and crossover fashion. We did not work from an office but mainly via daily email exchange, phone calls and irregular meetings in Berlin cafés. While the legal production company behind *Field Trip* is the micro-enterprise 'ronjafilm', the core team was de facto responsible for all aspects of production. There is no particular innovation in

this dimension, as small-sized teams working with freelancers in a flat hierarchical manner is quite common in digital media production.

The team managed to scrape together €80,000[13], with almost half the funds invested by a regional media innovation fund called MIZ-Babelsberg, and €16,000 from 150 crowd-funders participating in a six-week funding drive (April-May 2019). Most of the other smaller funds were from private foundations (journalistic, historical) and public institutions (cultural, political). While the media partner *Der Tagesspiegel* did not invest substantial funds, they invested considerable resources in copy-editing, testing, hosting, reporting, producing podcasts and disseminating the documentary on their website, and via social media channels and newsletters. The cooperation agreement was based on a win-win expectation, where the *Field Trip* team would benefit from increasing the quality of its product and reaching large audiences, while *Der Tagesspiegel* would get to feature an innovative 92-minute documentary that it would not be able to produce as part of its daily journalistic routine. This type of agreement between an online newspaper and an I-doc team has been made in the past on several occasions,[14] so it would be hard to qualify this aspect of the organisational dimension as innovative.

Based on this analysis *Field Trip* can be considered a media innovation according to Dogruel's (2014) dimensions of content/design, technology and function, but not organisation.

Impact expectations

This article does not attempt to evaluate the impact of *Field Trip*. For this to happen, it would need to be revisited in five, ten or even twenty years' time, as pointed out above. In other words, assessing whether *Field Trip* has succeeded in "raising awareness, stimulating discourse or inspiring action", as Flynn (2015, p. 143) puts it, or creating critical consciousness as conceptualized by Freire (1973), is a task for the future. It would need a thorough and robust analysis of the audience, and would require a mix of qualitative and quantitative research.

The second aspect of social impact that I have stressed above regards the production. It tries to understand what the makers' main impact expectations were, and when they felt they were having impact.

The director of *Field Trip's* overarching expectation for impact was "that people get transformed by a story, that they are not thinking about something in the same way before and after seeing the film" (E. Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019). For her, there were two key moments during the production, where her impact expectations were fulfilled. The first one came about through a cooperation

we had with a Berlin high school.

We had a former forced labourer coming for a shoot to the Tempelhof Field, where she was made to work in 1945. We made a school project out of it and spent two afternoons in history class. It felt kind of absurd, but I loved it, because it was really tangible. Pupils were learning something from our media project. We involved others in the making. I could feel that this had impact (E. Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019).

The second one happened while shooting:

I very often had that feeling that people had a big urge to talk about the field. It was incredible how much pressure there was for people to speak out about this case. For us to provide a platform felt to me as if we were doing something important, having an impact there, because we were those pulling together different crowds that don't talk to each other. It was like a big mediation we did, that we shaped into a film that everyone could understand (E. Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019).

Understanding how *Field Trip* was produced provides an important illustration of this kind of media innovation. The openness to co-creation and the team's approach to free culture are part of the documentary, and of the story *Field Trip* tells. It is one of sharing, of letting go of control. This is particularly true for the more artistic team members, who had to let go of certain aesthetic ambitions because of the limited budget. Illustrator and animator Filippo Letizi for instance, had his issues with the web technology we were using. It limited the sophistication of the animations we could do. As a team, we recognized this fundamental limitation. However, we accepted it as the use of open source web technologies promised more impact and were in this respect more important to us than full aesthetic sophistication. The idealistic social impact that we expected, coupled with strong financial constraints, introduced limitations on artistic possibilities.

The financial constraint also meant that as the co-author and producer responsible for interactivity I had to accept that the video episodes would be edited in classic storytelling fashion, and that interactive elements would only later be layered on top of the videos. The ideal case scenario for interactive media, not least to create content/design innovation, is to have an iterative process in which the moving image and the interactive elements are created in dialogue with each other. In *Field Trip*, the video episodes could only be edited once and the interactive elements placed on the videos afterwards, thereby forcing single episodes to be structured along a linear filmic narrative. There were some attempts to make room for interaction, but always as an add-on, and on a tight schedule. The time constraint had to do with underfunding, but also with the tight schedule we agreed to with *Der Tagesspiegel*, which insisted on timing the release with the 70th anniversary of the Berlin airlift.

Interestingly, we had lively discussions in the team about whether to drop the partnership with the newspaper altogether because of the extremely short timeframe that we were suddenly faced with. The shared framing of impact expectations (expected quantitative impact; credibility expectations vis-à-vis the *Tagesspiegel* brand) were such, however, that we preferred to roll up our sleeves. We accepted that the fast-track post-production process would put a dent in the innovative potential of the interactive storytelling.

One of the shared social impact goals was to have other independent producers use our media innovation to create further stories. This relates to the idea of FrameTrail enabling users to "create non-linear networks of video fragments (Hypervideos) which can be freely navigated by the user" (FrameTrail, 2018). At different stages during the production, the team debated where to allocate resources when it came to outreach. "Maybe the other members looked more at numbers of viewers than I did. What they were most

interested in, was that this project became a role model in how to use open media, that it created more reaction in the media community" (E. Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019). My interview with our creative technologist Joscha Jäger seems to confirm this: "My main idea was that it could serve as a blueprint for other stories in this format" (J. Jäger, personal communication, November 1, 2019). The team therefore faced a conundrum: should we focus on letting viewers see *Field Trip* as much as possible, thereby going down a classic distribution route (with a proper film festival circuit, submissions to awards and reaching out to get *Field Trip* reviewed in the media) or, should we be strategic about the 'unique selling point' of our open source and open content? Heated debates led to the team agreeing to prioritise classic distribution, within just a few hand-picked communities[15] in order to encourage the community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to re-use *Field Trip's* content and tech (e.g., Mozfest, Chaos Computer Conference, Creative Commons festivals). Here again, *Field Trip* invested in a platform without any classic return on investment in sight.

Looking back at this production process informs the discussion on media innovation and social impact. The individuals working in the team with me engaged in a progressive problem-solving process. However, this was not the only factor that constrained or facilitated media innovation. It was the impact expectation of each individual in the team, and the successful negotiation of this, often at an early stage of production, that determined how and on what dimension of change the media production would be innovative. In *Field Trip*, certain dimensions of innovation were salient (e.g., the "open duo" of open-licensed content combined with open source technology), while others were secondary (the team organisation and the production process). Thus, the degree of media innovation was largely dependent on the makers' shared framing of where to generate social impact. That shared framing needs to be agreed on early in the production process, and successfully defended and adjusted along the way as production constraints kick in. In the case of an independent production like *Field Trip*, this can only be achieved with a high level of engagement from all team members during the entire production.

CONCLUSION

This essay finds that in the production of *Field Trip*, social impact was approached from the start, when team members needed to agree on a shared impact frame. They then needed to uphold their larger impact goals and negotiate individual impact expectations as the production progressed. It also finds that even though producers set social impact goals, the complexity of independent production means that internal and external compromises need to be made on many dimensions. For this reason, it is important for media producers that see themselves as part of a larger commons-based production paradigm, to get ready for a rough but creative ride.

Field Trip is one example of a living documentary production. For a larger evaluation of how living documentaries create social change, many other impact elements would need to be explored, including for example the extent to which critical consciousness is brought about in a given community.

The analysis above points to the fact that when assessing the innovativeness of a media production, one would be well advised to account for the social impact expectations of the makers. One way in which future research might do this in a more systematic manner, is by generating a typology of social impact that is strongly informed by a producer perspective. There will never be a one-size-fits-all social impact framework, as there is no one recipe for how to produce media innovation. However, a well-rounded granular typology defining social impact for this type of cultural production would help scholars and practitioners to better inscribe and justify media innovation along a larger social change agenda.

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NOTES

1. Eva Stotz, personal communication, August 27, 2019

2. The term "produser/produsage" was coined by Axel Bruns (2008, p. 21).

3. For more on social innovation, see paper by Van der Have and Rubalcaba, 2016.

4. For a discussion of the history of innovation in documentary production, see New Documentary, by Stella Bruzzi (2006).

5. For more on evolving practices of interactive documentary, see I-docs edited by Aston, Gaudenzi, and Rose (2017).

6. Figures provided via e-mail August 21 and 28, 2019 by Nick Triggs, Research Manager at the Digital Cultures Research Centre (DCRC) of the University of the West of England.

7. Statutes in German: https://www.grimme-online-award.de/ueber-den-preis/statut/

8. Fairey`s paper on a community photography project convincingly uses and develops the notion coined by Paulo Freire (Fairey, 2017).

9. The *Field Trip* project was started 2017 and initially received kickstart funding from the Media Innovation Center Babelsberg.

10. An exception is German TV network ZDF's Terra X programme publishing six short explanatory science videos under a CC BY 4.0 licence in the last quarter of 2019.

11. The team members were co-author, film director and producer Eva Stotz, co-author and interactive producer Frédéric Dubois, creative technologist Joscha Jäger, and executive producer Svenja Klüh.

12. Some 15 to 20 freelancers joined *Field Trip* two-and-a-half years preceding the launch.

13. This amount represents about two thirds of the budget the team had initially planned.

14. Documentary-game *Fort McMoney* with Süddeutsche Zeitung, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, Der Standard, 2013-2014; Scroll-documentary *Atterwasch* with Süddeutsche Zeitung, 2015.

15. Community referred to in the Weberian sense of a group of people sharing aims and a sense of belonging.

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