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Hyperlocal News: After the Hype
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Introduction

This paper sets out some of the characteristics of hyperlocal with some international comparisons. It shows the limits of the sector but also its surprising vitality.

Drawing on previous research, it poses questions about possible directions of travel to key people with insight into the UK's hyperlocal news sector.

It does not claim to be a comprehensive survey, more an attempt to identify trends and to stimulate innovation and debate.

What strikes me looking at the UK from a Swedish perspective, is the sense that media industry commentators are surprised at the innovation and resilience in the sector. Small, community-orientated websites that popped up 5–10 years ago, seemingly out of nowhere, provided a counter-example to the doom and gloom surrounding the local newspaper industry with its cutbacks, increasing owner concentration, and highly commercial approaches. Some go so far as to describe hyperlocals as an opposing trend to a British tradition of top-down media. Now people were taking matters in their own hands, using their creativity and feeling for their local community to share views and information. Hyperlocals are of course an international phenomenon. In America, independent online news sites have a longer tradition. As city and local papers closed it was seen as a possible future business model for local news. This may have been overly optimistic, but now we see some impressive initiatives targeting funding, such as News Revenue Hub in San Diego and democracy projects, like Local News Labs in New Jersey.

In the Nordic countries, where legacy media still has a strong, though declining, local presence, the phenomena has also been noted, both as entrepreneurial local journalism and more as "in-between media" – a semi-professional layer between personal blogging and legacy media (Hujanen, 2017).

In this report we will take a closer look at some of the actors in the UK like the **Centre for Community Journalism (C4CJ)**, the **Independent Community News Network (ICNN)**, the early network **Talk About Local**, and the media regulator **IMPRESS**. The innovation foundation **NESTA** is also one of the organisations that has been taking a strong interest in the hyperlocal sector. So what can we learn from the experiences and development of the hyperlocal news sector in the UK? We will look at expectations and challenges both in the past and for the future, and also discuss some views on how to best support the sector.

Executive Summary

As commercial mainstream local news faced increasing financial pressures over the last decade, some people hoped that new digital technologies would facilitate the growth of independent 'hyperlocal' online news to fill the gaps. This sector of small community news providers uses digital tools and platforms to report from places and in forms that commercial media outlets do not. After a first phase of enthusiasm they struggled to spread widely but now there are signs that they have become part of an emerging local media system that cannot be ignored. Increased collaboration; starting a representative body; lobbying for shares of statutory notices; partnerships with the BBC; a lot has happened in recent years in UK hyperlocal.

Accountable journalism:
There are examples of hyperlocal news fulfilling normative roles attributed to journalism. There are also actors trying to promote professionalisation and media ethics in the hyperlocal sector, such as IMPRESS and C4CJ. There might be local exceptions, but on the whole, it is unlikely that the resources to perform accountable journalism or to act as a Fourth Estate will ever become comparable to traditional media. On the other hand: there is a difference between nothing and something.

Business opportunity:
When hyperlocals try to fund their journalism, they face the same challenges as traditional media: How to get readership to pay and competition from actors like Google and Facebook. The limited human resources in a microbusiness and the difficulty of scaling also makes the challenge greater for the hyperlocal sector. On the other hand, this is a sector of innovation, and the most resilient hyperlocals have multiple revenue streams.

Democratic value:
Money will probably never be the overruling drive to start a hyperlocal journalism venture. Some people will run a site as a hobby, others aim to make a (modest) living and grow. Some just want to mirror the local community. Despite various ambitions, they all contribute to media plurality.

Support requires resources:
In order to support independent grassroots publishing or microbusinesses of journalism, someone has to put up the resources. This could be staff funded by other actors who can work with networks, training and technical or business solutions for the sector as a whole. Support could also mean money: State subsidies, charitable funding, and so on. Support could be directed towards encouraging quality journalism or access to independent local information in various geographical settings.

Work with the sector as a whole:
Networks, like the Talk About Local un-conferences, are valuable to create identity and strengthen the sector. Working with preconditions for the sector as a whole is also more rewarding, since the field is very inconstant. C4CJ, as well as News Revenue Hub in San Diego, USA, want to work systematically with the sector in for example training and development or providing actual resources such as Wordpress templates. The hyperlocal publisher is most likely fully occupied with creating content and revenue streams, with little time for everything else. Via these hubs, parties interested in supporting the sector can do so indirectly – be it the government, funders or other organisations concerned with local democracy.

A Sector of Diversity

Emma Meese, C4CJ

The label hyperlocal is put on a broad range of different motivations, skills, business models, and geographical settings – even platforms. Some hyperlocal publishers are journalists, some are local citizens wanting to celebrate their community, and others start from campaigning against the local council and then broaden their coverage. "Each one is different, each one is a very locally tailored product, as it should be" says journalist and researcher Rachel Howells. She started Port Talbot Magnet with journalist colleagues in 2009 in a Welsh town that had just lost its local newspaper. Looking for a new job, they thought of the start-up as a win-win. But after seven "precarious, but never dull" years, the Magnet was closed in 2016.

One of the early British sites, Kings Cross Environment was launched by William Perrin in London in 2005. His motivation was never to be a local journalist, but to find a way to network the community together, "so people could understand what was going on", he says. Perrin experimented with what was then a quite new technology and set up a blog:

> "I was astonished with how successful this was, first in the role of just networking between local people, and then I started by accident to write in a form that was a bit like journalism."

Dr Andy Williams

Both William Perrin and Rachel Howells combined their own experiences with a broader knowledge of the sector. In 2009 Perrin founded the public service project Talk About Local, and later shifted his focus even more towards consulting for people and organisations interested in hyperlocal online news. Howells, while working as a hyperlocal editor, did her PhD on the democratic deficit in a town with no newspaper in 2015, and has also researched the local news industry in Wales with Cardiff University lecturer Andy Williams[1]. Perrin and Howells can be said to represent two different starting points, but with local democracy as a common factor. Another example is Jack Davies, who started **Tongwynlais.com** in 2012, and describes his motivation as more of a creative urge. The site covers a small village with 2,000 residents outside of Cardiff. Davies did not know anything about the place until he moved there. At first he just wanted to put the village on the map for tourists, when "it just snowballed, soon I was meeting parents and so on. If I hadn't done this, I wouldn't know a fraction of the people I know now", he says. But he has no intentions of turning the site into a business, the population is too

1 Their forthcoming book on the subject is '**The decline of local newspapers and the rise of online community news**'.

small for a commercial news service, and the main purpose is still to give himself a meaningful and creative leisure activity, and a change from his day job as a software developer.

Richard Gurner, the founder of Caerphilly Observer is perhaps best described as a local news entrepreneur. Like Rachel Howells, he is also a trained and experienced journalist. He was working as an employed journalist in another area of Britain, but was looking for new opportunities and to return to his hometown. Community online news was his original business idea, that later turned into a printed weekly. Gurner managed to get an EU grant for developing businesses in rural areas, and thanks to a variety of revenue streams, runs a viable award-winning newspaper with a small number of employees. However, Gurner does not describe his motivation as commercial:

"Quite a lot of people always ask me, what's next for Caerphilly Observer, are you going to go into other areas of Wales, am I going to have this empire? And I always say that I don't want to do that, I just want to be a local journalist. You know, if I am staying up late Monday nights, Tuesday nights, and then do the deliveries on a Thursday, I'll do that because of the job satisfaction. It gives me a great satisfaction when people come around to me and say: I read your newspaper. Because they are members of my community, I grew up here."

Richard Gurner, Caerphilly Observer

None of the people above can be said to be The Typical Hyperlocal Publisher. No hyperlocal really is 'typical'. Scratch the surface, and you often get a very personal and unique story. I have often been fascinated by the very different circumstances that can lead to an actual start-up. I will share two examples from Sweden of incidents leading to hyperlocals challenging traditional media.

Jakob Karlsson was a local print newspaper journalist, also playing ice hockey at a professional level. When transferred to a new ice hockey team, he needed additional flexibility in his work. Unable to strike a satisfying deal with his employer he quit his job at the local newspaper. However, only playing ice hockey gave him spare time, and at first he started a non-profit blog, covering local issues. This led to another idea, and half a year later, he recruited two partners from his former work place, and set up an online news business competing with his former employer. As a self-employed journalist he can decide for himself when and where to work. Having his income as a professional sportsman also comes in handy when launching a new business.

Another story from Sweden is the local journalist Berit Önell, working for decades at a local newspaper in the small town of Hässleholm. When her investigative reporting led to a conflict with local power, her employer wanted to solve the tension by moving her to another local newsroom. When she refused, Berit Önell's only option was to leave the newspaper. But soon she discovered an overwhelming support from people, both local and national, for campaigning journalism and free speech. She now runs what is probably the only hyperlocal in Sweden that is mainly crowdfunded.

Like the UK, there are many examples of amateurs or semi-professionals starting hyperlocal sites in Sweden. The hyperlocals might start in a depopulated area or a growing city, aiming for information or journalism, stories or news alerts, as a business or a non-profit project, by one enthusiast or a group of people or an association. There are also more commercially orientated ventures, such as the Swedish company 24Journalistik AB, a growing chain of hyperlocal outlets, now partly owned by Sweden's largest local newspaper group Mittmedia.

But despite all the variety of models and motives, a strong personal feeling for the local area seems to be the common factor[2]. Even Jack Davies, initially only aiming to build a tourist site, soon became an actor of community information.

Even though it is hard to talk about the hyperlocal practitioners as a homogenous group of people, networking is mentioned as one important identity builder. In 2009, William Perrin, launched the first Talk About Local "un-conference". 100 people arrived to the meeting in Stoke-On-Trent, and the gathering became an annual one.

The original purpose of Talk About Local was not networking as such. It was a project to get people around the UK more digital-savvy, encouraging the set-up of local information sites in their communities. But when traveling the country, Perrin and his colleagues encountered a surprising number of tiny local websites already operating. In return, many of them were pleased to learn that they were not alone. Looking back, William Perrin still thinks that the real value added by Talk About Local was bringing together the people who were already running local sites:

"They needed affirmation, a sense of community; that they were not crazy – a lot of them would often say they thought they were. The purpose of the networking was never to create a formal organisation or a co-op, but more of "a pat on the back, a group hug, a cup of tea, here's some other people like you, you can chat."

2 **Leckner, Tenor and Nygren, 2017**

The Cardiff Hub

Cardiff University launched the C4CJ in 2013, arguably at the height of the 'hype' around hyperlocal. But what makes the centre interesting, is the continuity and the close links to both journalism training and media research. The idea of a centre for new forms of local news providers came from Justin Lewis, professor of Communication at Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, to help make a difference in an important field. Emma Meese, manager of the C4CJ, describes the original drive as investing in the future, by trying to nurture a new kind of local journalism instead of mourning the past. One of the first arrangements was to set up a five week online platform course for hyperlocal publishing. This drew interest on a global level. To date, 32,000 learners in 130 countries have undergone this MOOC supervised from Cardiff. "We have made the most of being in a journalist school, but in a semi-attached way", says Meese.

As in the case with *Talk About Local*, C4CJ was initially targeting holes, trying to encourage local people to set up news sites from scratch. This was later abandoned as it was found to be more effective to work with people already engaged and the sector as a whole. Today C4CJ, staffed with 2.4 employees, work more closely with a network of approximately 40 grass-root Welsh publishers, but also networking and training on a UK level. At the same time, the centre has provided access to study "an informal, fragmented, hard-to-reach, and geographically distributed community of practice" as Andy Williams puts it.

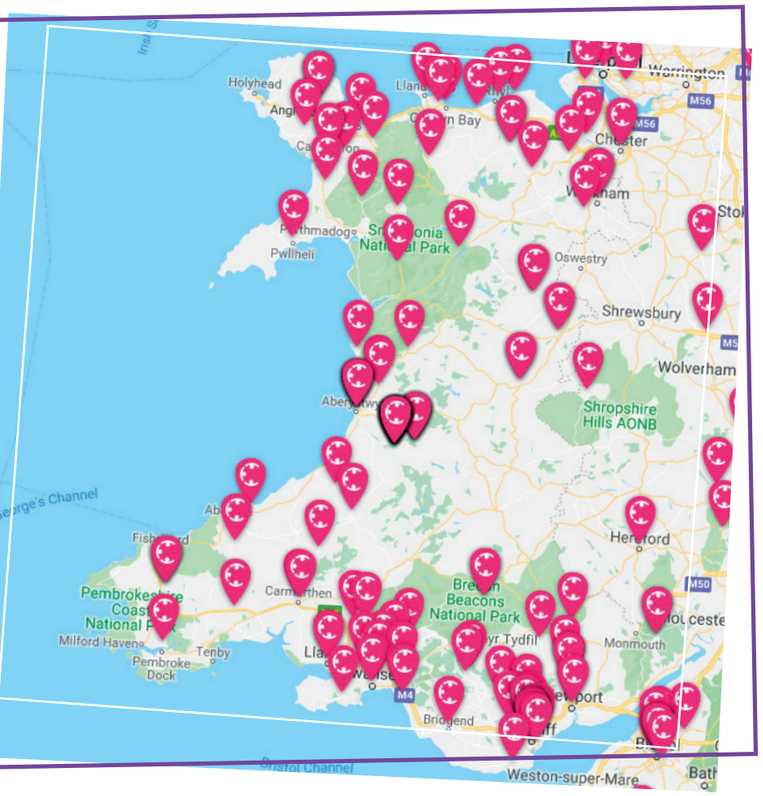
The diversity is a challenge, and C4CJ aim to find practical contributions that the majority can benefit from,

Matt Abbott, C4CJ

such as developing Wordpress tools for news publishing or an online template for readers' complaints that all can use. To inform and lobby outside the sector has also become an increasingly important role for C4CJ.

One example is the lobbying to increase access to the BBC Local News Partnership Scheme – which funds 150 local democracy reporters. In the end this led to four hyperlocals getting the BBC funding in 2017, while another 25 hyperlocals could partner with the BBC to receive content. Matt Abbott, the other staff member at C4CJ, says that the robust complaint system provided by C4CJ was one important aspect of the deal-making during negotiations around collaborating with the BBC. And competition is good in order to keep traditional media working hard as well. However, the BBC project has been criticized for the bureaucratic structure and the fact that a lot of the funding will go to the three major regional press groups.

At the beginning of 2018, Independent Community News Network, ICNN, was launched. **ICNN** has a more formal structure than the C4CJ network, and started after months of discussion and preparation. There are now 72 members, including Bristol Cable, Wrexham.com, West Leeds Dispatch, the Caerphilly Observer and the Lincolnite. They all adhere to an ethical code, and through the Cardiff hub gain access to free consultancy services, including media law.



Hyperlocals in Wales

But the purpose is also to "advocate and lobby on behalf of independent news publishers across the country and fight for better opportunities for all."

Rachel Howells describe the ICNN members as one layer of the hyperlocal sector – the ones that are trying to be professional and trying to do traditional journalism, but funding it in a different way. She also sees them as "kicking against hegemonization across traditional news":

> "The network gives a bit of lobbying clout, and there is loads of common ground. There are conditions out there that one individual hyperlocal can't change, but if we could change it for everybody, it would make a big difference, such as having rules that mean you could go report and record council meetings, or broadcast council meetings, because authorities have different rules [about] what they allow. Also widening the definitions of what a newspaper is in order to allow the hyperlocals to compete for council advertising – a change like this across the UK would immediately open doors for hyperlocals everywhere."

Centres in the Nordic countries

In both Sweden, Finland (Helsinki) and Norway (Bodø), university centres for local and hyperlocal journalism are being discussed. In association with a research project on Hyperlocal publishing, we had the opportunity to invite Swedish hyperlocals to a network meeting at Södertörn University, Stockholm in May 2017. Afterwards, one of the participants wrote:

> "The thought had never struck me before, that UBRO is a part of the Swedish media landscape. UBRO's small one-man operation suddenly became a keg in a big machinery, a piece of a puzzle in a whole, a legitimate belonging to something very big and important."

A rural Nordic community

The hype and the reality

Hyperlocals excite many hopes for wider benefits. These various framings have been summarized as "a potential saviour of local journalism, an emergent area of the internet economy and a mechanism to strengthen community cohesion"[3] But what hopes are actually realistic? William Perrin describes his reactions to the talk of hyperlocals as the future of journalism in 2012:

"We thought: This is slightly crazy. These little websites are great, but none of them are really ever going to be big, established things that have the capacity to hold the state to account and so on. They can do that to some degree, but they will never have the amount of money that the old local newspapers used to have, that is not going to happen – maybe with one or two tiny exceptions, but not for the vast majority."

Internet economy

Even though there are a lot of examples of innovation and ingenuity, studies on hyperlocals are full of examples of underperforming business models, self-exploitation and failing ventures.[4] Today, looking at this precarious sector, it is perhaps hard to understand the hype around hyperlocal journalism as a future business model in the US some ten years ago. The prediction was that hyperlocal online advertising would provide a very substantial financial return for local journalism sites. Looking back, you could say that Jeff Jarvis and other media trend spotters were right in assuming a future for hyperlocal adverts – but most of that local revenue has gone to the digital giants Facebook and Google.

Richard Gurner of Caerphilly Observer gives the example of a new restaurant opening in his area. It put one ad in his paper, and did the rest of the marketing through social media. Gurner actually considers some of the local advertising as an expression of support rather than marketing, because people know him and find the local weekly important.

3 Harte, Turner and Williams, 2016.

Local journalism and filling the news gap

Despite hopeful statements in the public, as early as 2012 it was remarked that the digital newcomers' potential to perform accountability journalism remained unclear.[5] Andy Williams, lecturer at Cardiff University, has researched the hyperlocal content of hyperlocal news in the UK, and says that while some could be described as local journalism, much of the content is partial, amateurish and trouble-making or just descriptive, banal and mundane.

So what hope is there for areas where local media pull out for cost-efficiency reasons? Katherine Geels, working with media innovation at Digital Catapult and #DInewslab, has encountered the field of hyperlocals from different angles, for example in a project for the innovation foundation Nesta: "We actually found less and less evidence that they are filling that kind of gap" she says. She gives the example Birmingham Updates that has grown quite quickly, even though Birmingham is already relatively well-served by mainstream local media, including the BBC. In these cases, the newcomers are providing an alternative rather than a replacement.

The local economy obviously affects the ability to run a viable news business. "The hyperlocals that have succeeded are in areas with a mix of enough people and enough money in the system – but that will not always be the places where journalism is most needed to give people a voice or to spread knowledge" says Rachel Howells. She has seen this mirrored in Port Talbot – where news about the big steel factory dominating the town might even be on the national news, but there is no coverage of what it means locally. Port Talbot was once a "treasure island" with five newspapers, but since The Magnet was shut down, there is no independent journalism, only a weekly politician's newsletter.

Kings Cross

Community cohesion

William Perrin started Kings Cross Environment in order to network the community together. "You can´t do community activity if you can´t communicate," he says. In this sense, you can put a certain democratic value label on hyperlocal publishing only by its mere existence. To mirror a community on everyday issues can help create a sense of place, a localness to the area, and make citizens connect.

Andy Williams says that not everything has to be judged by the criteria of traditional journalism to have a value for the public sphere. He sees that hyperlocals sometimes act in ways that might be more identified with the histories and cultures of social and political activism: "It is peoples' own acts of self-expression and self-construction. And that is something quite marvellous about the ability to publish online, without any significant barrier." He also thinks that people in the communities who read these local blogs, journalistic or not, are not thinking of them as hyperlocal, they are just thinking of them as a source of information that is a part of their daily or weekly diet of news and information.

4 van Kerkhoven & Bakker, 2014; Harte, Turner, & Williams, 2016; Naldi & Picard, 2012.
5 Sirkkunen & Cook, 2012.

Challenges

Funding, sustainability and visibility – these were the challenges set out in a Nesta study on hyperlocals by Damian Radcliffe in 2012. And the challenge of sustainability is also larger than funding, stresses Emma Meese, manager of C4CJ: "It means that if someone is on holiday or being hit by a bus and ends up in hospital, the hyperlocal can still go on." She knows many hyperlocals to be vulnerable in that sense too, with strong dependency on one single person.

The question of funding and accountable journalism is, of course, connected. In their chapter on Hyperlocal news in *The Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism*, Andy Williams and Dave Harte (2016) point out that the sector's potential to sustain journalistic standards of independence and critical reporting in the long run depends on its finances. Even though there are other areas in the UK built on voluntarism, this is viewed as a fragile solution.

When hyperlocals try to fund their journalism, they face the same challenges as traditional media: how to get readership to pay and competition from actors like Google and Facebook for advertising. Katherine Geels says that the increasing importance of social media platforms has been a double-edged sword for hyperlocals as well as traditional media, leading to less native visits to websites directly – but on the other hand, provides new opportunities. "So the question is more, how can you use social media in a constructive way to put out a story?" she says.

The particular challenge for grassroots media is the difficulty to expand to new areas. Hyperlocal news is described by Perrin as a craft product. "It's very much a high intellectual value-ad, networking value-ad, high-value content, to create, but it does not scale, because the skill is doing in detail in your local patch, not the ability to add another patch on it," he says. Another difficulty is that in order to become a successful entrepreneur, you have to market the product – not often a core journalist skill. On the other hand, this is a sector with examples of innovation, and the most resilient hyperlocal news operations have a lot of different revenue streams. Richard Gurner for example provides copywriting servies to businesses, does freelance work for national newspapers, and for the British Medical Association, working as a Wales correspondent for BMA News on a regular basis since 2012.

Among hyperlocals, there are also examples of non-monetary revenues or in kind support, such as volunteers investing their time, the trading of services and collaborations. For example, Blog Preston has its website hosted by a local web developer.[6] However, compared to five years ago, Geels sees the same barriers today for the hyperlocal publishers:

> "The problem is to find sustainability and resilience, how to be found and being relevant in all the noise."

6 **nesta.org.uk**

Expectations for the future

There are clear differences between what the still relatively powerful big local news companies can do and these smaller players. Hyperlocals should be viewed as a counterbalancing contribution, thinks Jonathan Heawood founder and CEO of the independent press regulator IMPRESS. IMPRESS regulates independent news publishers – such as investigative platforms, business news and small publishers based in a targeted geographical area. Jonathan Heawood says that he meets a lot of inspired, passionate and good journalists that want to do local journalism outside the corporate news industry. From his perspective, what is important is that people can access high quality journalism from different sources, and with different political views. Plurality is good – but not enough without standards, he says. In his opinion, hyperlocal publishing should help democracy and the public sphere, with basic standards of accuracy and ethics.

Cardiff University's Andy Williams says that supporting the sector will involve training people to be more journalistic, but only if that is what they want. In other cases they will just provide support on legal matters and technology for self-publishing in a difficult and uncertain digital environment:

> "We can try and promote journalistic values and that is something we try to do here at the C4CJ here in Cardiff. But something we also try to do is not to force people, or twist people into being a certain kind of local journalist. If they don't want to, we are happy to support people kind of in a variety of different ways that are suitable to the aims and goals and motivations of whoever is doing this."

Williams says that some hyperlocals will become more professional in their approach, even if they did not start out that way. Richard Gurner was a trained and experienced journalist when he started Caerphilly Observer, but he still describes a journey from publishing from a laptop in the spare bedroom to running a small newsroom, leading to more courageous publishing on local crime or holding power to account.

Even when people are trying to make a living out of their hyperlocal journalism, the expectations of "the hyperlocal spirit" is often implicitly a less commercially driven enterprise. Mary Walter-Brown, working with the News Revenue Hub, says that a lot of the news companies in the US today are NGOs, and she expects more of them to be in the future. This does not exclude the idea of local quality journalism done by properly paid professionals.

But if the purpose is to share information and not to create revenues, social media could perhaps be said to have challenged the old blog-centred idea of the hyperlocal site. UK pioneer William Perrin says that if he were to start something in order to network the community together today, he would start on Instagram instead of setting up a blog. In Sweden we came across both trajectories; one of a local Facebook page leading to a hyperlocal online news start-up (Battrestadsdel.se) and the opposite (Bagisbloggen.se).

The latter is also an example of how a succesful hyperlocal site perhaps can spark off a renewed interest from traditional media. Anders Engström founded Bagisbloggen together with fellow neighbours in a city district of Stockholm in 2009. When they experienced increased coverage from the local newspaper, they did not feel the need to maintain a standalone hyperlocal site any more. Since 2017 it has only existed as a local Facebook page.

Life after the hype

Hyperlocals as a term for mostly new, online approaches to providing local news has been used since the mid-2000s. The phenomena caught a lot of initial, but also passing attention: "The 'hyperlocal' hype was "ballooning and popping", to use the words of Poynter Institute's Matt Thompson.[7]

Katherine Geels sees categorizing small independent media businesses, community news and the blogger type under the same label as a bit restrictive – but she still sees a future for independent publishing: "The flip side of having been a buzz word and a bit of a trend, is that blogging from local areas increased a couple of years ago. But it certainly hasn't died out at all" she says. She also sees things starting to change with communities and communication in a larger perspective, not only locally. For example in the form of independent co-ops built on its digital communities, like Positive News a publication that promotes 'constructive' or 'solutions' journalism as an alternative to mainstream news.

Jonathan Heawood sees a tension within the sector, and thinks that for the next 5-10 years we should keep a close eye on its development: "Will they have to become commercial to be able to survive? Will they need state subsidies?" Perrin describes the journey of hyperlocal websites as a circle: "Strong interest in the beginning, lots of people will come into it, and an awful lot of falling out of it, of churn, as people don't succeed. But then there is a core of fabulous sites, like On the White and Brixton Blog. Some of them struggle from year to year, financially; they are quite open about that."

The future

Even though hyperlocals can be described as a new animal in the news ecology, they have to survive in the same environment that challenges legacy media. A digital start-up today requires fewer resources, but survival and development is another question.

When working on this report, a lot of people have asked me for good examples, or more specifically how a certain hyperlocal has succeeded or been helped by a centre or a network. But perhaps it is time to finally give up the preconception of a silver bullet solution, a role model or a recipe that could be applied broadly. The people that have worked more closely with this sector embrace the diversity and its own potential, and the importance of a place-to-place approach. Networking may strengthen sustainability, lobbying may increase financial preconditions, education may increase quality and press regulations accountability. But a lot of these sites will come and go due to their own personal or local conditions.

Therefore, the most interesting discussion will be how to promote independent and local publishing as a whole. Even though there are different conditions in different countries, I do not doubt that the experiences of an organisation like ICNN can provide valuable insights across nations. Could there be specific ad organizations working for hyperlocal journalists? Could there be a local service charge from developers to fund local news production?

Andy Williams describes the hyperlocal sector as more than just journalism. He does not exclude the idea of supporting certain kinds of hyperlocal news, which are fulfilling useful social and political and democratic purposes, with public subsidies: "We should be targeting any, certainly public money, to newer players. We should be opening up the existing public subsidies that are finding their ways into shareholders' pockets from the large legacy newspapers at the moment.

Perrin also thinks the funding available will be an important factor for the future, or as he puts it: free money. In his experience the most efficient way forward is to fund hyperlocals with small grants: "You will have some loose criteria attached to it, but you are just giving the money to do something as if they were a charity. We learnt that from the work we did with Carnegie UK Trust and the Neighbourhood News Project."

Conclusions

So, after the hype, it is important to adjust expectations. Instead of projecting false hopes, it is important to study the research and the empirically informed evidence, especially for policymakers and people with influence on the future of news and democracy. There are several ways to support financial sustainability and accountable journalism within the sector, as well as acknowledge democracy values in a broader sense. To quote Andy Williams: "I think the hyperlocal sector should be celebrated for what it is, and not denigrated for what it is not."

7 **poynter.org**, 2013.

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