

# Government and collaborative media as platforms

## New democratic initiatives in Helsinki

John Grönvall Arcada UAS, Mats Nylund Arcada UAS

### Introduction

In this paper we explore how the concept of collaborative media is manifested online and offline in communities and platforms in Helsinki. We study how resource exchange activities within online social networking sites (SNS) are generating new forms of super-local communication and media infused communities.

The digitalization of our society has meant a major paradigm shift for the news media industry. We see a declining in sales of printed newspapers and an intensified competition for advertising revenue on the whole. The discourse of the crisis of journalism is comprehensive (Grönvall, 2015; Picard et al., 2010; Spyridou et al., 2013; Wurff and Schoenbach, 2014; Zelizer, 2013). Most media houses are in a situation where new disruptive business models are needed to ensure the future of their success. They either have to adapt and change, or cease to exist (Lehman-Wilzig and Cohen-Avigdor, 2004).

Moreover, the traditional public service media are currently under scrutiny in many European countries. The critique is coming partly from the commercial media who do not qualify for state support and consider public service as competitors (Syvertsen et al., 2014, p. 124). Most of these developments build on the advance of social media platforms (Hermida et al., 2012) and a diverse range of mobile technology applications that effectively remove the need for the middlemen and thus foreshorten the distance between producer and consumer.

News about global affairs is available free via Twitter, Google and Facebook. Since most of national news is also easily obtainable from the web, the only remaining market potential for today's news media industry resides in covering news at the hyper-local level. So far this is a segment that underutilized and also challenging for the global platform conglomerates to control. Concurrently, the whole sociology of consumption in general and the media consumption culture in particular are changing. We are moving from a traditional one-to-many model of mass-media content production towards a many-to-many collaborative social model where information and knowledge sharing through peer-to-peer communication is becoming the norm. In the process, the traditional way of understanding media content as product is giving way to new conducts of interacting with media as a vehicle for provision of services and as an enabler of new experiences, moving from a traditional manufacturing mind-set towards a more service-dominant media logic (Viljakainen, 2015).

Meanwhile, the growing sharing economy has grown into a disruptive force that further challenge these traditional business models by offering platforms that create opportunities for micro work, crowdsourcing and a multitude of online businesses. Consequently, there has been an upsurge of recent scholarly interest in sharing economy concepts (Botsman and Rogers, 2010; John, 2013; Lahti and Selosmaa, 2013; Rifkin, 2014; Rosen et al., 2011; Teubner, 2014) We assume, in accordance with (Jenkins et al., 2013), that these sharing activities are connected to value creation. However, the majority of media companies have yet to discover how to benefit from the pluralism of networked activities that these platforms offer (Margetts et al., 2015).

### *Finland on the forefront of openness culture and collaborative platforms*

Finland has long been on the forefront of the global open source movement and therefore constitutes an excellent laboratory for studying government as platforms. The proficiency in this area largely emerged from the development of the globally endorsed open source operating system Linux and the MySQL database in the early 1990's. These technologies today form the backbone of the Internet.

More recently the openness-culture has also been adopted by the City of Helsinki, which is a pioneer in opening up its data repositories through restful-api's that allow harnessing of a wide range of big data sets. The main development has been accomplished by different organisations loosely related to the city municipalities, mainly the Open knowledge foundation Helsinki' (<http://fi.okfn.org>) and 'Helsinki Region Infoshare' [HRI] (<http://hri.fi>).

Helsinki Region Infoshare is a service that uses open data to support active citizenship, research and journalism by offering an increased transparency towards the municipal decision making process. As the name suggest, the data stems not only from the city of Helsinki, but includes also most of the nearby cities. Altogether there are currently more than 1200 datasets available in areas related to among others: living, work, social services, housing, construction, education, culture, maps, transport and of course municipal budget issues. The data is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International license (CC BY 4.0). The actual data is available through several different application programming interfaces [API] that in a uniform way give access a lot of municipality data that is stored in reasonably well-structured form in XLS, XML and JSON formats

The majority of communication and interaction facilitated by these organizations are social and informal and thus take place within the geographic vicinity of the actors and communities in the city (Foth, 2006, p. 207). As a consequence of the abundance of information available, there has been an upsurge of hacker communities developing in Helsinki. The city wants to encourage developers to come up with new kinds of applications, visualizations and dashboards using Open Data, applications that benefit the citizens.

The coding frenzy and hacking culture has become internationally renowned and supported by the city and different NGO's that organize large developer and risk financing events where prizes for the best new applications are elected (see Open Finland Challenge, Ultrahack, SLUSH). From among these recently developed communication platforms, we focus on those that work as enablers of local interaction, provide local peer-to-peer information and have a potential to encourage local journalism, activism and collaborative engagement.

The article is structured as follows; it starts with a presentation of the research questions and theoretical background including some conceptual foundations. The method and the material used are then presented followed by the findings. Towards the end of the article, the analysis is followed by a discussion about the issues arisen and their potential implications.

### **Aim and research objectives**

The aim of this paper is to study how the notion of government and collaborative media as platforms manifest themselves in the city and what opportunities they bring for the society. The above mentioned developments have led to an increasing plethora of service-platforms for the citizens, both commercial and non-commercial. Our focus is on how these platforms and the hyper-local services they provide are affecting the agency of the citizens. The study aims to answer the following research question:

*How do local collaborative and municipal platforms empower the citizens of Helsinki?*

## **Data and research method**

The data was gathered in two ways. Firstly through semi structured in-depth interviews (Tracy, 2012) with key executive people representing the selected platforms. The interviews were done during the spring of 2015 and supplemented with additional interviews in June 2016 when we learned that the Nearhood service was discontinued.

Secondly, we analysed resource exchange activities on a number of social online sites located in the Helsinki region. The authors were registered for all services and actively took part in the different activities available in order to better understand how the sharing aspects manifest themselves in practice; we thus categorize our complementary method as adaptive virtual ethnography in line with (Hine, 2000).

The criteria for inclusion of the interviewees were that they should form a broad overview of available collaborative sharing economy initiatives in Helsinki.

### *The platforms studied, demarcation*

The platforms in our study enable people to share information, belongings and various forms of assistance and services. The four biggest local online service platforms were chosen, they are: The City Time Bank (Stadin Aikapankki), Sharetribe, Nearhood and Nifty Neighbour (nappinaapuri) and PiggyBag. We also included several local and super-local Facebook groups in our netnography study. After our initial studies of the available platforms (see the authors 2015) we took a particular interest in the platform Nearhood, ([www.nearhood.fi](http://www.nearhood.fi)) which in several ways is breaking new ground in the overlapping fields of digitalization and sharing economy and hyper local community journalism and media production. It bridges interactions between journalists, audiences and automatically generated news-content.

However, while the concept of the platform was promising, the service has recently been discontinued. This makes it even an even more relevant subject to study. In order to better understand the challenges and opportunities of collaborative media platforms in general we go from the generic to the specific by refocusing specifically on the Nearhood platform in order to discover what generic understanding and conclusions we can draw from its lifespan.

## **Background**

The digital technologies we have studied connect people through online services in a peer-to-peer or business-to-peer manner. In general, one can predict that where there is a middleman in the business chain, that person will be bypassed as soon as it becomes technically possible. With location based services and ubiquitous mapping of customer behaviour, more data about people and their shopping habits become available, leading to new assets that are disaggregated and consumed as services. As a consequence, the marginal costs are reduced, prices are cut and revenues will shrink as we approach a zero marginal cost society as described by Rifkin (2014)

As crowd sourced and peer to peer based business ideas flourish, people turn from passive consumers into creative prosumers. Consequently, some of the key concepts we have applied in our study relate in diverse ways to notions of sharing *economy*, a changing *journalistic culture*, the power of *communities* and the empowered citizens. Next we give a short overview to these concepts.

### ***Sharing economy***

The traditional ways of doing business are challenged and the future society will be seeing new economic and social models (van Den Hoff, 2013). Sharing economy has been described as one such trailblazing shift in Western societies (Botsman and Rogers 2010; Lahti and Selosmaa 2013; Rifkin 2014). It is undeniably a global movement, a big trend in social commerce, and represents a potential \$110 billion market (Contreras, 2011)). The sharing economy represents a new way of thinking about business, exchange, value and community.

Nicholas A. John (2013, p. 116) points out that sharing is the fundamental and constitutive activity of Web 2.0 in general, and social networking sites in particular. People prefer having access to services when needed, rather than actually owning the products. He further describes sharing as a cultural practice that is constitutive of all social relations and splits sharing economies into two different groups: economies of production and economies of consumption John (2013: 179). The former has been covered by Benkler, (2006) and Lessig, (2009), the latter however is currently a relatively uncharted territory in academia. Clearly sharing economy constitutes a new environment and new opportunities for production also for the media industry since an increasing number of people consume, use and share media through social networks (Rohn and Nylund 2016). Thus the sharing economy can in essence be defined as peer to peer based, audience-driven cultural practices (Rustrum et al., 2014, p. 31).

### ***From traditional journalistic culture towards a service based culture***

The traditional journalistic way as Thomas Hanitzsch (2007, p. 370) describes it is ‘the arena in which diverse professional ideologies struggle over the dominant interpretation of journalism’s social function and identity’. Mark Deuze (2005) concurrently shows that reality is complex and that the core journalistic values can be determined only by studying how journalists negotiate them, thus the ‘professional ideology’ and ‘collective knowledge’ (Zelizer, 2004) of journalistic institutions are adapting to the altering production climate. Consequently, journalism is in a state of flux (Spyridou et al., 2013). As a result, the journalistic tenets and ideals of corporate media executives are also changing as they face new market imperatives and audience expectations. Viljakainen (2015) shows that a shift in managerial mind-sets can be observed as media companies turn into service businesses, the traditional product- based way of thinking is increasingly shifted into a more collaborative and dynamic service-based mind-set.

Consequently, when the viewers and readers formerly known as the audience are turning into empowered citizens: makers, co-constructors, crowdfunders and peers (Owyang, 2015) the media need to adapt to a many-to-many model of collaborative *communities* rather than depending on the consumers utilizing the traditional one-to-many, mass media “products”. Not surprisingly, these changes are disrupting 150 years of global mass media-logic.

### ***Communities as platforms***

There exists an extensive amount of research on social media and communities both regarding online and offline communities (Gilchrist, 2009). For an extensive literature review of the former, see (Malinen, 2015). When it comes to communities that are present both online and offline however, the research is limited. One exception is the study on Couch Surfing done by Rosen et al. (2011). (Gusfield, 1975) divides communities into two groups, those that are based on a physical neighbourhood and those that are based on human relationships. (Wood and Judikis, 2002) on the other hand identifies six elements that determine whether a community is present:

1. A sense of common purpose(s) or interest(s) among members;
2. An assuming of mutual responsibility;

3. Acknowledgment (at least among members) of interconnectedness;
4. Mutual respect for individual differences;
5. Mutual commitment to the well-being of each other;
6. Commitment by the members to the integrity and wellbeing of the group, that is, the community itself; (Wood, c2002., p. 12)

For an extensive summary of community theory, see (Albinsson and Yasanthi Perera, 2012). Our theoretical framework is based on conceptual model developed by Julia A. Hersberger et al. (2007). They extend the Gusfield model with a four-tiered framework of how information exchange progresses in communities. “The framework integrates models of community, social networks, information exchange and information-sharing behaviours. The framework also accounts for the affective dimensions of virtual communities” (Hersberger et al., 2007, p. 145)

The common denominator for the platforms in our study is that they aim to benefit from the collective innate force of the different communities they address. The users of the services form the core of a paradigm of consumption and production of services and media content. With the paradigm change we see a corresponding change in the agency and empowerment of the citizens.

| Empowered Citizen roles | Distribution & Production  | Changes, Opportunities & Threats   |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Viewers, consumers      | On demand content, Live events, platform interactivity                   | Content creation based on user data, consumer profiles, the end of linear TV?                              |
| Peers, circulators      | Sharing through social media, user Distributed Content                   | Engagement. Value creation, but for whom? "We create the content, Twitter takes the revenues"              |
| Content Co-creators     | User generated content, crowdsourcing                                    | Community-driven content. Participation on a large scale difficult, Second screen apps have the upper hand |
| Makers                  | Youtubers, vloggers, Younowers Professionalization, Production companies | Content-driven innovations. Advertisers switch to Youtube, the winner takes it all.                        |

*Table 1 – citizen empowerment roles*

## **A closer look at the Nearhood platform**

Nearhood is an online platform (in web and app form) that facilitates the sharing processes among citizens and companies. It functions as a framework for collaborative content production. It is a combination of several different functions offerings a classifieds section, an event calendar, a social networking through different forums, advertising space for local companies and most importantly a service that automatically produces relevant news for specific geographic neighbourhoods and areas in the city.

### *Nearhood as a collaborative sharing platform*

Lari Lohikoski, the driving force behind the service, has earlier been a successful developer of the largest Finnish online classifieds service, tori.fi. He describes the initiative as derived from a need to present relevant hyper local information to the people in the neighbourhoods.

There is no media to serve the hyper local needs... e.g. when a bike that clearly was stolen, stood against our neighbour's fence, there was no way for me to make this known in the neighbourhood.

According to Miemo Penttinen, the other founding partner, 'You can follow the whole world via Twitter, but you often don't know your neighbours'. Their answer to this problem, the Nearhood platform, thus gathers and redistributes information coming from a multitude of sources. Using open data and open street maps, they have created a proximity filtering mechanism that scrapes the web for relevant issues related to the specific parts of the City:

... the city makes a lot of decisions, for example related to a climbing frame in the park, but the (municipal) information does not reach the population even though it is relevant for the citizens in the area

When the minutes from the last municipality meeting become available (via the API), the decisions made by the city board are filtered out according to the geographic area they relate to. By looking for key parks, churches, street names, churches etc. - the data is aggregated and key information is presented in text form to the citizens registered with the service in that specific area. This functions what makes Nearhood unique and interesting says Lohikoski:

There are a lot of examples globally of local news aggregation. However our API is unique - we used the open data services a lot, from weather information to positioning action and open street map.

### *Classifieds, service and business model of the Nearhood platform*

The business logic of the Nearhood service is based on local marketing. Ads can be submitted by small and medium sized companies that would like to reach people in specific areas of Helsinki. For citizens the service is free and it functions as a public service information channel for their neighbourhoods. In this way they serve the same function as traditional superlocal newsmagazines. Their goal is to be 'the official news channel of the different city quarters.

We want to be involved in helping local communities flourish. To, help them make a functioning business while at the same time make the world a better place. The revitalization of the local in the nearby area together with aspects concerning global support of important issues, such as climate change, is important (Penttinen 2015).

Lohikoski (2016) thinks there is a business potential a service that lets people nearby rapidly react to special offers from e.g. a barber with a cancelled appointment:

Companies do not have the means to market directly to nearby group of friends. This afternoon all of a sudden come someone has a barber hour for sale for half the price ... While online advertising is often annoying, the local advertising is more informative – not consider spam. Offers suddenly become interesting.

It becomes clear from the interviews that supporting the forming of communities are a key goal for Nearhood. They want to enhance the opportunities for citizen self-mediation and allowing for a new type of neighbourhood collaboration.

### ***Nearhood as service for and by the communities***

In addition to the data from the municipality, inhabitants in the different districts and areas are expected to share media and information in a peer-to-peer manner within four categories on the platform website, these were: *events, classifieds, problem reporting* and a *general discussion segment*.

The latter also incorporates commercial news items. Penttinen divides the community of users into three different roles according to what the users are looking for and how they behave:

1. *General interest*, people looking for info about where the cheapest shopping bag or the coolest children's play park can be found.
2. *Followers of events*, people participating in events if someone comes up with something fun to do
3. *The urban social media enthusiasts* who are interested in local happenings only if they relate to their own specific interests. They want to spend time with people that share their own interest even though they can be physically in different locations, even globally.

For 1 and 2 there are many services, but the third option is not very richly fulfilled yet according to Penttinen:

A global interest in the super local is clearly visible. People's desire to focus on the surrounding area has been noted in different research projects. At the same time the media crisis is slowly killing the few local actors still functional in this field. Clearly there is room for a new solution here, but it is difficult to know what the right business logic for the task is (Penttinen 2015).

However promising the Nearhood concept was in 2012 when it was founded it did not take off. Nonetheless there are valuable insights to be had from the effort; we present some of them in the next section.

### **Lessons learned from the Nearhood platform project**

When the initial interviews carried out in our project in 2015 the Nearhood team were still hopeful that they would find a veritable business partner that would help them fund the venture. However in the spring of 2016 the service was discontinued. In June 2016 in a second interview with Nearhood we asked the CEO Lohikoski, why it failed and what could be done differently.

#### ***Lack of good partners and sponsors***

Having unsuccessfully looked for a crowd sourced form of funding they decided to approach the main Finnish news media companies for partnership:

We went to seek partners, a variety of combinations. One idea was to gather a lot of small players – but that took up too much time and resources. We approached the large media houses and even got some good offers, but we did not want to become too dependent on these companies - married to them for a long time (Lohikoski, 2016).

Also the potential external funders they worked with demanded too much to commitment to make it worthwhile.

The media industry is so bad off, we couldn't find good deals. Clearly though, the local presence is of interest to media houses with online advertising. And rapid reaction to local opportunities and special offers.

Also nonmaterial resources played a roles said Lohikoski, 'with age, family life and your free time becomes valuable'. Thus personal reasons clearly also were a factor when deciding to

discontinue the service. If the founders would still have been in their 20's and worked long hours, they thought they could have made it work.

### *Not reaching a critical mass of users*

However, the main problem was finding a sufficiently broad base of devoted users. The service was first tested in 7 parts of the city. The places where it worked better were in neighbourhoods where they had help from existing communities that helped in establishing interest for the service.

We never reached sufficient audiences, we did not attract enough users, it's a chicken and egg problem. How to activate your users, how to get them involved? That is just the thing. How do you get a critical mass in a specific area? The content must come from somewhere.... It worked well in Kivistö since there was a local association facilitating the process.

Also direct marketing efforts in shopping malls were efficient in drawing the attention from people but it was not enough to actually engage these people into a daily use of the platform.

A few of the shopping centre where physically people to use the service. Gave their email and were inspired, it did wake a lot of interest

Clearly one had not thought it through to the end how to engage the users to an extent where Nearhood would become their first go to choice for publication. In a potentially collaborative situation the users went to Facebook and Twitter instead, as they were used to. Thus the habits of social media sharing would need to be properly understood first when designing this type of a service:

... you need a Top of mind awareness where the first thing that comes to mind is to share the content on Nearhood (not Facebook). It is difficult to get there, so that that is the first user reaction, first thing that comes to mind.

In addition, according to Lohikoski their system was trying to do too many things at once a jack of all trades service. It would have been better to make it a one stop thing and make that one service as good as possible:

[Y]ou must find the path to the users brains! How using the service will become a daily everyday thing. You need to know why someone will use the service, ... today I'd forget the web and focus on the app... Simplicity, that is the key thing. Take one thing and do it well.

In other words, the workings and aim of the service needs to be understood at a glance and one should be able to explain the concept and its idea in a tag-line of three words:

You have to be there you must understand what it is about with the first glance. The problem was that it was a new unknown concept trying to solve too many things at once! When someone asked - what is this? It was hard to explain in one sentence. You could not explain the concept in three words. ... We would need a simpler system.

One of their means to encourage the creation of superlocal narratives (primarily photos and short stories, or 'status updates') were the Emissary scouting arrangement. As a user you could improve your social status in the service by entering into a voluntary agreement with Nearhood.

Helsinki August 12<sup>th</sup> 2016 – working paper to be presented at IPP 2016, Oxford.

As an Emissary you would be a key figure in your neighbourhood and people could count on your engagement in content creation:

But getting the content production into a part of their daily flow, that is really difficult! There were many Emissaries, but since they were volunteers, we could not push them hard into producing something.

When they started out in 2012, there were not that many specialized Facebook groups but now things are changing and the big aggregators are pushing into new niches, also the superlocal perspective is being exploited.

### *Fierce economic competition from the Megaplatforms*

Inevitably the megaplatforms are spreading into the superlocal communities, thus heavily reducing the market potentials for startups like Nearhood:

Facebook takes it all ... it's a Megaplatform which takes everything. It's rather random for what purposes these (facebook) groups have been established... The groups have different agendas .. some have a security agenda where people like discipline and order. We wanted to create a generic platform for everybody. ... it's difficult to predict the needs. For example, children's clothing, women's shoes, seems to work well in these forums.

Likewise, when discussing megatrends, such as the sharing economy, Lohikoski fears that the megaplatforms are seriously stealing the markets for all but a few.

UBER is not Sharing Economy, but the trend exists and is important. But how do you turn it into a viable business? There is always this one huge aggregating service ... there will likely not remain sufficient business options for that many players.. the Megaplatforms are extending also to the super local places.

Lohikoski brings up the subject of the bleak future of traditional printmedia. On the whole most stories and narratives today in papers are no longer found through the print medium but rather from aggregating services like Facebook.

One (magazine) CEO claimed that the newspapers sales will end completely – I think their ability to regenerate, in a way that would demand a cannibalisation of their own company, .. they don't have the courage for this, to give it up. The new tools (media) fulfil these needs better.

As people read headlines on a couple of the larger newspapers webpages most of the shared content spreads via social media:

But the large aggregators dominate, same thing also with the online newspapers, ... the vast majority of the stories are found through social media.

Instead of reading through the full papers, the readers look for content produced by a journalist they trust to tell them the real truth.

Of course, content is still important. The distance between users and producers diminishes continuously. ... people follow bloggers and people who write well. ... how do you turn the connected "Rapport" kind of journalism economically viable? Maybe through crowdfunding. Sponsorship-deals.

Considering a new future for Nearhood is not impossible but it would mean some substantial rethinking and redesigning of the service.

### *New future through further decentralization*

Even though the website has been taken down, the backend still exists and it would take less than a day to reestablish the Nearhood site if a good enough opportunity should arise.

Yes, the code and database are still there. We're willing to take a look at what its future. If we can find a simple and good angle and reason to evoke it.. We had a conceptualization but the idea didn't come out as expected. We wanted to make a self maintaining consumer service... BIG-or-nothing (not something you sell separately to every household).

However, that would require a substantial marketing effort on many levels and a lot of footwork. ... marketing in some way. With a good angle with a good partner to gain visibility might in one of the specific territories, maybe run through all the traders and stores... essentially more footwork. The city cannot support the service directly

Clearly Lohikoski believes that there still is a potential and also a so far un-identified need among the citizens and consumers that could be harnessed for a future version.

People may not even realize that they have such a need. We should have invested more heavily in the fact that "You really have this need " you need to create a connection between the need and the service and the users everyday activities, like in the morning I click the HS app.. it must be concrete, hands on connection.

Decentralization is seen as a solution to many different kinds of problems. (Manor, 1999). Lohikoski is of the same opinion that in order to be able to compete and reduce the influence of the big aggregating services even more and better peer to peer based services are needed.

We'd need a decentralized system not like the centralized Airbnb and Ubers. It is good that such initiatives have arisen (e.g. Nifty neighbour) .. we need even more peer to peer! ... The entire Bitcoin thing - P2P that removes the middle man... Swarming etc. .. the Internet promise of direct communication is slowly coming. What will happen to the large middlemen? ... when you buy directly from China, from a maker or factory... many merchants and dealer here disappears as does the quality assurance.

In the following section of the paper we deduct the answers to the research questions based on the above findings.

## **Conclusions**

Out of the platforms studied, nearhood.fi emerged as a particularly interesting case that in several ways is breaking new ground, not least in the technical integration with the open APIs provided by the government. It also functions as concrete example of sharing economy-principles manifested in a real world context where the citizens are offered new ways of community building through the social media features provided by the technology platform. Moreover it utilizes the automatic generation of journalistic content in a innovative new way, where the government open data platforms are utilized to automatically provide super local news. Information about political decisions that are of key importance to inhabitants in specific areas of the city are passed down the pipeline as automatically generated narratives directly to the citizens. Nevertheless, despite the promising concept, Nearhood is also an informative example of a platform-based initiative that failed. Our belief is that analyzing such 'failures' is as important and interesting as analyzing success stories. We think that the Nearhood case relates in

noteworthy ways both to theories of media, business model development, innovations and communities.

Nearhood stands out as a platform with a business model that has the potential to solve a lot of the present challenges in the media industry and to do it in a socially responsible way, especially when it comes to the hyper-local level. However, the case of Nearhood also shows that a good idea is only a starting point. There is a long way ahead, even after a business plan that on paper, seems to have it all. The business model canvas and similar strategic and managerial tools emphasize the importance of creating innovations that are based on customer needs. The trick is however to be able to identify the real needs. It does not necessarily help to interview the customers, because they usually do not know what their needs are. Nearhood succeeded, by and far, or in technical terms if you like, as a news aggregator and distributor of news and information produced by local authorities. It failed however, to attract a critical mass of news consumers and content creators and co-creators and therefore it did not manage to attract advertisers and consequently it never managed to generate the much needed revenues.

Clearly, the citizen's need to interact with each other on a neighborhood level is there, but this need is increasingly being satisfied by Facebook, especially by its increasingly popular 'group' function. In our interviews with representatives of Nearhood, Facebook stands out as their main rival. The ability of a global platform to be re-invented on a hyper-local level by its users is indeed striking. But the '*top of mind*' scenario, where Nearhood would be the first platform to use when you have something on your mind, is too difficult a challenge when standing in the shadow of the global aggregators like Facebook, Twitter and Google.

Looking for the generic in this specific case we conclude that while Nearhood in many ways promised to be 'the' disruptive innovation providing for a local collaborative and municipal platform that would help empower the citizens of Helsinki, in order for this type services to succeed and fulfil a democratic purpose, it will be necessary for the citizens of Helsinki to show a keener interest in what is going on within their neighbourhood. However, it is a real challenge for local and governmental media platforms to move up the market. Displacing the established global aggregators is hard, even on a super local arena. Then again, this situation is not that surprising when considering the inherent monopolization tendency in the current digital media logic and platform economies.

## Funding

This research was funded by the Helsinki Metropolitan Region Urban Research Program. The network is research partnership between University of Helsinki, Hanken the Swedish Business School, Diakonia-, Metropolia-, HAAGA-HELIA-, LAUREA-, ARCADA-, HUMAK-, HAMK- and LAMK- Universities of Applied Sciences, and the Cities of Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa and Lahti as well as Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Finance. The program develops and funds multidisciplinary urban research projects and related development activities carried out in the participating universities and universities of applied sciences. Its main goal is to improve the use of scientific research data and results as the basis of decision-making as well as seek best practices and new innovative operations models between participating cities, universities, universities of applied sciences and the state.

## References

- Albinsson, P.A., Yasanthi Perera, B., 2012. Alternative marketplaces in the 21st century: Building community through sharing events: Alternative marketplaces in the 21st century. *J. Consum. Behav.* 11, 303–315. doi:10.1002/cb.1389
- Benkler, Y., 2006. *The wealth of networks: how social production transforms markets and freedom.* Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Botsman, R., Rogers, R., 2010. *What's Mine Is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption.* HarperBusiness, New York.
- Contreras, J., 2011. MIT Sloan Grad Discusses Sharing Economy. MIT Sloan Experts.
- Deuze, M., 2005. What is journalism?: Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism* 6, 442–464. doi:10.1177/1464884905056815
- Foth, M., 2006. Network action research. *Action Res.* 4, 205–226. doi:10.1177/1476750306063992
- Gilchrist, A., 2009. *The Well-Connected Community, Second Edition.*
- Grönvall, J., 2015. De-coupling of journalism and democracy: Empirical insights from discussions with leading Nordic media executives. *Journalism* 16, 1027–1044. doi:10.1177/1464884914554174
- Gusfield, J.R., 1975. *Community: A Critical Response.* Harper & Row.
- Hanitzsch, T., 2007. Deconstructing Journalism Culture: Toward a Universal Theory. *Commun. Theory* 17, 367–385. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2885.2007.00303.x
- Hermida, A., Fletcher, F., Korell, D., Logan, D., 2012. SHARE, LIKE, RECOMMEND: Decoding the social media news consumer. *Journal. Stud.* 13, 815–824. doi:10.1080/1461670X.2012.664430
- Hersberger, J.A., Murray, A.L., Rioux, K.S., 2007. Examining information exchange and virtual communities: an emergent framework. *Online Inf. Rev.* 31, 135–147. doi:10.1108/14684520710747194
- Hine, C., 2000. *Virtual Ethnography.* SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Jenkins, H., Ford, S., Green, J., 2013. *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture.* NYU Press, New York ; London.
- John, N.A., 2013. The Social Logics of Sharing. *Commun. Rev.* 16, 113–131. doi:10.1080/10714421.2013.807119
- Lahti, V.-M., Selosmaa, J., 2013. *A Fair Share: Towards a New Collaborative Economy.* Atena.
- Lehman-Wilzig, S., Cohen-Avigdor, N., 2004. The natural life cycle of new media evolution Inter-media struggle for survival in the internet age. *New Media Soc.* 6, 707–730. doi:10.1177/146144804042524
- Lessig, L., 2009. *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy.* Penguin Books, New York.
- Malinen, S., 2015. Understanding user participation in online communities: A systematic literature review of empirical studies. *Comput. Hum. Behav.* 46, 228–238. doi:10.1016/j.chb.2015.01.004
- Manor, J., 1999. *The Political Economy of Democratic Decentralization.* World Bank.
- Margetts, H., John, P., Hale, S., Yasserli, T., 2015. *Political Turbulence: How Social Media Shape Collective Action.* Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Owyang, J., 2015. *Report: The New Rules of the Collaborative Economy, 2015 Data on the Rise of Sharing | Web Strategy by Jeremiah Owyang | Digital Business.*
- Picard, R.G., Wunsch-Vincent, S., Esser, F., Bruggemann, M., Nieminen, H., Antheaume, A., Lloyd, J., Schudson, M., 2010. *The Changing Business of Journalism and Its Implications for Democracy, 1st ed.* Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism.

- Rifkin, J., 2014. *The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism*. Palgrave Macmillan Trade, New York.
- Rosen, D., Lafontaine, P.R., Hendrickson, B., 2011. CouchSurfing: Belonging and trust in a globally cooperative online social network. *New Media Soc.* 13, 981–998. doi:10.1177/1461444810390341
- Rustrum, C., Stempinski, G., Liss, A., 2014. *It's a Shareable Life: A Practical Guide on Sharing*. Shareable Life.
- Spyridou, L.-P., Matsiola, M., Veglis, A., Kalliris, G., Dimoulas, C., 2013. Journalism in a state of flux: Journalists as agents of technology innovation and emerging news practices. *Int. Commun. Gaz.* 75, 76–98. doi:10.1177/1748048512461763
- Syvertsen, T., PhD, D.O.J.M., Moe, H., Enli, G.S., 2014. *The Media Welfare State: Nordic Media in the Digital Era*. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
- Teubner, T., 2014. Thoughts on the sharing economy, in: *Proceedings of the International Conference on E-Commerce*. pp. 322–326.
- Tracy, S.J., 2012. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*. Wiley.
- van Den Hoff, R., 2013. boek\_engels-def.indd - society30updated.pdf [WWW Document]. URL [http://www.society30.com/download\\_book/society30updated.pdf](http://www.society30.com/download_book/society30updated.pdf) (accessed 3.15.16).
- Viljakainen, A., 2015. Exploring the transformation of media sector through the lens of service-dominant (S-D) logic. doi:10.13140/RG.2.1.2100.4325
- Wood, G.S., c2002. *Conversations on community theory /*. Purdue University Press, West Lafayette, Ind. :
- Wood, G.S., Judikis, J.C., 2002. *Conversations on Community Theory*. Purdue University Press.
- Wurff, R. van der, Schoenbach, K., 2014. Civic and Citizen Demands of News Media and Journalists What Does the Audience Expect from Good Journalism? *Journal. Mass Commun. Q.* 91, 433–451. doi:10.1177/1077699014538974
- Zelizer, B., 2013. On the shelf life of democracy in journalism scholarship. *Journalism* 14, 459–473. doi:10.1177/1464884912464179
- Zelizer, B., 2004. When facts, truth, and reality are God- terms: on journalism's uneasy place in cultural studies. *Commun. Crit. Stud.* 1, 100–119. doi:10.1080/1479142042000180953