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## Community media and design: insight journalism as a method for innovation

**Article (Accepted version)  
(Refereed)**

**Original citation:**

Blum-Ross, Alicia, Mills, John, Egglestone, Paul and Frohlich, David (2013) *Community media and design: insight journalism as a method for innovation*. [Journal of Media Practice](#), 14 (3). pp. 171-192. ISSN 1468-2753

DOI: [10.1386/jmpr.14.3.171\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/jmpr.14.3.171_1)

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Available in LSE Research Online: August 2015

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***Title***

**Community media and design:  
Insight Journalism as a method for innovation**

***Abstract***

This paper details the benefits and challenges of *Insight Journalism*, a community engagement and research methodology developed by the interdisciplinary Bespoke project. Based in two under-resourced urban neighbourhoods in North West England, Bespoke combined community media with participatory digital design by supporting local residents to create a series of 'old' and 'new' media outputs that were exhibited locally and used within an innovative design process. The digital designs inspired by the journalism were then built by the Bespoke team and deployed within the local area, where Insight Journalists evaluated their reception. Based on our experiences, in this paper we argue that Insight Journalism can provide a vital space for exploring salient civic and social issues, but must be understood as a process of building relationships and competencies, as well as a set of products including the mediated stories and digital designs that resulted from on-going engagement.

***Keywords***

community media, journalism, user-centred research, digital design, civic engagement, participation

## ***Introduction***

In recent years, there have been parallel shifts in the worlds of journalism and design. Facilitated by increasingly accessible ways of engaging and participating in civic life through technology (Jenkins, 2006), journalists and designers have both had to increasingly accept – and often celebrate – the participation of ‘ordinary people’ in the process of creating stories and envisioning new ways of shaping and expressing the worlds around them (Castells, 2009). The impact of mediated participation has affected journalism and design differently. However the activities of ‘citizen journalism’ and ‘participatory design’ have resonant echoes. Although the two fields of intervention do not often intersect, this article explores the findings of a research project specifically engineered to converge these mirrored trends.

Within journalism, there has been an exponential growth in ‘community’ or ‘citizen journalists’. Non-professional media-makers represent, re-create and circulate stories from both intensively local and expansively global social worlds. From neighbourhood blogs to printed newspapers to online and broadcast community television, there are myriad examples where amateurs use forms of ‘old’ and ‘new’ media to depict both spectacular and mundane aspects of contemporary life. However, while community journalism is often heralded as an evolving but vital ingredient in the mediated public sphere, persistent questions remain about the impact of these forms of communication.

Concurrent with the development of community journalism and digital publication tools, such as smartphones, social media, publication platforms and affordable video cameras, that facilitate the creation and dissemination of media, the journalism industry as a whole is currently in a state of evolution and self-examination. Some, such as Beckett (Beckett, 2008), have argued that within a digitally connected or ‘networked’ media landscape, citizen reporters, community journalists, editors and

professional reporters should share and collaborate to fill a journalistic void that the slow decline of the print industry is potentially leaving in its wake. This complex ecosystem involves a multitude of media actors, and emanates from the new reader-publisher relationship paradigm encapsulated by web 2.0, and its ability to digitally link citizens and harness the power of the crowd, described by Shirky (2008) and Rosen (2006). However, within this shared media-sphere sustainability remains an issue, with value and monetary relationships between professional and citizen publishers located at a delicate embryonic stage of evolution.

Another kind of democratisation has emerged in the world of digital and product design. As Sanders & Stappers (2008) put it, the North American tradition of user-centred design is colliding with a Scandinavian tradition of participatory design as companies look to their customers for new forms of innovation. This move was noted around 2005 by a number of authors arguing for firms to pay greater attention to the creative use of their products by lead users or customers (Prahalad & Ramaswamy 2004, von Hippel 2005, Seybold 2006).

The open source software movement, 'app' revolution and crowdsourcing for improvements to software has accelerated this approach, and opportunities are opening up for the co-creation of physical products through developments in computer-assisted manufacturing and low-cost 3D printers. These allow for a more bespoke design process in which new products are tailored to the user groups involved in their development. This has been described as a turn away from mass production to a more craft-based approach to design (Bunnell & Marshall 2009) and can be carried out on an individual or community level. To do this, designers work with communities to engage them in the design process over long periods of time through regular meetings and workshops with stakeholders (e.g. Carroll & Rosson 2007, Bjorgvinsson, Ehn & Hillgren 2010).

Putting these two trends together, we wondered whether there might be some possibility for new forms of community journalism to feed a participatory design

process within a spatially bound community. Working in two under-resourced neighbourhoods in Preston, Lancashire, in the North of England – Callon and Fishwich - the Bespoke project was created to explore whether citizen journalists could act as a conduit for community ‘voice’ in such a participatory design process and provide design ‘insights’. Its aim was to explore the potential for convergence between journalism and design, using geo-specific community journalism as a new form of user engagement in the design process. In addition, we hoped to map out a different function for ‘hyperlocal’ journalism that could provide more action-oriented content for local communities in a more sustainable way. This paper presents an in-depth exploration of our findings, with an emphasis on the training and practice of the community-level media-makers we came to call ‘Insight Journalists.’

The findings from this project have wider ramifications for those working both within the fields of design research and citizen/community journalism. We suggest here that Insight Journalism can provide a vital and currently underdeveloped space for exploring salient civic and social issues at the local level, and can have a significant impact on wider community consultation efforts. However, our experiences on Bespoke also suggest that community media initiatives are not a panacea able to redress the issues of inequality that are often the backdrop to communities in which they are sited. Equally, we acknowledge that there are continuing hierarchies of power and control present within the context of both journalism and participatory design – with a clear distinction between the ‘expert’ trainers and the community participants in both cases. Ultimately we found that Insight Journalism can provide a unique space for exploring issues and stories, but cannot be understood in isolation from the context in which it is sited.

### ***Background to Bespoke***

Bespoke was composed of an unusually diverse interdisciplinary research team that was funded as part of the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC) 'Digital Economy' programme. Defined by Research Councils UK, the programme aims to understand 'how the novel design and use of digital technologies can contribute to an innovative, healthy economy and inclusive society' (Research Councils UK, 2011). None of the researchers on Bespoke had worked together previously, but shared an interest in forming a research project that could have immediate practical outcomes by collaborating with communities and local partners, and in developing digital media and physical design resources with them. The mixed methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie 2003) of action research embodied a commitment to contribute to academic knowledge whilst solving practical problems (Denzin and Giardina 2009) collaboratively and through participation (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000; Wadsworth 1998). Bespoke was to involve local people and organisations as active partners throughout the process of data collection, analysis and dissemination – innovatively combining storytelling and social media tools with principles and techniques from participatory action research within design (Kemmis and McTaggart 2000: 572).

Though coming from different disciplines, the Bespoke team recognised a shared excitement about the shift towards 'user-created content' (Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007) or 'citizen journalism' (Allan & Thorsen, 2009). Acknowledging that ever-more affordable media technologies offer increased access to public debate, the researchers wondered if there was a potential for some form of amateur media making to be used iteratively within design. The group discussed some of the parallel methodological innovations that have occurred within 'user-centred design' (Coleman, 2007; Eason, 1992; Galer, Harker, & Ziegler, 1992) that have sought to not only allow but to actively encourage the incorporation of user perspectives into a design process. From personas (Pruitt & Grudin, 2003) to cultural-probes (Gaver, 2001) there are myriad ways in

which researchers collect, analyse and disseminate knowledge about potential users and user groups.

Although widely used, these methods have occasionally been criticised for discursively constructing the 'user' in only very limited terms (Massanari, 2010). Although Bespoke broadly falls under the umbrella of 'user-centred design,' where we differed from these practices is on the question of diversity. Traditional user-centred design is often conducted within user-groups considered to have relatively homogenous needs, when working at the level of communities the potential designs users are much more diverse. The idea of working with a wider swathe of people at the level of a community inherently brings together a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Readily acknowledging that the term 'community' is itself a slippery notion, we nonetheless find Delanty's (Delanty, 2003) conception of community as processual and iterative: coalescing around shared interests and spaces rather than fixed geographic communities, wholly relevant to our experiences in Preston.

For this reason, we began to think of ourselves as fostering a 'community journalism' programme, and conducting *community*-centred, rather than user-centred design (c.f. Frohlich et al 2009). The project had two parts, the journalism researchers would train and support local residents to produce differing forms of community journalism, which would in turn be fed into an iterative design process which would include specialists in Product Design, Human-Computer Interaction and Designer-Makers. Throughout, an ethnographer would conduct initial ethnography in Preston and in the dispersed design team. The aims of the project were to develop new methods for conducting community-centred design, build and deploy designs and generate community feedback. Thus there are inevitably many disciplinary perspectives that could be expressed in this article. Rather than focusing on the technical aspects of the designs (for a more detailed design-oriented discussion of our project, see Taylor *et al*, 2012), this paper is based on the perspectives of the ethnographic and journalism

researchers in charting the genesis of the project and critically assessing the development of the method of Insight Journalism.

### ***Methodology***

Methodologically, ethnography built on the study of 'everyday life' was judged to be the most appropriate means of capturing the daily experiences of community journalists and designers. One of the key foci of ethnography is to understand the ways in which 'members of a society conceptualize and interpret their experience' (Basso and Selby 1976: 3), a process that community journalists inherently undertake as they attempt to form stories around the issues raised in both their own and their subjects' lives.

In the initial three months of the project an anthropologist based at the University of Surrey, Katherine Smith, lived in Preston and conducted long-term participant-observation, getting to know local groups and individuals in the Callon and Fishwick neighborhoods. She held semi-structured in-depth interviews with a number of local residents, including not only organisational stakeholders but also people who simply demonstrated interest (whether willing participation or suspicion) in Bespoke. In the second year, the ethnographer Alicia Blum-Ross, also based at the University of Surrey, concentrated more on the experiences of the Insight Journalists, as well as how the project design team interacted with the Insight Journalists and attempted to incorporate their stories into the design process.

The aim of Bespoke was not to work with individual 'citizen journalists' – a term that implies a single individual documenting life as it unfolds around them – but rather to build on the longer-term trajectory of organised community media initiatives that have developed organically worldwide over the past forty years (Boyle, 1997, Halleck, 2002). Community media projects in the UK and beyond have been based on the idea



that 'ordinary people' are able to document and explore their own lives using a variety of different forms of media (Rowbotham and Beynon, 2001, Thumim, 2012). These projects work directly with participants to train them not only in technical media-based skills, but also 'soft skills' including confidence, teamwork and communication. However, the Bespoke project differed from these community media initiatives in a fundamental way. Instead of focusing on the documentation of daily life, Bespoke fostered another output, which was given equal weight. The design team would also take the outputs and attempt to elicit 'insights' from them in order to inform the design process and create a series of digital outputs.

Bespoke's Insight Journalism process was an on-going training and support scheme where a disparate group of non-professional, semi-professional *and* professional journalists – formed from local and nearby Preston residents – were supported to document the life of their community holistically. The loose and evolving group of Insight Journalists had a diverse make-up, with participants having diverse ethnicities, age ranges, genders and occupations. Throughout the project, these community reporters produced a series of multimedia stories about life in Callon and Fishwick. These included: a local newspaper, a series of video and audio stories, photo essays and blog posts – all of which are collated on an interactive and geo-specific website (<http://news.bespokeproject.org>).

The term 'insight' in this paper encompasses numerous roles. The aims of Bespoke's Insight Journalists were to create 'insights' that could be used within the design process. But of equal if not greater importance was the process of allowing local residents and community organisations to share and absorb 'insights' about one another. This often meant a distinct departure from the spectacular (although heated debates occasionally emerged) and towards a privileging of everyday experience. Stories, for example, spanned local fetes, the building of a local pond, community gardens, the opening of a wildlife area, listings and generalised information dissemination.

In this respect, the Insight Journalism methodology served dual purposes. In addition to providing empirical evidence and acting as agent within the wider participatory design process, the idea of community journalism was intended to provide an opportunity to counteract what many local residents identified and characterised as an 'unfair' and unrepresentative image of their areas in local and national press. The area had reached national consciousness after being labeled the 'Race Hate Capital of Britain' (Lusher & Leapman, 2006), after a murder that was later argued not to be racially motivated (Lancashire Evening Post, 2007). Even the local paper, the Lancashire Evening Post (LEP), was cited as accepting the more hyperbolic imaginary associated with Callon, and failing to account for concerted 'clean up' efforts. Though local residents continued to complain about coverage, it was clear that the LEP were attempting to address what was considered to be a 'negative' narrative of Callon by highlighting community engagement initiatives (Lancashire Evening Post, 2009) or a campaign to raise funds for a local community centre.

In this article we detail the specifics of working in Callon and Fishwick, as well as provide a 'warts and all' discussion of the training provided to the Insight Journalists. We then describe the process of 'participatory design' where the design team engaged with the journalism in order to understand the community-level use-ecology their designs sought to be a part of. Finally, we analyse some of the lessons of Bespoke and suggest what we think are the ramifications of this project for community journalism and community-centred design.

### ***Callon and Fishwick***

While the research team on Bespoke was spread across the whole of the UK the two contiguous neighbourhoods of Callon and Fishwick in Preston were selected to be the fieldsites for the project. This selection was made based on the on-going relationship the researchers at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) had formed with

community groups and individuals in the area who were recognised community members and close ties with local press.

The history and geography of the Callon and Fishwick neighborhoods provides important context to understanding Bespoke. While the two areas are in close proximity – separated by a single street - and located within the Fishwick electoral Ward, they are far from heterogeneous. Callon is a 1930s housing estate with mainly Caucasian working-class residents, whereas Fishwick is predominantly 19<sup>th</sup> century terraced housing with a greater majority of residents from the South Asian community. The approximately 2,200 households across the two areas are therefore mixed in terms of ethnic and religious groups, but according to Preston City Council the Fishwick Ward as a whole is amongst the 10 per cent most deprived areas in England. Educational achievement, employment levels and life expectancy are lower than the national average for each measure (Preston City Council, 2009). Notably, since 1997 a multi-million pound investment in housing stock and the formation of local youth groups and other resident groups saw an improvement in the area's fortunes (Contour Homes). According to Contour Homes, one of the area's main housing providers, there is now a minimal level of vacant property and a waiting list to access social housing.

The financial investment in the area has been accompanied by a high degree of on the ground support; fostered by council or public-sector led organisations but in many instances operated and run by local voluntary groups and residents. Bespoke sought to build on links with a diverse range of these local stakeholders, form new relationships and offer budding Insight Journalists the opportunity to produce stories involving them and the project team to place the designs.

### ***Creating and consuming media: hyperlocal platforms and co-design***

An initial realisation was that establishing a team of dedicated Insight Journalists

was easier in theory than it was in practice. As a digital design project inspired by stories of citizen journalism disseminated worldwide via YouTube and other media platforms, the co-Investigators had initially conceived of mainly digital output including online and mobile dissemination. However, the early ethnographic research and extensive interviews conducted by the initial project ethnographer and journalism researchers revealed a strong preference for an analogue product.

As is increasingly acknowledged (CivicWeb Consortium, 2009), just because media technologies are increasingly accessible does not, *de facto*, ensure widening of engaged citizen participation. The reality of disparity in internet access revealed through local fieldwork, as well as existing social barriers to on-line participation, mean that it's not simply enough to build any form of digital 'platform' and expect organic participation. Thus, while the idea of an old-fashioned analogue local newsletter (eventually called *Newspaper!*) was a departure from the 'hyperlocal journalism website' we had initially planned (and continued to develop in tandem with the newspaper) we saw the benefit of a printed newspaper in responding to residents' platform preferences.

*Newspaper!* was co-designed with residents from Callon and Fishwick in a process facilitated by the reporting of a team of young women who called themselves the 'Callon Young Reporters.' These three girls, aged between 11 and 13, used Flip Cameras to investigate what community members wished to see in a local paper, how often it should be distributed and a number of other questions regarding its design and dissemination – thus replicating Bespoke's overall user-centred design methodology.

Providing content for the *Newspaper!* and Bespoke news website again provided a challenge to the premise of the project. Whereas initially there had been the hope that the project might offer an exciting platform to local residents to air experiences, grievances or simply 'tell stories,' in reality we were less than inundated with volunteers. In the end, the process of recruiting journalists was done through fostering on-going

relationships with local organisations and service providers working in the area. Many of the stories submitted to the *Newspaper!* were from representatives of these organisations who were keen to publicise their information. These included housing associations, neighbourhood management teams, local youth schemes and children's clubs, churches, park rangers, scouts, women's groups and schools. Eventually the paper was printed and distributed to all local households and copies were left in public areas, such as local shops, offices and the YMCA-run community centre. The monthly print run totaled 2,500 copies.

It was through increasingly solid relationships with local organisations that the second group of Insight Journalists was recruited. During the first year of the project, Bespoke partnered with housing association Contour Homes. Contour Homes had secured funding from the Future Jobs Fund, a source of support to re-skill and support people who were long-term unemployed. Their hope with this fund was to train and support fifteen Preston residents who had been receiving public benefit in basic media skills. It was hoped this process would help build their confidence and skill sets to prepare them for a return to work. PVM, a not-for-profit organisation that specialises in community and social media, was to deliver the training.

[Figure 1: Bespoke Insight Journalism in action in Callon. *Reproduced courtesy of Garry Cook*]

While the journalists recruited for this scheme did not necessarily live on the Callon and Fishwick estates, they were based in Contour Homes' office in the heart of Callon and tasked with reporting local issues and 'needs'.

By the end of the project's lifespan, and considering the wide variety of groups inputting into the process, the Insight Journalists on Bespoke were a heterogeneous group of contributors whose pieces spanned several forms of media. The group of

Insight Journalists included paid community researchers recruited through the Housing association, semi-professional local journalists, representatives from community groups and service providers in the local area, and a small number of local residents who joined as volunteers.

### ***Training and supporting Insight Journalists***

As the Insight Journalists ranged from complete novices to individuals who had previously conducted professional-level journalism, the training varied due to their previous experience and skill-level. The training was undertaken collaboratively, between Bespoke, Contour Homes and PVM. Throughout the 12-month partnership, training and feedback was offered on a one-to-one basis and via group workshops. These latter sessions were held at UCLan, which offered a wide range of media and facilitation tools.

Based on the individual needs of the Insight Journalists, group workshops were structured around a 'show and tell' dynamic, aimed at fostering a peer-review process through demonstrations of technical best practice and narrative techniques. Woven into the training programme were hands-on mentoring and support covering 'hard' technical skills for example, camera technique, shot-framing, basic editing, the use of social media and sound recording, along with corollary 'soft' skills needed to create successful journalistic pieces. These 'soft' skills included help building confidence amongst the journalists to approach members of the public, to conduct lively interviews, to develop local contacts and to plan a story with a dedicated audience in mind. This also included reinforcement of what makes a 'story' and how stories can be communicated effectively.

Structured training and feedback workshops were held on a weekly basis, with those on the paid scheme receiving the most in-depth training and volunteers and representatives of community organisations receiving support on a more ad hoc basis

via drop in visits from the journalism researchers. Peer-to-peer learning was key, with journalists offering each other training and support where they felt they lacked skills or confidence. Contour Homes also provided training for general employability and workplace conduct, and PVM taught specialist skills such as basic animation. As discussed below, we ultimately found that training for 'soft' skills, including enabling journalists to take on a critical or investigative stance, proved far more challenging than simply teaching basic technical skills.

[Figure 2: Bespoke's weekly training/feedback session at UCLan]

As the project continued, the support increasingly took the form of one-to-one sessions aimed at developing story ideas and mentoring Insight Journalists interested in developing advanced skills or in continuing towards a professional career. When some of the Insight Journalists completed their initial training schemes, they were supported to think more critically about story structures, technical advice and developing contacts. A small group of Insight Journalists continued with the research element of the project until after the designs had been deployed, and have taken part in conferences and workshops the Bespoke team has held subsequently. It is one of the defining features of this project that there has been a conscious emphasis on creating and supporting professional opportunities for those Insight Journalists that have particularly sought them out, both in Callon and Fishwick and beyond. For example, beyond the Bespoke, Contour Homes and PVM collaboration, two Insight Journalists continued to work with Bespoke researchers to develop more advanced skills geared towards starting their own media business.

### ***Incorporating Insight Journalism into Design***

In the first stage of the project, the journalists were given free reign to investigate whatever local activities or issues they found most interesting, with guidance and support. Subjects included: a new community fishing pond, talking to local

charities about the work they undertake in the area and gathering general impressions and views through vox-popping. As the research progressed, the Insight Journalists were given progressively defined briefs, some of which related to the design ideas and eventually to the designs themselves. Stories under this category included pieces on communication and democracy. Other Insight Journalists continued to make films and write stories for *Newspaper!* on topics of their choosing, so the two phases overlapped in terms of the project timeline.

A key question for the project was how to 'translate' the multi-faceted Insight Journalism into actionable insights for the design team. There was a lively on-going internal debate about how much the designers should direct the journalistic process. This hinged on whether the journalists should be trying to produce insights *for design*, or whether it was the job of the designers to extract information from what was produced. Several designers felt journalism was more useful in providing general insights about life in the local area, and inspiring the look and feel of the designs. The video footage, in particular, was cited as a good way of getting to know the 'characters' within the area. As one designer commented, 'the journalism works on one level as a very good form of scene setting. What is the environment you're going to be designing in and who are the actors within that environment?'

Practically, the team developed a series of measures through which journalism was incorporated into the design process. Initially, this meant watching, reading and listening to the journalistic outputs and engaging with the journalists in live question and answer sessions. Using a real-time electronic commentary system, set up at UCLan, designers wrote text-comments – displayed automatically on a communal screen – while watching video pieces or listening to audio stories. The sessions were translated into themes and concepts, from which design ideas were identified and developed. The design team held a press conference to announce the design ideas to Insight Journalists and stakeholders, and then these were then scrutinised by journalism through reporting



on community responses to the concepts. In the latter stages of the project the Bespoke 'editor' John Mills played a key role as interlocutor, translating the themes and ideas of interest to the design team into briefs given to the Insight Journalists. This process continued iteratively, with the journalists producing material, the designers watching, reading and discussing it, creating design ideas (and, eventually, designs), and commissioning further journalism to assess the designs that were deployed.

### ***Case study – Viewpoint***

While the aim of this article is not to discuss in depth the technical aspects of the designs in depth (for a technical exploration, see Taylor *et al*, 2012), we want to briefly illustrate the mechanism of using Insight Journalism as design research through a case study of the development of one of the artifacts. The interactive digital voting and consultation device 'Viewpoint', for example, demonstrates the iterative and reflexive nature of the methodology of Insight Journalism.

Viewpoint emerged from many early Insight Journalism stories demonstrating that while many residents of Callon and Fishwick were often consulted about initiatives in the local area, they didn't feel their opinions were heard. In several video and audio stories, local residents described feeling disconnected from local politics, and when asked about democratic structures they indicated a strong sense of apathy or the feeling that what they said 'didn't matter.' Yet at the same time, local stakeholder groups repeatedly highlighted the efforts they'd made to garner information from residents about their views. In several of the Insight Journalist's interviews with stakeholder groups, they noted that community consultations generally received very low levels of participation, and that organisations grappled with how to collect feedback.

In addition to these explicit references, a lack of 'self-efficacy' (Bandura, 1995) to make an impact was implicitly reported by the Insight Journalists. Several journalists told researchers how they'd spent multiple days trying to conduct interviews with local

residents but were continually turned down on the basis that people felt their views weren't taken seriously. One Insight Journalist described 'it's happened a lot where I've gone up to people to ask them for an interview and they've said "yeah I've got a lot to say but I won't say it to you and I won't say it on camera or I won't say it to anyone because I've talked to people and no one listens."'

Through the journalism, the designers noted the repetition of complaints on both sides about engagement and grappled with how to create a design that would help communication and participation on issues of local relevance. Key to this, it was felt, was responding to the concern that consultations occur with little follow up. The design, then, would need provision for people to receive feedback on what happened as a result of their participation.

This discussion resulted in Viewpoint, which was installed in three locations. A simple voting device; the design has a large digital screen which displays a question posed by residents, community groups or local organisations. The question could be on any subject but must be answerable with a binary voting option. Residents voted by pressing one of two large buttons on the front of the machine or by sending free text messages. The questioner had to respond to the final poll by describing in the following week what forms of action were or would be taken as a result of the community response. For example, one of the questions centred on whether residents felt that dog fouling was a priority issue in the area. Given the overwhelming feedback that dog fouling was problematic (82% of respondents voted that it was a priority problem), the questioner (in this case, the local councilor) was able to provide extra cleaning services and reported back on this the following week.

[Figure 3: Viewpoint in action at Callon's Londis store]

The case of Viewpoint, as with our other designs, demonstrates how Insight Journalism was in essence an iterative process. At each stage of the design process new

journalism was commissioned, and old journalism was referred to. Questions raised by the design team were put to the journalists, and the journalism itself was used as part of the design not only in the conceptual stage, but also throughout the whole of the development and deployment process. For Viewpoint, the journalists not only produced the initial material that inspired the design idea, but also reported back on the deployment of the device. Unlike some of the devices created in Phase 1 of the project, Viewpoint had stronger buy-in from the community from the outset and continues to be used and developed both locally and in new locations as part of on-going research grants beyond the end of the project.

### ***Lessons learnt***

In this final section, we detail some of the central lessons from our experience applying Insight Journalism to the process of participatory design.

#### Insight Journalism was both a process and a product

For digital designers used to working at a fast pace within research environments, the process of setting up Insight Journalism felt lugubrious. However, in the second year of the project, it became increasingly clear that simply conceptualising Insight Journalism as a means to create *outputs* that could be used within design was taking into account only part of the picture. Rather, we began to understand the *process* of conducting the Insight Journalism as equally important to the products created, especially with regard to the institutional and individual relationships that were fostered.

This was true especially for the creation of *Newspaper!* Throughout the project, we maintained a relatively low threshold of entry into what would be considered

'journalism,' not scrutinising the newspaper against some external criteria of 'newsworthiness' but rather allowing it to organically represent and develop the

**Figure 4: The 11th Edition of *Newspaper!***

informational needs of local residents and resident groups. Articles, images, artwork and events listings were welcome and only subjected to a small amount of editing pre-publication. This not only allowed for a generous inclusion of all issues of local concern and relevance, but also tried to ameliorate the perception that a research project 'at the University' would not be relevant to residents.

The value that accessible journalism brought to local groups not only resulted in better outputs and solidified working relationships. Key to this was the newspaper's analogue format. Delivered by hand the newspaper could be considered a paradigmatic example of 'old' media with continuing relevance. A result of this practice was that *Newspaper!* was increasingly seen as a means for local groups to raise the profile of their activities. Hussain Master, one of the staff of the local Fishwick Rangers Youth Development Scheme, told us that *Newspaper!* had been valuable to them in 'promoting our programmes and it just, it saves us time and money... [and] it gives us information though as well, what's going on in the area ourselves.'

Dedicated training was required for 'soft' skills and critical thinking

Training for the Insight Journalists incorporated both technical 'hard' skills and a series of corollary 'soft' skills necessary for creating nuanced journalism. Ultimately, our experience demonstrated that while technical skills were relatively easy to support with training and mentoring, the necessary 'soft' skills were much more difficult to foster. This was particularly revealed through Bespoke's methodological intention of incorporating journalism into design as it specifically required the journalists to interpret and act upon theoretical design concepts and ideas.

This can be understood as another key difference in practice between professionals and community journalists. Whereas professionals have a degree of confidence, and indeed skepticism, many of the Insight Journalists on Bespoke needed a significant amount of support in developing what could be termed 'critical literacy' (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993) or the ability to analyse and decode – or even challenge – institutional statements. Thus, one of the aims of the project was to develop a specific form of 'critical media literacy' (McLaren & Hammer, 1997) in which the journalists would not just 'soak up messages as passive onlookers or 'inert sponges' but rather engage in an ongoing process of interpreting and incorporating such messages' (107), understanding them as situated and contextual.

One way in which this was manifested was in the support the journalists needed to challenge local organisations to push past their 'party line' in interviews and discussions. Where less confident journalists would prepare lists of questions ahead of time and read them almost by rote, those who had more successfully reflected on their training and had higher degrees of personal confidence felt able to think spontaneously or push their interviewee on key points. As one journalist commented later:

I had a list of questions in my head but I also wanted to let the conversation just roll on. I found just going off of a straight list of questions; you don't get the really beautiful comments. Whereas if you can just start the conversation with one question you can then bat it around like a mouse.

While some journalists achieved this, the majority lacked the interrogative stance that allowed them to push figures of authority and question the validity of what they were being told.

By extension, this process replicated itself during interactions with the designers. While the design team intentionally wanted to keep their ideas open and flexible, so that they could be questioned and interrogated by the journalists and those they chose to interview, the lack of skills in this area made this difficult to achieve. For instance, the final phase of the project saw designers present ideas to Insight Journalists, who

gathered community feedback on them. In one striking example, one journalist returned a series of audio interviews conducted with local residents based around a single design concept. New to the role, his difficulty in expressing this concept within an interview scenario is palpable. His interviewee is, at various points, unable to understand exactly what he's describing and the opportunity to elicit feedback is subverted by the reporter's difficulty in expressing the design idea. As one designer noted at the end of the project:

it was [so] abstract to explain... saying we're doing this project on the design process and we want to see if local people can help design things, and you're not able to say what things they're going to make, what's the purpose of it ... made it quite hard to approach the community with that idea.

Listening to the interview it was clear that not only had the journalist not understood the concept as envisioned by the designer, but that the time he had met the designer he had not been confident enough to ask questions of him. On the opposite end, in some cases the close relationships between the designers and the journalists led to an implied feeling of loyalty, and therefore a lessened ability to interrogate and challenge concepts. To some extent, this limited critical appraisal of the prototypes and project as a whole among some of the Insight Journalists, and as such brought the effectiveness of the separate and independent nature of their fourth-estate function into question on both a practical and theoretical level. While the designers attempted to take steps to avoid this, one enthusiastic journalist said (somewhat facetiously) after the project, 'I'd lay down in the street for Bespoke' underlining that ability to maintain a critical stance towards the project was questionable.

#### Insight Journalism was not inevitably a counter-narrative

As described above, the 'mis-representation' of Callon and Fishwick in both the local and national press, from the perspective of local residents, was a key underpinning of the project. As such, one of the central aims of creating a mechanism for local

reporting was to offer local residents an opportunity to form a 'counter-narrative' to this coverage. As Insight Journalism continued, and partnerships with local organisations were formed, it was clear that these organisations were particularly invested in creating 'positive' associations. As a local resident who also holds a prominent position for one of the housing associations in the area told our first project ethnographer:

[the outside reporters] stick their two pence in and they all go and put cameras up here and things like that. They blast our estate all over the place. Reporters focus on that one incident, you know... A young reporter... did a report in the Lancashire Evening Post about Callon. I said to her, 'Where did you get the report from, about the Callon estate? Because it's a bit damaging that'... I said, "How long have you been here?" "Six weeks" [she said]. I said, "What the hell do you know about the Callon Estate?" You know people have got to come on the Estate and look at it. If they just read that report, you know... [people] just go off of the reputation from about ten, fifteen years ago.

The language of 'positive' versus 'negative' representations was oft-referenced by local residents and organisations, but obscures a more complex continuum. At the behest of some of the local organisations some of the early journalism covered local football victories, volunteer awards and other accolades for local youth organisations. Neighbourhood management organisation Unity FM sought to publish news of their activities and calls for additional volunteers, as did local churches, scouts, schools and other groups who utilized the platform.

But this desire to showcase 'positive' images led to occasionally contentious discussions. In one instance, an Insight Journalist produced a light-hearted animated film but which had serious undertones discussing crime in the area. This caused some consternation, as it was felt that his portrayal hadn't taken into account the changes in the area over time and would contribute to the 'negative reputation' of the area. The film was re-edited to show how crime rates had fallen, but this subtle censorship contributed to a discussion of how to bring in multiple perspectives and the necessity to think critically before further vilifying the area. The fact that there was such significant organisational buy-in to the project was therefore a somewhat double-edge sword – the

institutional partners had a certain image of the area that they wanted to project and would influence the Insight Journalists to reflect this in their work.

However, there was scope for more critical depictions, for instance when two Insight Journalists produced a film about how local green spaces could be better used. Through the course of the project, the Insight Journalism – in particular *Newspaper!* – became increasingly embedded in the area. As a result, when the journalism uncovered a specific issue – for instance a story about a local arson attack – there was a rapid commitment from local organisations to combat the problem. Equally, stories that highlighted less savory aspects of the local area (the dog fouling described above, for instance) were turned into ‘good news’ by organisations who promised to do something to remedy them.

In some ways, this implicit struggle over forms of representation can be seen as a key difference in professional versus community journalism practice. While ‘professional journalists’ owe more to their training, honed intuition and experience, they often exhibit little interest in or sensitivity to the desires of local residents and organisations to portray themselves in the best possible light. Equally, professional journalism practice often rests on the idea of providing a ‘balanced’ report, however problematic this may be, highlighting multiple perspectives in the interest of objectivity (Hackett, 1984). Community journalists, on the other hand, are transparently imbricated within the network of power relations at play – and as such will reflect these interests in their outputs.

#### There were competing audiences for Insight Journalism

The Insight Journalism methodology created tension between the competing needs of the different ‘audiences’ it was designed for. While *Newspaper!* was most explicitly oriented to an audience of local residents, the video and audio stories had lower consumption levels. Periodic community screenings were held and the hyperlocal



journalism website gave people an avenue to view or listen to the journalism pieces, but neither had the wide reach of *Newspaper!* Equally, as the project continued, the designers began to play an increasingly central role in determining the shape and topic of stories produced by the journalists through commissions mediated by the Bespoke 'editor'. As this process developed, a variance emerged between the format and content of stories intended for public audiences versus those aimed at the design team.

A film created by a freelance Insight Journalist provides a good example of this tension. In the later stages of the project, he produced a film focusing on a second-phase design and included lengthy interviews with stakeholder groups and individuals. The film felt long, at twelve minutes, and included rambling interviews that were out of focus. Bespoke's journalism researchers discussed how the film needed to be significantly pared down to be palatable to a general audience, but in contrast it was precisely its unedited qualities that were useful to Bespoke's designers. As a journalism trainer described, for the designers the 'context, the places and the people and all that sort of stuff that are superfluous to the actual story' were useful. In this case, the tension was reconciled by the journalist submitting two versions of his piece, one less edited which was watched and discussed by the designers and one more polished that was included on the public-facing website.

In terms of the content areas of interest to the designers and the journalists, there were both overlaps and divergences. As one designer put it, 'the journalists have to do what they think is interesting' but at the same time, not all topics chosen raised meaty issues the designers felt that they could 'do something about.' This caused some frustration, but ultimately it was felt that the needs of the community should be prioritised with regard to the format and content of the journalism. However, the fact that the needs of the designers and the community itself were not the same, vis a vis the journalism, demonstrates a fundamental conflict in the project design. Community

journalism cannot invariably be all things to all audiences, and as such if local needs are prioritised other needs (in this case, design needs) may be more difficult to parse.

### ***Conclusion***

Through our work on Bespoke, we discovered there is some helpful common ground between the philosophical positions of journalism and design, which naturally link the disciplines. It is not generally within the gift of journalism nor the duty of journalists to present solutions or resolutions to the issues its practice uncovers. Designers, on the other hand, need ‘problems’ to respond to and good design is the product of a deep understanding of a problem.

Insight Journalism sees journalism as a process of ‘filtering and mediation’ (Goode, 2009) that interpolates between the world as it exists and procedures of meaningful intervention. The process of Insight Journalism is similar to professional journalism as journalists follow their instincts for stories and publish those deemed to be of interest to their primary audience. As is the case for professional journalists, there are occasionally tensions between the requirements of reaching different audiences – in this case encompassing both local viewers and designers with digital technology in mind. However, it is our contention that the process of equipping people with the skills, technologies and support and encouraging them to tell stories about where they live from a range of perspectives, will over a sufficient period of time inevitably present meaty issues to respond to. Our experience on Bespoke hinted at this, but though the scale of the project was longer than many research projects, these relationships still needed to be further developed. Happily there has been follow-up to the project in the form of further short-term investigations into Insight Journalism. Paul Egglestone and Jon Rogers have established small reporting teams at the Sleep No More theatre production in New York, and at the UnBox design festival in Delhi, India. These schemes

have sought to foster and develop the dynamic between journalistic storytelling and the creation of 'insights' to designers, and a wider stakeholder audience.

Our experiences on Bespoke and beyond have highlighted that Insight Journalism is a holistic process that needs to be iterative in order to be successful. The design team had to consider not only the *outputs* generated by the Insight Journalists, but also the knowledge gained as part of the *process* of generating them. This required methodological rigour but also room for creativity to not only identify and catalogue recurring issues, but to create inspired ideas in response to the issues raised.

Where the Insight Journalism provided new opportunities for the design team was in immersing them in the texture of life in Callon and Fishwick, in a way they had not previously experienced in other user-research projects. For the designers, Insight Journalism constructed both face-to-face and mediated relationships that offered a new way of learning about life in an area characterised by past disenfranchisement. In contrast to traditional forms of user-research, Insight Journalism distilled and incorporated a wide range of voices and perspectives in a way that preserved complexity.

For the journalism researchers Bespoke offered an opportunity to reimagine how hyperlocal journalism could be created and curated within a community, and, through the creation of design insights (and ultimately designs), provide an alternative way in which it could be absorbed, understood and acted upon. In offering the opportunity for Insight Journalists to question the designers and garner community opinion on the designs, the project sought and, to some extent, retained journalism's fourth estate function to hold those with influence to account on behalf of the community.

For the community, Bespoke created a group of representatives whose primary responsibility was to gather stories, receive training, and develop personal relationships. The stories for and about local groups found audiences, and as a whole the

project has proved sustainable in growing into new and dynamic forms of community engagement, and providing paid employment for a sub-section of participants. There was also a peripheral but potentially significant impact for residents and groups encountering the research process either by directly interacting with the team, or through monitoring the development of *Newspaper!* and the installation of designs. As Bespoke concluded, a number of community members told researchers that, for them, an important and successful element of the project was its ability to connect local voices with visible outcomes, some of which produced tangible local benefits. These were embodied in the hyperlocal media and a range of digital designs, but also through the creation of training provision, access to the university and the presence of 'innovation' in a tangible form in the community. One youth leader went as far as describing this element of the research as 'amazing'.

However the project was not able to ameliorate the underlying context of power relations neither in the local area, nor within the context of academic research. While we ultimately feel the method of Insight Journalism was helpful in democratising the design process by giving more direct access to a range of voices and perspectives – and in being led by local residents rather than mandated by designers – the project did not operate within a vacuum. The process of Insight Journalism was established to avoid top-down workshops where designers prompted thinking about 'design requirements' in their own language, and yet at times they lamented the fact that the Insight Journalism was not entirely legible to them in a format they felt was actionable. In offering a greater level of relationality and flexibility, Insight Journalism did not match up to narrowly defined 'user needs' which was both a unique benefit of the project and at times a source of frustration.

Equally, for community members, Insight Journalism made great strides in increasing the transparency of the design process, and in forming personal relationships between university 'experts' and local residents. However, inevitably there were

conflicts between the needs of these two partners. Insight Journalism as a methodology was able to bring together a wide range of voices and perspectives from the community, but perhaps less able to deal with individual complaints or desires.

Ultimately we found that Insight Journalism was a potentially widely relevant form of applied community journalism. While no single methodology will entirely address the contexts of power and inequality often at play within marginalised communities, we suggest that Insight Journalism presents an innovative avenue for bringing together those who have vitally important stories to tell, with those who have the resources and capability to deliver responses, both within and beyond design.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Bespoke was comprised of a multi-disciplined research team, which in addition to the authors of this paper, included: Sean Smith and Heather Ritchie (University of Central Lancashire); Dr. Justin Marshall (University College Falmouth); Dr. Jon Rogers and Mike Shorter (University of Dundee); Prof. Patrick Olivier, Dr. Nick Taylor, James Thomas and Gavin Wood (University of Newcastle) and Katie Smith (University of Surrey).

We would also like to thank the Callon and Fishwick community, Bespoke's Insight Journalists and participants and stakeholders throughout in Preston who made the research possible.

Finally, we would like to thank RCUK for funding the Bespoke project.

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