

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: Canterbury Christ Church University
Unit of Assessment: Communication, Cultural and Media Studies, Library and Information Management (36)
Title of case study: Enhancing Public and Professional Understanding of Digital Transformations Through Research on Communities
1. Summary of the impact

The research in this case study explored how media and cultural practices of communities are transforming in the digital age, and addressed the ways in which digital tools can enhance the lives of communities. There have been two main areas of impact: (1) contributing to the preservation, conservation and presentation of cultural heritage of communities; and (2) enhancing public and professional understanding of digital transformations in communities. The two main beneficiaries have been (i) local communities, and organisations working with and for communities in the South East of England, and (ii) professional communities of journalists and communicators in the UK and Germany.

2. Underpinning research

This body of research features work from Dr Agnes **Gulyas** (Lecturer 1998-2000; Senior Lecturer 2000-2006; Principal Lecturer 2006-2013; Reader 2013-) and Dr Karen **Shepherdson** (Lecturer 1998-2000; Senior Lecturer 2000-2006; Principal Lecturer 2006-). Both have researched the changing media and cultural practices of communities in the digital age. The specific focus of their projects varied, but overall the body of research analysed the impacts of digital transformations in communities as well as the opportunities digital tools offer for enhancing the lives of communities. A distinctive feature of the work is the application of action research methods in some of the projects. This led to impact taking place during the research process, as beneficiaries have been part of the study.

The research has revealed that digital transformations can and do have positive effects on communities, but these benefits can be fragmented and divisive along the lines of digital divides. Action research projects have focused on areas that are disadvantaged or left behind because they are not easily or cheaply converted to digital. **Shepherdson's** *South East Archive of Seaside Photography* (SEAS Photography) project (see section 3: 1) has focused on the preservation, conservation and presentation of the cultural heritage of communities by creating a digital archive of perishable photographs of people's lives on the South East coast taken during the heyday of the British coastal resort in the 20th century. SEAS Photography provides a research environment for critically and creatively engaging with visual interpretations of seaside culture and is currently (2012-2014) collating over 40,000 images produced by the Sunbeam Company. Another strand of the project has concentrated on locating collecting commercial seaside photographs in local communities as well as archiving them. SEAS Photography has created new knowledge through the preservation, archiving, and interpretation of an overlooked area of Britain's cultural heritage.

One strand of **Gulyas'** research (see section 3: 2 and 3), focusing on changes in local communication and local media, has showed that while digital tools are increasingly used in local communities, developments are geographically patchy and stratified because of digital divides. Findings also demonstrated that traditional local media are in decline partly because of changing audience behaviour and partly because digital transformations have led to the collapse of long-established business models. To address the issue of the digital divide in local communication, **Gulyas'** action research projects aimed to assist third sector organisations (i.e. voluntary and non-profit) in the South East of England to develop strategic and effective use of social media tools in order to enhance public engagement and augment their work in the communities they serve. These projects included: *Developing a Prototype Social Media Toolkit for Community Groups and Organisations* (in partnership with Canterbury District Voluntary Alliance; funded by HEIF - £5,352; November 2011 - July 2012); *Communities, Third Sector Organisations and Social Media* (in partnership with Kent Can, Canterbury District Voluntary Alliance and Canterbury City Council; funded by HEIF - £6,916; November 2012-July 2013); and *Museums in the Digital Age* (in partnership with Museum Development Service for Kent & Medway; funded by Arts Council England - £6,373; June 2013 - March 2014). The studies revealed that voluntary and community sector organisations lack strategic use of social media due to limited resources and digital skills. Addressing this lack of skills was a major component of the action research projects. Another

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strand of **Gulyas'** research (see section 3: 4) explored digital transformation in a professional community. Specifically, the research has analysed patterns of social media use and attitudes by journalists in different countries. It has also examined how professional practices are changing as a result of social media use. The research, which is carried out in partnership with multinational communication company Cision, involved an annual survey as well as interviews with journalists. It has provided country specific analysis of journalistic communities in the UK and Germany as well as international comparisons covering a larger number of states (four countries in 2011 and eight countries in 2012 and in 2013). As well as co-leading on research design and analysis, **Gulyas** developed the framework for the international comparative analysis in the study.

3. References to the research

1. **Archive: Shepherdson** (as curator and director) (2013) *Digital archive - South East Archive of Seaside Photography* (SEAS Photography). Evidence of quality: the project was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund (£75,200) after peer review selection process. The patron of SEAS Photography is the renowned photographer Martin Parr and the Archive also benefits from having Professor Val Williams, Director of Photography and the Archive Research Centre at the London College of Communication, as a Board Member. The project is a partnership with Thanet District Council and Margate Museum.
2. **Book chapter: Gulyas** (2012) 'Changing Business Models and Adaptation Strategies of Local Newspapers' in John Mair, Neil Fowler, Ian Reeves (eds.) *What Do We Mean By Local?*, Arima publishing, pp27-33. Evidence of quality: the output went through a peer review selection process and was published in an edited academic book. The project on which the chapter is based received funding and also went through a peer review selection process (*Empirical study on current trends and challenges in regional media in Kent*; HEIF: £990; October 2009-July 2010). The output was also presented, following a peer review selection process, at the 'The Changing Ecology of the Media', European Media Management Education Association Annual Conference, 5-6 February 2010, University of Westminster.
3. **Book chapter: Gulyas** (2013) 'Public Service Media for Local Communities' in: Gulyas and Hammer (eds.) *Public Service Media in the Digital Age: International Perspectives*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, pp139-154. Evidence of quality: the output went through a peer review selection process and was published in an edited academic book. The project on which it is based received funding and also went through a peer review selection process (*Neighbours Online* - funded by HEIF: £1,901; May-December 2011). The output was presented, following a peer review selection process, at the 'Audiences, Users and Producers of Public Service Content', International Symposium, 23 May 2012, Canterbury Christ Church University.
4. **Journal article: Gulyas** (2013) 'The influence of professional variables on journalists' uses and views of social media: A comparative study of Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK' in: *Digital Journalism*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp270-285. Evidence of quality: the article went through a peer review selection process and was published in an academic journal produced by Taylor & Francis. The output was presented, following a peer review selection process, at the MeCCSA Annual Conference, 11-13 January 2012, University of Bedfordshire.

Outputs 1, 2 and 4 are listed in REF2. Output 3 can be supplied on request.

4. Details of the impact

The body of research has created impact in two main areas:

(1) Contributing to the preservation, conservation and presentation of cultural heritage

The SEAS Photography project's digital archive, under the directorship of **Shepherdson**, has been made publicly accessible and reached a diverse range of audiences through a variety of strategies including its website, curated exhibitions, archive open days, corresponding publications and presentations. The significance of the impact of this work is two-fold. Firstly, by conserving previously perishable and unique photographs in a robust digital format the project has preserved part of the cultural heritage of the South East of England. Secondly, through various presentation strategies it has reached a cross section of the population and enhanced public knowledge about this part of the UK's cultural heritage. This significance is corroborated in the following testimonial from the Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England: [the SEAS Photography archive] "means that many more people are able to gain access to this historic collection of photographs, providing a vivid and fascinating reminder of seaside days on the Isle of Thanet in years gone by.

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The project also gives the local community a chance to enhance and add to the collection by sharing their own Sunbeam pictures." The SEAS Photography website currently includes content of some 3,000 images and provides ready access to a previously inaccessible resource. The website received 131,000 hits by 31 July 2013. In addition, there have been exhibitions and public talks curated and led by **Shepherdson** that have provided opportunities for people to engage with the project (for example, a public exhibition held at The Pie Factory, Margate, 11-17 July 2013; a public lecture given to Margate Museum Friends and Volunteers, November 2012; and a public lecture for the Isle of Thanet Photographic Society, November 2012). In total, more than a thousand people attended these events between November 2012 and July 2013. The project has also provided free short courses and workshops in Margate and Broadstairs covering how to use digital tools to safeguard cultural heritage and record everyday life of communities. Over 80 people attended these by the end of July 2013, enabling members of the public to contribute to the creation and preservation of their own cultural heritage. The significance of the project and its reach are further evidenced by the following testimonial from the Head of Collection, National Media Museum, UK: *"SEAS Photography is contributing to our knowledge and understanding of both twentieth century commercial photography in Britain and the cultural practice of the population at leisure. SEAS Photography is not only preserving images of the past, but also increasing awareness and accessibility of this material for both academics and the general public."*

(2) Enhancing public and professional understanding of digital transformations in communities

The body of work described in this case study has enhanced public understanding of digital transformations in communities through a range of strategies including creation and publication of new knowledge, workshops, public talks, debates and expert advice. **Gulyas'** research provided new evidence and initiated public debate on the impacts of digital transformations on local media and communication. The findings of two empirical research projects, *Empirical study on current trends and challenges in regional media in Kent* and *Neighbours Online* showed how local communication is changing and raised concerns about implications for local democracies. The significance of this work is that it provided data that had not been available before and raised public knowledge of and awareness about the topic. The impact of this research is evidenced by the different ways it has been followed up: a public debate on 'Crisis in Local Democracy?' (05/2010, Canterbury attended by 90) chaired by **Gulyas** with contributions from key local media and local political figures; a public research seminar given by **Gulyas** on 'Regional Media in Crisis' (06/12/2009, Canterbury); and media exposure, including an interview with **Gulyas** on BBC Radio Kent (03/2012), and coverage in the Media Guardian (09/05/2012) and Kent Online (23/03/2012).

Gulyas' action research projects (*Developing a Prototype Social Media Toolkit for Community Groups and Organisations and Communities, Third Sector Organisations and Social Media*) worked with local and regional public bodies and voluntary and community sector organisations. The projects, led by **Gulyas**, aimed to support the latter in developing their use of digital tools, in particular social media, in order to enhance public engagement and augment their work in the communities they serve. Through the collection, analysis and presentation of primary data, the research has improved understanding of social media use in the voluntary and community sector as well as identified organisational barriers and needs. The projects involved supporting voluntary and community sector organisations through workshops (free of charge), one-to-one support, as well as stakeholder events which explored the benefits of social media as well as issues with their use and implementation. There have been three workshops (07/2012 - 'Social media essentials'; 04/2013 - 'Social media strategy; 06/2013 - 'Community building and fundraising with social media') led by **Gulyas**, which were attended by 57 local third sector organisations demonstrating a wide reach in the area. The sessions gave the organisations tools, tips and templates to support the adoption of social media in their organisation's practices. Impact of the workshops is evidenced by positive feedback received from participants. The significance of this work is confirmed in a testimonial from the Director of Canterbury District Voluntary Alliance (which has about 300 member organisations): *"The Knowledge Exchange project focusing on Social Media Skills and the third sector has been extremely well received amongst the organisations who have taken part. There is a real skills shortage in the sector regarding this area as well as a realisation that social media needs to be increasingly at the centre of what we do and, more importantly, will do in the future. I, personally, have benefited greatly from this project and am adapting my working methods as a result. It is heartening that there is such a beneficial transfer of knowledge between the*

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University and local community organisations especially at a time when the sector is trying to cope with the effects of the current economic situation".

Gulyas' research on social media use and attitudes in journalistic communities in different countries has created impact through the generation of new data and insights into how these digital tools are embedded in professional practices, and their impacts on the profession. The research has reached beneficiaries through publications, online resources and presentations as well as media coverage in different countries with widest dissemination in Germany and the UK. Findings were published online in non-academic professional reports available free of charge. **Gulyas** has co-written international comparative as well as country specific reports on Germany and the UK yearly since 2011. These reports were discussed in a variety of professional outlets and forums. For example, in Germany professional media exposure of the 2012 reports included interviews with **Gulyas** (14/10/2012, 02/10/2012, 29/09/2012 on Cision sites), coverage and commentaries in PRReport (29/10/2012), drehscheibe (12/11/2012), ABZV Universalcode (08/11/2012), JakBlog (11/2012), Redbra.in (24/10/2012), Netzschnipsel.de (28/10/2012), Zimpel.blog (30/10/2012), Verbannde//Talk (11/2012), Lead Digital (24/10/2012), onlinejournalismblog.com (27/10/2012), saarlorlox.businessson.de (24/10/2012), ethority (25/10/2012), presstext (23/10/2012), TheWall (09/2012), Media Digest (19/09/2012) and MediaBistro (20/09/2012). In the UK the report was covered in the Press Gazette (18/09/2012), Journalism.co.uk (19/09/2012), The Drum (18/09/2012), PR Moment (20/09/2012), Graham Jones (19/09/2012), MediaPost (19/09/2012), MediaJobs (20/09/2012), CorpComms (19/09/2012) and NewsReach (19/09/2012). The significance and reach of the research is further evidenced by the testimonial from the Managing Director of Cision Germany GmbH: *"The Social Journalism Study is of major importance in all of the markets it covers (mainly UK, US, Nordics, Germany) and is essential in terms of helping professional communicators to further their understanding of the impact of social media. Results of the study are communicated to the entire industry by means of major press releases (up to 8 across the globe), communicated within industry newsletters (approx. 200,000 subscribers/industry participants – several mailings throughout the year), results are further used within Cision blogs posts (20 posts within various country blogs), used in various online and offline events, including YouTube videos, webinars, client events and are widely reported within the media, online and offline. Unique pageviews for the 2012 study results approaches 40,000 across Sweden, Germany, US and UK (40%) with downloads of about 1,000 across these markets. This study would not be possible within the current format/quality, in terms of output and impact without the support of both participating academics [i.e. Gulyas and Pole]".* **Gulyas** also organised an international symposium on the topic ('Social Media, Journalism and Communication Practitioners' 07/09/2012 Canterbury) attended by 60 academic and industry practitioners from different European countries.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

Reports, reviews, web links or other documented sources of information

- South East Archive of Seaside Photography website (<http://www.seasphotography.org.uk>) and project application and reports (available on request) (impact (1) in section 4)
- Kent Atelier; Sound Production and Archive: 'An Archive of local history': <http://www.mixcloud.com/roger-allen/supporting-information-for-seas/> (impact (1) in section 4)
- Blog post of Gulyas' research on local media organisations by Roy Greenslade, *The Guardian* (09/05/2012): <http://www.theguardian.com/media/greenslade/2012/may/09/local-newspapers-mediabusiness> (impact (2) in section 4)
- Links to online coverage of the Social Media and Journalism 2012 reports: <http://www.cision.com/uk/blog/social-journalism-study-reaction/> (impact (2) in section 4)

Individual users/beneficiaries who could be contacted to corroborate claims

Head of Heritage Lottery Fund South East England (impact (1) in section 4) (**Contact I.D.1**);

Director of the Photography and the Archive Research Centre, London College of Communication (impact (1) in section 4) (**Contact I.D.2**);

Director of Collection, National Media Museum (impact (1) in section 4) (**Contact I.D.3**);

Managing Director, Cision Germany GmbH (impact (2) in section 4) (**Contact I.D.4**);

Director, Canterbury District Voluntary Alliance (impact (2) in section 4) (**Contact I.D.5**).