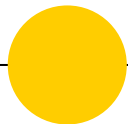


Reinventing the wheel?

How local newsrooms try (or not) to rethink their relationships with their audiences

Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel, Olivier Standaert, Brigitte Sebbah, Laura Amigo

Cardiff - The Future of Journalism conference 2021



Journalists/media and their audiences

- The link to audiences has become a central element of contemporary media development
- As a response to the various crisis that media are going through (crisis of trust, of distribution, and disinterest) and to the new requirements/expectations (place in the digital news ecosystem; participatory culture, etc.)
- This link to audiences is manifested by:
 - Journalistic practices integrating participation (participatory journalism) (Paulussen et al., 2007; Singer et al., 2011)
 - Editorial models that promote engagement (engaged journalism) (Schmidt et al., 2020; Ferrucci, 2020; Wenzel, 2018; Green-Barber Lindsay, 2018)
 - Knowledge of audiences via metrics and, more globally, an "audience turn" consisting in taking into account the demands / interests of audiences and measuring them (Costera Meijer, 2020; Costera Meijer & Kormelink, 2021)
 - New positions dedicated to the link to audiences (community manager, engagement manager, etc.) in news organizations and newsrooms (Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Pignard-Cheyne & Amigo, 2019)

Our perspective

- Necessity to articulate several levels of analysis to be able to comprehensively and deeply understand a possible shift towards audiences :
 - Actions ("initiatives") implemented
 - Journalistic practices, specifically integrating audiences
 - Editorial strategies and accompanying discourses (in particular on the role of media)
 - Organizational and structural level
- Focus on local media in French-speaking Europe
 - Proximity (to audiences) is part of the DNA of local media ([Hess & Waller, 2017](#))
 - Deep transformation of local media (evolution of historical players, digital transition, concentration of the sector, arrival of new players, spectre of information deserts, need to rejuvenate audiences, etc.) ([Gulyas & Baines, 2020](#); [Franklin, 2006](#); [Ali & Radcliff, 2017](#); [Nielsen, 2015](#); [Jenkins & Nielsen, 2020](#))

The LINC project

- How local media in French-speaking Europe (re)think their relationship with their audiences ?
 - What are the initiatives and actions of local media and journalists towards audiences?
 - What is the involvement of audiences in the editorial process?
 - What is the integration of these actions and practices within the media, (organization, strategic aim and practices) ?
- 2 complementary methodological approaches :
 - Creation of a database of local media's initiatives towards their audiences
 - 11 case studies of local media conducted in FR, BE and CH (45 interviews with various profiles within the media)

LINC project (12/2018 - 01/2021) : Nathalie Pignard-Cheynel (project leader), Laura Amigo and David Gerber (Univ. Neuchâtel); Loïc Ballarini (Univ. Lorraine); Franck Bousquet and Brigitte Sebbah (Univ. Toulouse); Benoît Grevisse, Olivier Standaert and Lara Van Dievoet (Univ. Louvain). Funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)

Inventory of media's initiatives towards audiences

Inventory via a participatory form

Public database, freely available at <https://www.unine.ch/ajm/linc>

Limits of the database: what is visible, what is communicated and definable as an "initiative"; no claim to exhaustiveness

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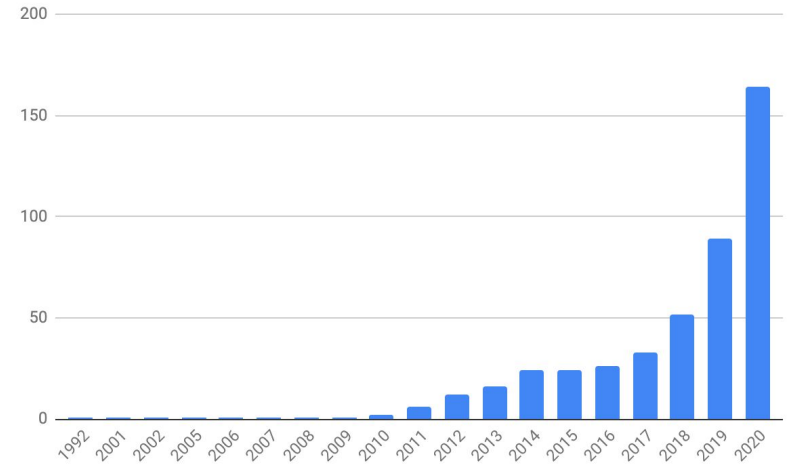
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☐	Nom de l'initiative Radio"	Média	Nature...	Localité/Ré...	Pays	Descriptif synthétique radio, de l'information	Démarrage an...	Liens
								3320910105001985?s=20
242	Rencontre "Face aux usagers"	La Montagne	Presse	Auvergne	France	Organisation d'un échange entre les usagers de la ligne Clermont-Paris et le patron de la SNCF et le secrétaire ...	2019 (septembre)	https://www.lamontagne.fr/clermont-ferrand-63000/actualites/face-aux-usagers
243	Abonné(e)s expert(e)s	Nice Matin	Presse	Nice et Var	France	Panel ouvert aux abonnés experts dans un domaine, afin d'être consultés pour éclairer des dossiers, décrypter de...	2019 (septembre)	https://www.nicematin.com/faits-d-societe/devenez-nos-abonnees-...
244	Super fans	Ma Télé	Télévisi...		Belgi...	Création d'un groupe Facebook de superfans afin de créer une relation privilégiée avec des internautes hyper ...	2019	https://lelabmatele.wordpress.com/2019/09/07/12que-faire-avec-ses-...
245	Nouveaux outils éditoriaux	Mediacités	Numéri...	Lille, Lyon, Nantes, ...	France	Appel aux dons afin de financer de nouveaux outils éditoriaux.	2019	https://www.okpal.com/mediacites/
246	Génie suisse sur la route	RTS	Radio	Suisse romande	Suisse	Le bus de la rédaction de la radio RTS fait étape dans 7 villes romandes à la rencontre de la population afin ...	2019 (août-septembre)	https://www.rts.ch/info/dossiers/2019/elections-federales-2019/1066410
247	Portes ouvertes	Nord Littoral	Presse	Calais	France	Après quelques mois de travaux, le journal invite les lecteurs à découvrir le nouvel agencement de ces locaux.	2019 (octobre)	https://pbs.twimg.com/media/EIRhYAEtT1y.jpg
248	Médias et Citoyens	Groupe Ebra, La Voix du Nord, Ouest-...	Presse	Plusieurs régions	France	Plateforme participative en ligne afin de recueillir des contributions sur plusieurs thèmes portant sur la ...	2019 (octobre-décembre)	https://www.francetvinfo.fr/partena-irs/comment-les-medias-peuvent-ils
249	Charte de bonnes pratiques	Groupe Centre France (not. L'Ech...	Presse	Centre	France	Charte de bonnes pratiques faisant partie d'une volonté de transparence sur la couverture des élections municipales...	2019	https://www.lamontagne.fr/paris-75000/actualites/les-huit-...
250	La liberté vous ouvre sa ruche	La Liberté	Presse	Fribourg	Suisse	Possibilité d'organiser une visite de la rédaction en réservant une date via un formulaire en ligne.	2019	https://www.laliberte.ch/site/landing_redaction/index.php
550 records								

Statistics on the initiatives database

- 550 initiatives listed, representing 142 media, and including 100 "Covid" related initiatives
- The 3 countries and the different types of media are represented
- 456 initiatives are dated; most took place between 2018 and 2020

Media type	Belgium	France	Switzerland	Total
Digital only	0	46	7	53
Newspaper	23	183	125	331
Radio	9	11	44	64
Television	54	27	21	102
Total	86	267	197	550



Diversity of types of initiatives

1. Call for contribution (punctual or thematic)	194	35,3%
2. Permanent feature for sending content	28	5,1%
3. Publication of content sent by audiences	32	5,8%
4. Co-production of content between journalists and audiences	14	2,5%
5. Journalistic training for audiences	8	1,5%
6. Journalistic production "on the road"	20	3,6%
7. Vote on stories	8	1,5%
8. Editorial contest	23	4,2%
9. Making-of content / Behind the scenes of the news factory	10	1,8%
10. Open editorial meeting	12	2,2%
11. News outlet guided tour	14	2,5%
12. Meeting between journalists and audiences	27	4,9%
13. Debate or thematic conference	23	4,2%
14. Readers' panel	16	2,9%
15. Creation & management of an online community	37	6,7%
16. Solidarity action	5	0,9%
17. Crowdfunding campaign	29	5,3%
18. Festive event	12	2,2%
19. Subscribers' club (marketing)	11	2,0%
20. Marketing action	12	2,2%
Other	15	2,7%

We inductively created a categorization of 20 main types of initiatives

This allowed to see the diversity of initiatives but also to study the quantitative distribution between the types of initiatives

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The vast majority of initiatives are in the realm of "classic" participatory journalism with a framework for audiences' contributions

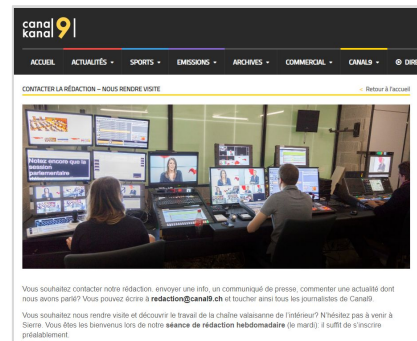
But also initiatives involving collaboration between journalists and audiences



Diversity of types of initiatives

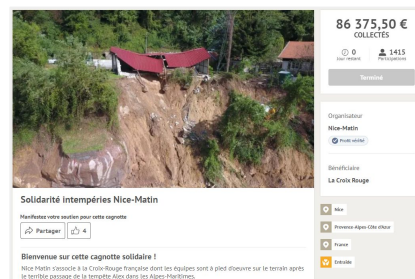
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Other initiatives are part of a process of openness (even transparency), pedagogical approach and interaction between media (mainly via journalists) and audiences



Diversity of types of initiatives

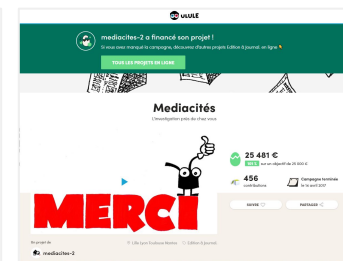
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} Thanks to digital devices, local media create and manage (local) online communities, sometimes in a perspective of solidarity (especially during the Covid)

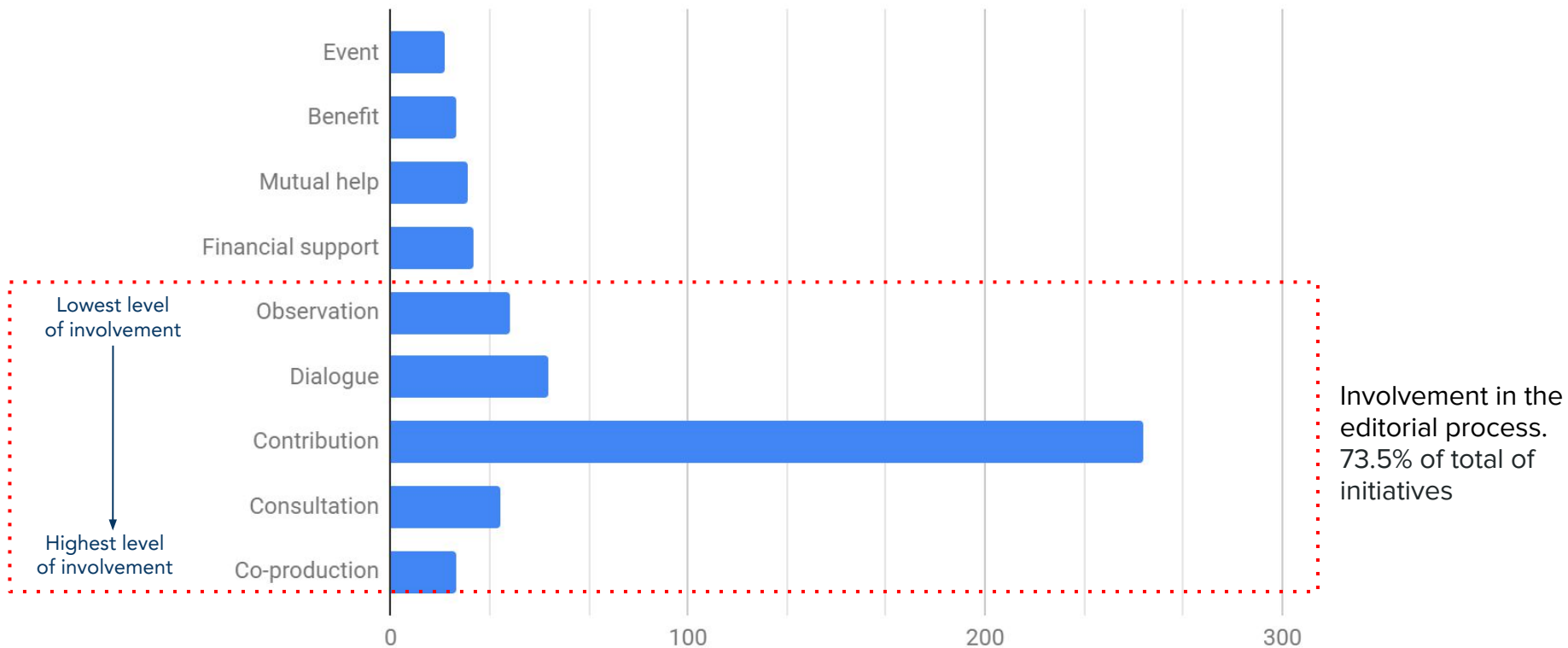
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The inventory also reveals funding or marketing initiatives aimed at building loyalty among "client" audiences

Involvement of audiences in initiatives



From initiatives to case studies

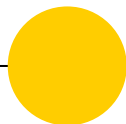
- Database of media's initiatives toward audiences completed with in-depth studies. Need for a deeper analysis of how and why local media launch such initiatives.
 - 11 media case studies in the three countries : Léman Bleu, Tribune de Genève, Nouvelliste (Switzerland), Ma Télé, SudPresse, L'Avenir (Belgium), La Marseillaise, Mediacités, Rue89 Strasbourg, Centre France, Voix du Nord (France)
 - 45 semi-structured interviews (journalists, media management, editors-in-chief, marketing-oriented profiles)
 - Topics: internal organisation & resources; discourse on roles & practices; editorial-managerial strategies

	Public “on the fringe” Media not involved	Public considered Media implicated	Public integrated Media engaged
Regularity and level of integration of initiatives	« One shot » attempts, depending on opportunities and most often bottom-up (carried out by one individual or a small group)	Regular initiatives, in many cases with the support/coordination/supervision of (a part of) the management	Initiatives with a mid/long-term view, integrated in both the editorial and commercial structure; feedbacks & evolutions of the concept
Type of initiatives and relation to the public	The “participation” remains under control and is poorly integrated - Openness and pedagogical efforts but the public is confined to an observer role	Construction/animation of local communities Co-production of content, sometimes with audience training	Engagement of the media in the local area; Involvement of the public in the editorial process (choice of topics, substantive contributions, etc.)
Connections with the editorial line/project	No strategic/global reflection; Few consistency between the discourses/interviewees Fear to see the identity of the media diluted	Implementation of strategies limited to the initiatives and poorly integrated into the editorial production process	The link to the public (and initiatives) is central to the editorial project; Part of a reflection on the role of the media and its place in the territory
Resources	Resources not allocated to empower the links to the public; Poor monitoring of the initiatives (feedback, lessons learned, etc.); Few tools mobilised for improving the knowledge of the public	Limited resources, sometimes leading to handiwork and resourcefulness; Different degrees of follow-up of initiatives	Creation of functions/positions dedicated to strengthen the link to the public; Setting up CSR systems; Monitoring of initiative cycles over time
Type of news media outlets	Traditional and legacy media outlets without any clear vision/application of a digital business and/or editorial model.	“Small” media (“pure player” or hyperlocal broadcasting stations) with a very strong local anchorage but limited human and material resources.	Traditional and legacy media redefining their project/positioning or emerging pure players.

Thank you !

More information on
<https://www.unine.ch/ajm/linc>

@MediasLocaux



Insights and perspectives

- La question du rapport des médias aux publics doit être saisie de manière globale et systémique, en prenant en compte les divers acteurs, pratiques, actions et discours qui y sont impliqués
- Notre recherche dépasse la question de l'audience turn (surtout orienté sur la prise en compte des pratiques des publics, via les data) pour interroger aussi le rôle des médias et des journalistes et le modèle éditorial
- Elle nécessite de croiser
- Des

From initiatives to case studies

- The analysis of the initiatives highlights a few trends:
 - High number of initiatives involving audiences, especially in relation to editorial processes (growing interest in audiences)
 - Permanence (not weakening) of participatory journalism type of initiatives with reactivation during the Covid pandemic
 - Growth of initiatives favoring proximity, transparency and openness to audiences, often through face-to-face events & meetings
 - Pedagogical and dialogical approach more associated with engaged journalism
- However, this remains a superficial understanding of media's efforts towards their audiences
 - Need to study how these initiatives are developed inside the media/newsrooms
 - 11 case studies in the three countries - 45 semi-structured interviews. Topics: internal organisation & resources; discourse on roles & practices; editorial-managerial strategies

Pivot to audiences ?

- Our perspective: articulate several levels of analysis to be able to comprehensively and deeply understand a possible "pivot to audience"
- "Pivot" implies evolutions/changes that take shape over the long term and are structured in practices and organizations
- Where the "audience turn" explores above all the relationship to the audience through metrics and the monitoring of uses and expectations, our perspective involves all manifestations of links to the audience within and outside the editorial process. This also includes integrative and participative practices (participatory journalism, engagement journalism, etc.)

	Publics en marge Média indifférent	Publics considérés Média concerné	Publics intégrés Média engagé
Régularité et intégration des initiatives	Initiatives « one shot », conjoncturelles et souvent le fait d'individus isolés	Initiatives régulières voire récurrentes, avec une impulsion de la direction du média	Initiatives sur le long terme, régulières et structurantes (suivi, rebond, cohérence)
Nature des initiatives et rapport aux publics	Participatif contrôlé et peu intégré Des efforts d'ouverture et pédagogique (publics "observant") reposant sur une image imprécise voire fantasmée des publics et un faible recours aux métriques et outils de connaissance [un peu à part du reste]	Construction/animation de communautés Co-production de contenus et formation des publics	Engagement sur le territoire; implication des publics dans le processus éditorial
Lien au projet éditorial	Pas de réflexion stratégique globale; peu de cohérence dans le discours des acteurs Crainte de la dilution de l'identité du média	Mise en place de stratégies circonscrites aux initiatives mais faiblement intégrée dans le reste de la production éditoriale	Mise en avant du lien aux publics dans le projet éditorial Réflexion sur le rôle du média et sa place dans le territoire, les communautés Des initiatives au coeur du projet éditorial et non à part
Moyens déployés	Moyens non attribués au lien aux publics (fléchés ailleurs, pour la transition numérique notamment) Faible suivi du cycle des initiatives (retours, enseignements, etc.)	Moyens limités, induisant du "bricolage" Suivi des initiatives	Création de fonctions/postes intégrant le lien aux publics Mise en place de dispositifs RSE Suivi de la totalité des cycles des initiatives
Types de médias	Médias locaux "historiques" (ex. La Marseillaise)	Petits médias (type TV locales ou pure player) avec un fort ancrage local / tradition de proximité, mais	Médias historiques en phase de redéfinition de leur projet / positionnement ou pure players (ex

Degree of integration of audience issues within the media

Publics en marge (média indifférent)

Régularité et intégration des initiatives

Initiatives « one shot », conjoncturelles et souvent le fait d'individus isolés

Nature des initiatives

Participatif peu intégré et contrôlé

Lien au projet éditorial

Pas de réflexion stratégique globale et collective

Peu de cohérence dans le discours des acteurs

Crainte de la dilution de l'identité du média

Moyens déployés

Moyens déployés ailleurs (transition numérique notamment)

Faiblesse du suivi de la totalité du cycle d'une initiative (retours des publics)

Lien au public

Image imprécise voire fantasmée des publics; faible recours aux métriques et outils de connaissance

Inscription dans le temps

Publics considérés (média concerné)

Régularité et intégration des initiatives

Initiatives régulières voire récurrentes

Nature des initiatives

Construction/animation de communautés;
co-production, formation des publics

Lien au projet éditorial:

Mise en place de stratégies circonscrites aux initiatives et non reliées pleinement au reste de la production éditoriale

Moyens déployés:

Moyens limités -> bricolage

Suivi des initiatives

Lien au public :

Prise de conscience de la nécessité du lien aux publics par la direction et les journalistes

« Petits médias » type TV locales (ex. Léman Bleu, MaTélé) ou pure player (ex. Rue89 Strasbourg)

Publics intégrés (média engagé)

Régularité et intégration des initiatives

Initiatives régulières en lien à l'ensemble des productions éditoriales et sur le long terme (suivi, rebond); **Articulation cohérente des initiatives**

Nature des initiatives

Engagement

Lien au projet éditorial:

Réflexion sur le rôle du média et sa place dans le territoire, les communautés

Des initiatives au coeur du projet éditorial et non à part

Moyens déployés:

Création de fonctions/postes intégrant le lien aux publics

Mise en place de dispositifs RSE

Suivi de la totalité des cycles des initiatives

Lien au public :

Mise en avant du lien aux publics dans le projet éditorial

Souvent des pure players (identité à construire) ou des

Degree of integration of audience issues within the media



Publics en marge (média indifférent)

- Initiatives « one shot » et souvent le fait d'individus isolés
- Pas de réflexion stratégique globale
- Peu de cohérence dans le discours des acteurs
- Image imprécise voire fantasmée des publics; faible recours aux métriques et outils de connaissance
- Les moyens sont déployés ailleurs (transition numérique notamment)

Médias locaux "historiques" (ex. La Marseillaise)

Publics considérés (média concerné)

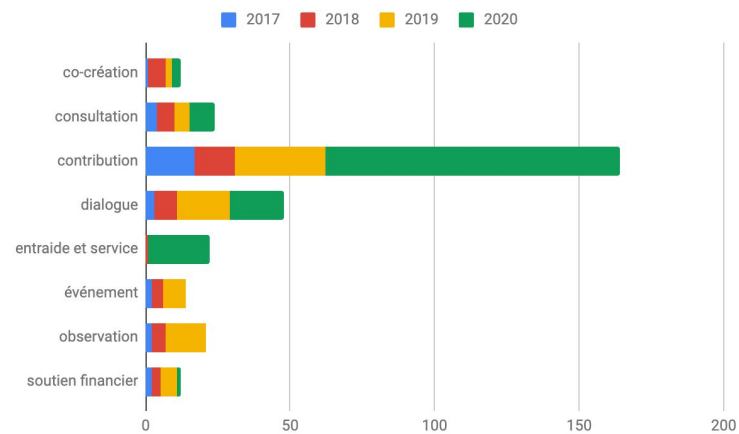
- Initiatives régulières, souvent en lien avec la construction/animation de communautés
- Prise de conscience de la nécessité du lien aux publics par la direction mais :
- Moyens limités -> bricolage

« Petits médias » type TV locales (ex. Léman Bleu, MaTélé) ou pure player (ex. Rue89 Strasbourg)

Publics intégrés (média engagé)

- Réflexion sur le rôle du média et sa place dans le territoire, les communautés
- Mise en avant du lien aux publics dans le projet éditorial
- Création de fonctions/postes intégrant le lien aux publics
- RSE

Souvent des pure players (identité à construire) ou des médias en phase de redéfinition de leur positionnement (ex. Centre France, Médias Cités, VDN)



Les pratiques journalistiques [à compléter]

- Participatory journalism initiatives are still quantitatively the most numerous (sometimes inherited from the past), but sometimes remain superficial and less integrated into the editorial process
- The rise of initiatives (and discourses) aiming to bring media/journalists closer to their audiences: meetings, visits, discussions, debates, etc. and to integrate the reader more into the editorial project (choice of topics, co-creation of content, etc.)
- Une connaissance des publics (métriques) inégale

The link to audiences in the organizations

- Organisational and strategic perspective
- Many initiatives are based on individuals / **short term** vs. integration in a fundamental project
 - Dynamism of digital-only media and traditional media engaged in an overhaul of their editorial and organisational model -> central reflection on the relationship with audiences
- Development of business models that integrate audiences (membership, crowdfunding, etc.)

Theoretical framework

Triple anchorage of the project :

- Socio-political dimension of local media: relationship with the local and the territory, place in the ecosystem and local democratic activity (Gulyas & Baines, 2020; Guimerà, Domingo & Williams, 2018; Nielsen, 2015)
- Socio-economic dimension of local media: contemporary context of crisis and injunctions to evolve and innovate; inclusion in deep restructuring movements (concentration, disappearance, dilution of local anchorage, etc.) (Franklin, 2006; Nielsen, 2015; Ali et al. 2018; Hess and Waller 2017; Jenkins and Nielsen 2018)
- Professional practices and newsroom organisations incorporating audience participation (participatory, engagement, solution journalism, etc.) and more broadly, identifying an audience turn (Singer et al., 2011; Costera Meijer, 2018; Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018)

Is the link to audiences a 'trend'?

- Large number of initiatives, with an intensification during the period of confinement (Covid-19) and related to major events (elections, major debates, disasters, etc.)
- Phenomena of mimetism around certain types of initiatives (readers' cafes, open editorial conferences, etc.), no doubt due to the significant self-mediatisation but also to the structuring of the media landscape (groups, formal and informal collaborations)
- However, a more in-depth analysis shows that an audience turn is very diversely present/visible within the media studied

Focus sur VDN / Centre France

Focus sur médias pour lesquels le rapport aux lecteurs est / devient structurant, intégré dans la ligne éditoriale, etc.

- Centre France, VDN, Médiacités, Rue89, MaTélé ? Léman Bleu ?
- Création de postes dédiés
- Intégration à la ligne éditoriale
- Business models adaptés

“Participatory” is dead, long live “engagement”?

- One of the research questions at the beginning of the project was to look back at the "semi-failure" of participatory journalism ("clash of cultures" - Hermida & Thurman, 2008) to question the possible continuation or renewal in current journalistic practices integrating audiences
- Participatory journalism initiatives are still quantitatively the most numerous (sometimes inherited from the past), but sometimes remain superficial and less integrated into the editorial process

“Participatory” is dead, long live “engagement”?

- The rise of initiatives (and discourses) aiming to bring media/journalists closer to their audiences: meetings, visits, discussions, debates, etc. and to integrate the reader more into the editorial project (choice of topics, co-creation of content, etc.)
- Appearance of the concept of "engagement" and engagement journalism (Batsell, 2015) which can be defined as a journalism more in tune with its audiences, favouring proximity, exchange and conversation, or even positioning itself on topics/causes

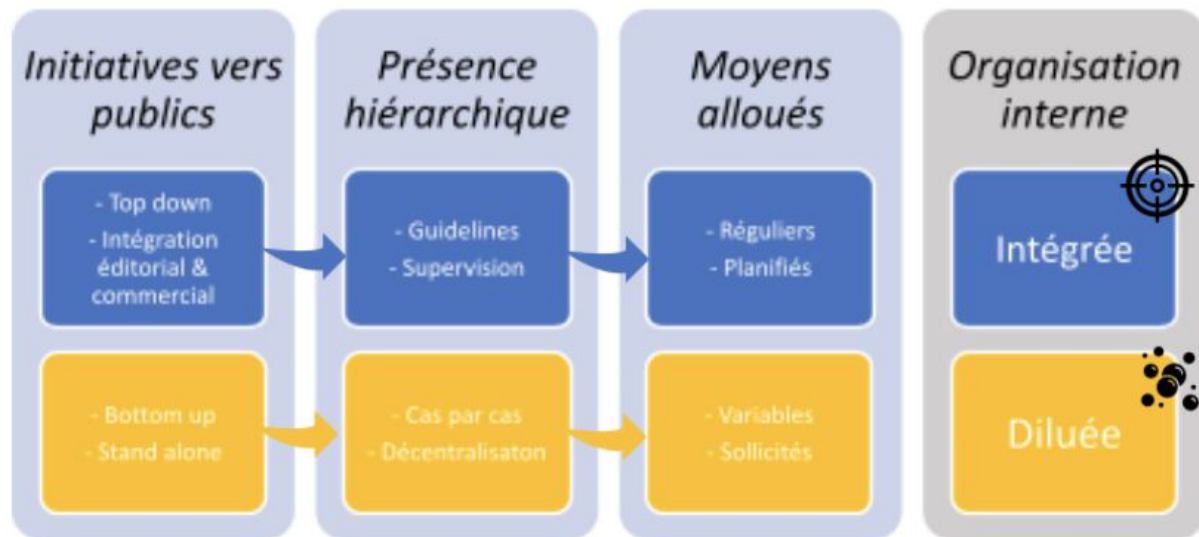
Digital is not necessarily a driving force

- One of LINC's initial hypotheses was that digital was a vehicle for fostering links with audiences (via platforms, certain formats, etc.)
- This hypothesis is rather invalidated (except during the Covid period) with a strong development of direct contact **initiatives** ~~devices~~ between journalists and audiences

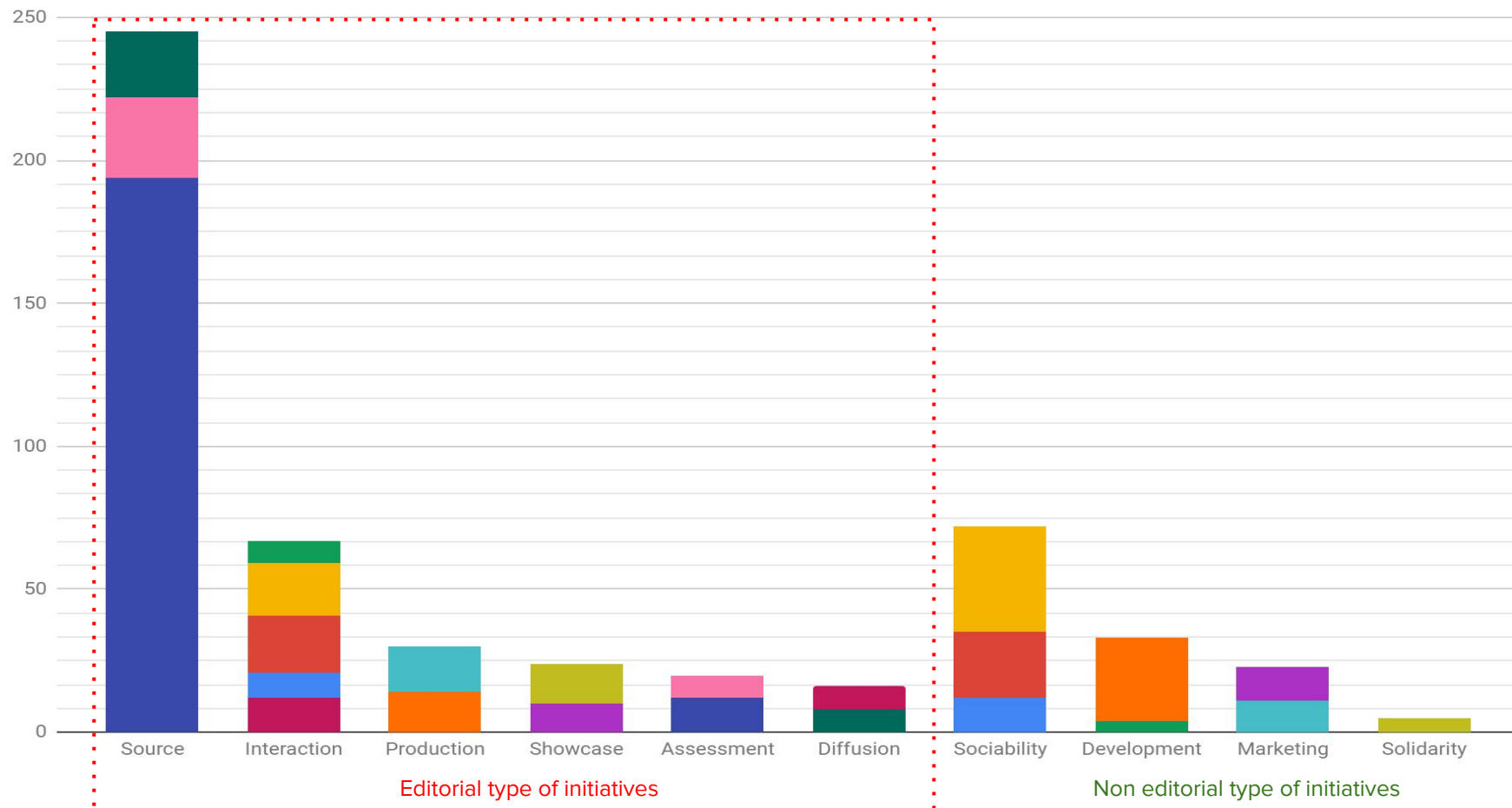
Conclusion

- No real distinctions between the countries studied (Belgium, France, Switzerland)
- The nature, the organisation and the history of the media play a greater role: dynamism of digital-only and of some traditional media engaged in an in-depth overhaul of their editorial and organisational model (*Centre France*, *Voix du Nord*) -> the question of audiences is more central there
- Need to identify the specificities of a local media in this relationship with the public

Tableau 1 : Les modalités organisationnelles des médias locaux face à leurs publics



Diversity of types of initiatives



Degree of integration of audience issues within the media



Publics en marge (média indifférent)

- Initiatives « one shot » et souvent le fait d'individus isolés
- Pas de réflexion stratégique globale
- Peu de cohérence dans le discours des acteurs
- Image imprécise voire fantasmée des publics; faible recours aux métriques et outils de connaissance
- Les moyens sont déployés ailleurs (transition numérique notamment)

Médias locaux "historiques" (ex. La Marseillaise)

Publics considérés (média concerné)

- Initiatives régulières, souvent en lien avec la construction/animation de communautés
- Prise de conscience de la nécessité du lien aux publics par la direction mais :
- Moyens limités -> bricolage

"Petits médias" type TV locales (ex. Léman Bleu, MaTélé) ou pure player (ex. Rue89 Strasbourg)

Publics intégrés (média engagé)

- Réflexion sur le rôle du média et sa place dans le territoire, les communautés
- Mise en avant du lien aux publics dans le projet éditorial
- Création de fonctions/postes intégrant le lien aux publics

- RSE

Souvent des pure players (identité à construire) ou des médias en phase de redéfinition de leur positionnement (ex. Centre France, Médias Cités, VDN)