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Collective Digital Citizenship through Local Memory Websites

Mike de Kreek and Liesbet van Zoonen

In this chapter we discuss a double case study of collective empowerment within local memory websites from the perspective of digital citizenship. Local memory websites offer local residents a platform where they collect and share memories about particular places or experiences in their neighbourhoods and districts. Such digital memories consist of audio recordings, videos, but mainly pictures and text. Researchers and professionals alike have noted the potential of such websites to contribute to the wellbeing of a neighbourhood and its individual residents. In their studies, they have mentioned a wide range of social effects that ultimately could foster a stronger local community (Burgess, 2006; Garde-Hansen, Hoskins, & Reading, 2009; Klæbe, Adkins, Foth, & Hearn, 2009; Stillman & Johanson, 2007). However, it is unclear in the available literature how exactly the particular online dynamics of these websites contribute to these social effects (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013b). Our field study of 80 local memory websites, moreover, suggests that these online dynamics are strongly related to the way the websites are initiated and organised (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013a). These two observations have led us to the question how organisational characteristics are connected to online dynamics, and what kind of social effects these connections produce. Looking for answers, we present a detailed double case study of two local memory websites in Amsterdam: the Memory of East, and the Memory of West.

The two websites are able to facilitate collective empowerment by resisting dominant influences of memory institutions, commercial popular culture and local politics. These findings align with Dahlgren's claim that civic engagement and the acquirement of corresponding competences can manifest themselves in many kinds of public settings (Dahlgren, 2006). In these 'circuits of civic culture' (Dahlgren, 2003) digital citizenship can develop in the context of interlocking processes around practices, identities, values, trust, space and knowledge (Couldry e.a., 2014). However, in this literature, acts of citizenship are predominantly discussed in terms of individual behaviour and possibilities, whereas a collective running a local memory website is also likely to have a social effect on its surrounding community, whether positive or negative. For example, the Memory of East

developed into a website with only a few dominant topics, therewith unintentionally excluding residents who could not identify with these topics. In this chapter we offer insights into such collective acts of citizenship by comparing the emergent online properties and organisational driving forces of the Memories of East and West. In addition, we argue that insights such as these should not remain in the academic realm, but should be fed back into collective community practices. This is illustrated by showing how the research findings helped the involved groups to acquire new literacies about emergent properties of their websites and reconnect the group interest to the public good.

Empowerment Meets Narrative in Online Dynamics

The two cases under study were the Memory of East and the Memory of West, referring to particular neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. Both websites were made by the same community software developer, which makes their online appearance similar to a high degree. The need for a comprehensive study arose out of a close collaboration between researchers and students of our university, the two memory websites and the involved organisations.

In 2001 the Amsterdam Museum started with the preparations for its first neighbourhood exhibition, called “East, an Amsterdam Neighbourhood” (Ernst, 2006). The East area had a highly diverse population demonstrating various lifestyles and social backgrounds. The Amsterdam Museum was also unknown in this neighbourhood, which is why it wanted to promote itself among the inhabitants. In collaboration with a social welfare institute, an outreach project for the neighbourhood was set up in 2003. It consisted of collecting and sharing local memories on a website called the “Memory of East”. The aims with this project consisted of “improving social cohesion and accessibility, increasing skills and helping people to become better acquainted with art and culture, as well as the history of Amsterdam” (Ernst, 2006, p. 110). The exhibition finished in 2004, but the participants are still actively collecting memories and commenting on them online to the present day.

Inspired by the Memory of East, the “Memory of West” was initiated in 2004 by the local government of a city district in “New West” who partnered with a local community centre. In 2000, some of the district’s areas with high concentrations of a few ethno-cultural groups were identified for urban renewal. The aim of urban renewal programs was to foster greater socio-economic diversity and resilience. These redevelopment projects were set up in order to

produce social cohesion by differentiation of: “a larger variety of apartments and environments as well as inhabitants” (translated from Hellinga, 2005, p. 86). In this context, the Memory of West aimed at “increasing social cohesion in Amsterdam West, preventing social isolation among the inhabitants, improving the memory skills of the elderly and creating more tolerance among young and old by means of knowledge and understanding about each other and each other’s past” (translated from Bekker & Helbergen, 2010, p. 1). The website is still active today both in terms of new stories and comments on them in the comment fields.

In order to identify a theoretical framework for conceptualising the social effects of both websites, we conducted a systematic review of the existing literature about local memory websites, from which we developed an analytical model which identifies empowerment on individual, group and community levels (see Figure 1). This model aligns directly with empowerment theory: “a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organisations and neighbourhoods” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 121). Potentially, local memory websites thus offer: “a mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122).

Existing research has identified how individuals can be empowered through their participation in local memory websites, i.e. through experiencing pleasure, acquiring self-confidence or digital skills (Burgess, 2006). Much less is clear, however, about how local memory websites empower specific participating groups, and the wider community in which they operate. In studying the online memory websites of East and West we thus focused on assessing empowerment at the collective levels, specifically on the concepts marked with a letter (A, B, etc.) in Figure 1. Moreover, we were interested in how these aspects of empowerment depended on the particular ways the websites were organised. Six organisational dimensions were identified on the basis of a field study of 80 local memory websites: the context, the participating partners, their aims, the characteristics of the memories, the ways of collecting them and the website’s affordances (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013a).

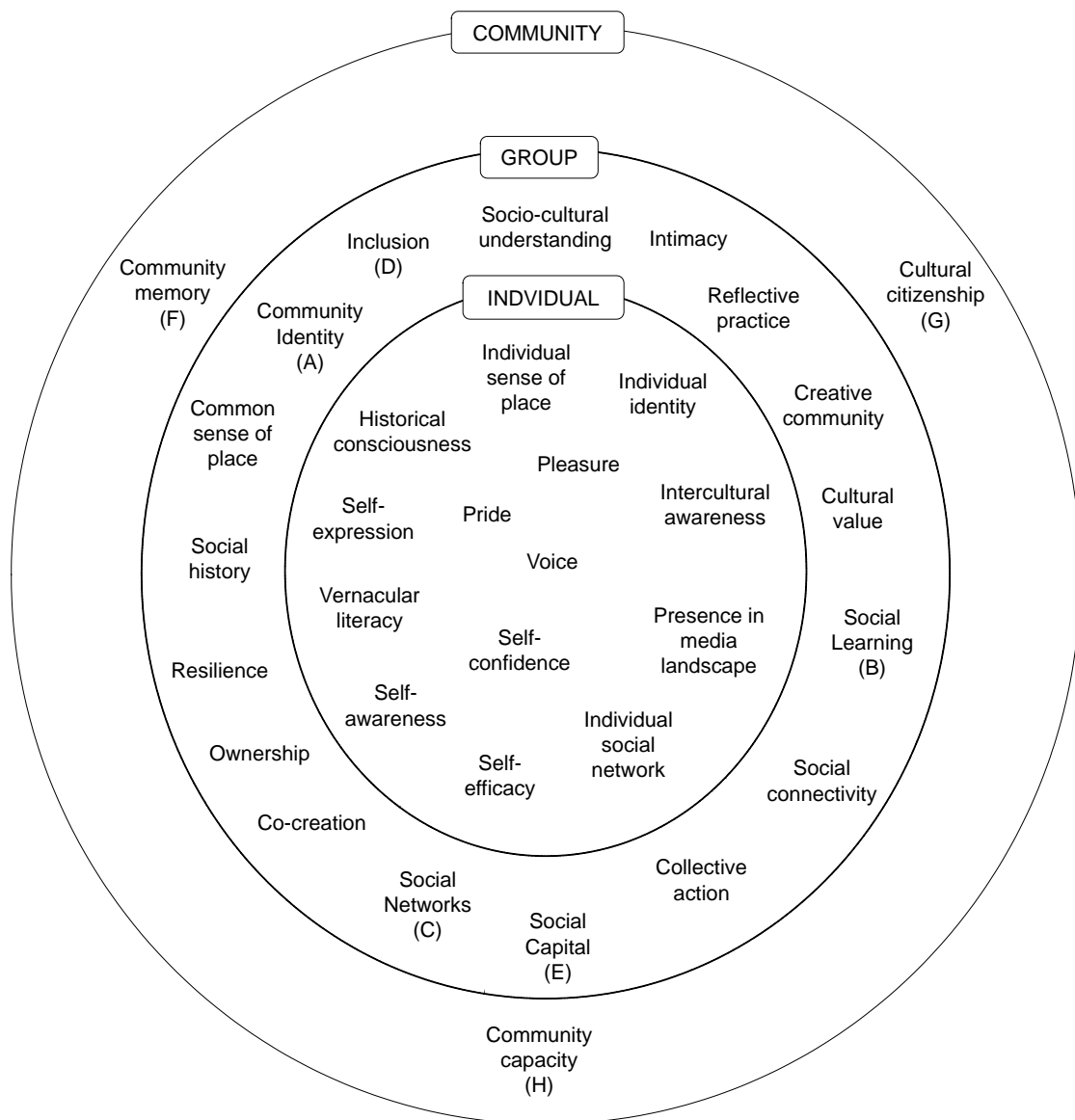


Figure 1: Analytical model for the social effects of a local memory website (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013b)

We used the analytical model and the field study to focus our research question on the influence of organisational characteristics of online local memory websites on the empowerment of participating groups and the wider local community. However, we still needed an approach to connect the online dynamics of the websites to collective empowerment. We tackled this by using a combination of two narrative approaches to study the websites. The first approach consists of Rappaport’s “empowerment meets narrative” model (1995, p. 795) according to which personal stories and collective narratives are important resources for empowerment. He argues, among other things, that inclusion in a collective identity is determined by “what is allowed to be remembered” (Rappaport, 1998, p. 229). People who can relate to a collective narrative, experience inclusion in the collective

identity, and those who do not have a connection, feel excluded from it. In addition, Rappaport states that the mutual influence between personal, group and community narratives parallels the interdependencies across similar levels of empowerment (Rappaport, 1995, 2011).

The second approach was taken from Boje's work on organisational storytelling which provides a narrative method to identify collective aspects in large collections of stories (Boje, 2001, 2008). According to this approach, personal stories are not only part of someone's personal discourse, but also part of a "complex system of a collectively construed [discourse] of organisational "reality"" (Luhman & Boje, 2001, p. 163). This 'reality' as such can unintentionally or intentionally exclude or include people or groups, as with Rappaport's claims about collective narratives. Changes in organisational context and hegemony of individual or group discourses can force one 'reality' into a next one. Assuming that organisational storytelling has similar dynamics as neighbourhood storytelling, the narrative methods applied in the former are applicable in the latter. Consequently, we have adopted "story network analysis" as formulated by Boje (2001) to analyse the features of the online memories. This involved scraping the websites for the public features of the memories and complementing this with non-public elements from copies of both databases. The resulting data, covering more than 10 years of activity, was subject to an exploratory data analysis (Tukey, 1977), for which the analytical model arrived at in Figure 1, provides the sensitising concepts, i.e. "directions along which to look" (Blumer, 1954, p. 7).

Collective Empowerment Expressed in Online Dynamics

In order to arrive at meaningful elements in the online dynamics, we iteratively explored possible relations between patterns in the data and concepts from our analytical model. This resulted in three composite indicators of collective empowerment: online diversity, online activity and online participation. The developments of these indicators for each case are depicted in Figure 2 which gives a heuristic summary of the findings.

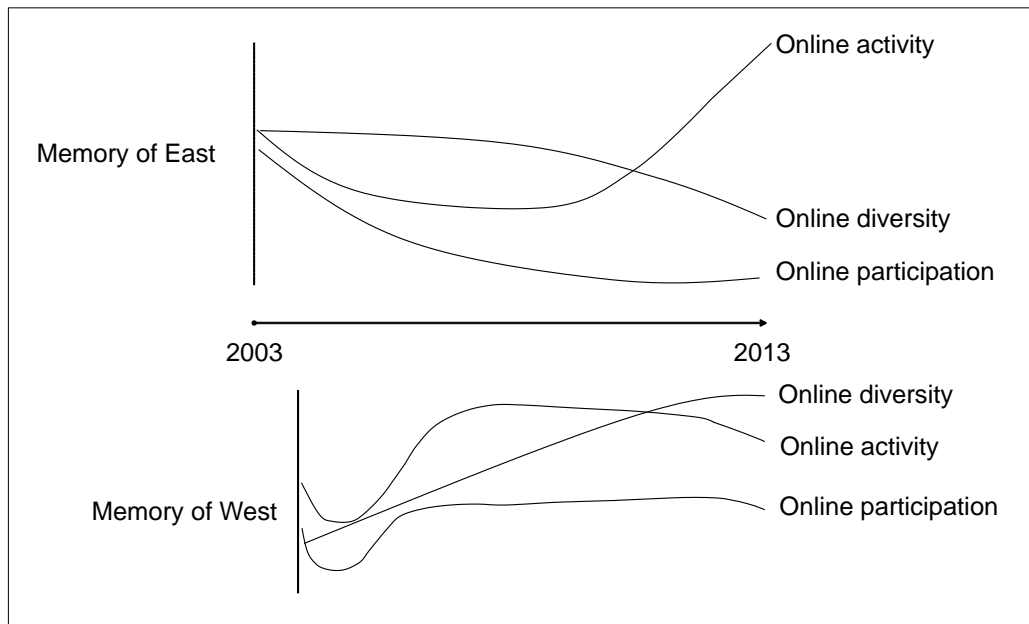


Figure 2: Heuristics of the development of three indicators in the online dynamics.

Over time, the online diversity in the Memory of West increases in terms of the keywords (topics, locations and periods), whereas this decreases in the Memory of East. On both websites, the online activity (number of stories and comments) and participation (number of different participants) fluctuates, but in the Memory of West these indicators develop more parallel than in the Memory of East. This implies that the ratio between the numbers of contributions and participants who deliver them, remains stable. However, in the Memory of East, the online activity is relatively high and steeply growing compared to the number of persons participating online, especially during the last five years. This means that the number of contributions per participant increases. For the Memory of West, both participation and online activity in 2013, drop to a level lower than the previous five years.

The analysis also related the patterns of three described indicators in Figure 2 to three concepts on the level of group empowerment in Figure 1: forming collective identities (A), social learning (B) and social networking (C). We assume that being part of a collective identity is constrained by what that collective defines as worthwhile to remember (Rappaport, 1998). This implies that online diversity in terms of remembered topics and periods is directly related to the variation of identities different people can identify with. Consequently, focussing on its increasing online diversity, the Memory of West can be seen to be empowering in terms of available collective identities for its highly diverse population to connect with. Vice versa, the Memory of East disempowers certain groups, because the

decrease in online diversity lowers the set of available collective identities for these groups to relate to.

If “[v]irtually all human knowledge is based on stories constructed around past experiences” (Schank & Abelson, 1995, p. 1), then the online activities of remembering constitute an important social learning process. This means that online activities, especially online comments on stories, reflect the degree to which participants exchange and discuss facts, experiences and beliefs, and learn from this. Although the total of online memories is nearly similar between the two cases, the activity in comments in the Memory of East (about 20.000) is much higher than in the Memory of West (about 9.000). This indicates that empowerment in terms of social learning is more fruitful on the website of East than on the one in West.

Gilchrist claims that in “strong and sustainable communities” (2009, p. 12) the community network consists of a balanced variation in bonding capital (strong ties), bridging capital (weak ties) and linking capital (links beyond peer boundaries). In our study, we assume that online participation of many different residents, rather than a few, offers better preconditions for such a balance. The preconditions for network variation in the Memory of East lowered following the decrease in online participation. The Memory of West has been more stable, both in online participation and, thus, in the social networking preconditions. Consequently, looking solely at the developments of online participation, the heuristics imply that the social networking configuration is more empowering in the Memory of West than in the Memory of East.

A closer look at the interdependencies between the three discussed group concepts of collective empowerment sheds light on two more: inclusion and social capital (D and E in Figure 1). The presumably dense social networks, but with few participants, in the Memory of East, combined with its high level of social learning and dominant collective identities, imply stronger social capital than the Memory of West represents. This manifestation of social capital seems to be embedded in a self-affirming process, because the developments in the three other concepts have a grip on each other. That is, a small, dense network with a strong collective identity and satisfying interactions between participants presumably has no immediate, intrinsic reason to change. On the other hand, the multiple collective identities in the Memory of West, carried by large, light networks with low levels of social learning, result

in a more inclusive website than the Memory of East. The developments causing this inclusivity also keep each other in balance. That is, the multiple collective identities and light networks fuel each other's characteristics through incidental online activity in which new memories are added and new people briefly meet each other in comments.

Organisational Influence on Collective Empowerment

In what follows, we explain how the differences in the organisational aspects between both cases can explain the differences in their collective empowerment. This leads to five organisational continuums, each with its own extremes, on which the cases can be positioned: context, partners, aims, digital memories and collecting memories. Both websites' affordances are left out based on their high degree of similarity.

Context: From Preserving to Pioneering

In terms of context, the main differences between the Memory of East and West can be found in the age of their neighbourhoods, and in the way they dealt with gentrification processes.

The main parts of Amsterdam East were developed in the 60 years before the Second World War. In this sense, this area has long been a traditional residential area of the city of Amsterdam. Once gentrification processes started in the seventies, many residents rejected the city renewal and the government facilitating it. Around 1990, this led to the decision of the district administration to concentrate city renewal projects on preserving and restoring buildings. It seems likely that this wish to preserve was present among the participants who remained active after the exhibition finished in 2004. Collecting stories and pictures gave them a chance to focus on preserving the past, before it got lost. This has resulted in collective identities with which residents who have childhood memories of the neighbourhood can identify. Other people, for young people or elderly who grew up somewhere else, cannot relate to these identities very well.

Amsterdam New West predominantly came into being in the 25 years following the war. People who moved there were considered, and considered themselves, as pioneers. Gentrification-driven city renewal started to play a role in the nineties offering a solution to two supposedly intertwined problems. There were so called concentrations of ethnic groups

that, according to the local media, threatened integration and lowered the image of their neighbourhoods. Restructuring certain neighbourhoods would dissolve the concentrations and would increase the market value. Although many projects were effectuated, this chain of arguments received a growing amount of criticism and, eventually did not hold. What did hold, and probably got stimulated by these events, was the sentiment of being pioneers and newcomers in New West, be it 5 or 30 years ago. The people who participated in the Memory of West wanted to collect stories that celebrated this pioneering character by expressing the incentives and experiences of these adventurers. Instead of age and length of residence determining the validity of a person's memories, a person's first experiences after their arrival in New West offered the content for the online memories. This way, as opposed to the website in East, the highly diverse population in New West produced a variety of collective identities its residents could identify with.

Partners: from 'Do It Yourself' to 'Do It Together'

The ways collecting memories have been organised differs between the two cases in terms of how projects are set up with partners and how the core teams are composed.

The Memory of East was supported by institutional professionals until 2007. Workshops were provided for target groups of other organisations, without collaborating at an organisational level. The cultural entrepreneurs of the Memory of West, on the other hand, were able to set up subsidised collaborations and events into 2012. In these collaborations, win-win situations were created in which the aims of the Memory of West and those of a partner would overlap or complement each other. Consequently, the memory collecting activities were strongly embedded in the partners' regular core business, and in their physical environment. Methodological differences also had an impact, with the workshop-based approach in East and collaboration-steered process in New West both having their pros and cons. On the one hand, a workshop program is easier to organise than collaboration in terms of alignment and negotiations. On the other hand, collaborations are likely to be more sustainable than a sequence of workshops if a steady stream of memories is aimed for. More importantly, in New West collaboration with partners in other locations contributed to diversity in the collective identities participants could identify with. This did not apply to the Memory of East.

The Memory of East had a mixed core team in terms of residents and professionals until the end of 2007. After that, a single cultural entrepreneur, hired by the museum since 2003, was both webmaster and the key figure in the story collecting workshops. Despite her central role, her involvement was not funded during the year before the transfer of responsibility to the residents, which occurred in 2010. This resulted in disappointment among the people directly involved. From that moment, only residents who strongly identified with the more distant past of Amsterdam East and had time to invest made up the team that collected memories. The core team of the Memory of West always consisted of a tight group of cultural entrepreneurs, volunteering professionals and active residents. The entrepreneurs were closely connected to the core processes of collecting memories and organising the conditions necessary for it. The Memory of West also had a number of volunteering professionals. One person, for example, was professionally linked to the local newspaper, but also wrote reportages for the Memory of West and sometimes the same stories for both. Another example was a copywriter, who also liked to write attractive, short stories about everyday topics for the Memory of West.

In summary, the Memory East developed into a self-organising group of residents doing all the collecting activities themselves. The Memory of West, on the contrary, could be considered as a collaborative setting with a natural balance between various organisations, professionals and residents. It seems likely that this variation stimulated the presence of several perspectives in the organisation of the Memory of West, and the creation of multiple collective identities people could relate to. Consequently, it evolved into a more inclusive community than the Memory of East, with less perspectives present in the core group.

Aims: from Abstract to Concrete

Two important differences between the websites, in terms of communicated aims, are the attention to vulnerable citizens and the local embeddedness .

On a rather abstract level, both cases aim for social cohesion, social participation and belonging in the neighbourhood. Both cases also elaborate on these their aims, such as stimulating contact across ages and backgrounds, sharing stories and emotions related to the neighbourhood and improving knowledge about the socio-cultural history. The first difference is that the social participation aims of the Memory of West become more concrete

and applicable than those of the Memory of East. In the context of participation of possibly vulnerable citizens, the Memory of West mentions improving self-esteem of youngsters, women and seniors, increasing computer skills and enhancing the memory function of the elderly. The Memory of East limits the concrete aims to computer skills. The second noteworthy difference is that in relation to social cohesion, the Memory of West wants to improve tolerance. Tolerance, according to the website, is the growth of reciprocal knowledge and understanding which is attributed to the sharing of memories. This elaboration of the way tolerance might be improved reflects the knowledge and experience of the multicultural centre in which the Memory of West has been embedded during its entire existence. In addition, it gives more urgency to the involvement of a variety of groups or neighbourhoods. Both the concrete attention for certain groups and connection with the multicultural centre have contributed to a continuous presence and inclusion of a variety of participants, as such ensuring multiple identities many people can relate to.

Digital Memories: from Distant to Recent Past

The main difference in the characteristics of the memories between the two cases concerns news report-like items of the Memory of West.

These items have always been part of the category “News” on the website, but were also categorised, for a number of years, under the header “Stories about the present”. Most of these contributions, like the name indicates, account for issues, experiences and events that are embedded in the present or the recent past. Some of them explicitly report on changes in certain neighbourhoods or openings and events of various sorts. Others concern more personal reports around a certain experience like a visit to a museum or a park. A third example consists of photo reports in which participants represent themselves or their neighbourhood. With “Stories about the present”, the Memory of West initiated projects with groups of participants ranging from the youth to the elderly. Individual writers also contributed to this category on their own behalf. The resulting combination of content about the more distant past (around 2000 items) and the recent past (around 1000 items) relates to the high online diversity and multiple identities people in New West can identify with. The Memory of East used to have a category “News”, but it was used only occasionally for announcements. Moreover, spreading announcements was not regarded as a core activity, which is why it ended up in disuse. Consequently, the Memory of East predominantly invited

people to contribute memories about the distant past, which tended to attract people over the age of 60 who liked to share their childhood memories. This explains the general tendency of the Memory of East to primarily contain memories about the distant past which many of the present residents cannot easily identify with.

Collecting Memories: from Numbers to Variety

Two final differences between the cases can be found in the actual collecting of memories and making publicity for them.

The Memory of East remained under the wings of the museum until 2010, although the role of professionals in supporting the project decreased after 2006. In 2010 the responsibility of the website was handed over to a small group of volunteer enthusiasts, who, owing to available time, wanted to take up that challenge. The independence was partial, however, because the hosting of the website was still financed by the museum. The core group of participants developed the idea that success in terms of high numbers of published stories and website visitors would convince the museum to continue financing the hosting. Moreover, success in these terms was feasible, because there were some specialists in a limited set of topics, who also had easy access to content. In addition, spreading new memories through Twitter and Facebook also reached a rather steady group of visitors and elicited comments. In terms of social learning based on high online activity, these developments were promising, with the network becoming smaller and denser, and gathering around dominant topics. These topics fitted the sentiment of preserving the distant past since they covered, among others, the Jewish past, former neighbourhood shops, and former soccer clubs.

After the Memory of West became an independent association, 3 years after the beginning of the project, entrepreneurial heritage professionals became involved. These professionals were able to translate the adventurous character of the community to other organisations in New West. They did not only apply successfully for subsidies, but also organised the networks and collaborations explicitly with partners from other districts' neighbourhoods. In these projects, digital memories about various other locations in New West were collected and intentionally produced by different participants. This kept the variety of the social network configuration high in terms of strong and weak ties, and also enabled boundary crossing. More importantly,

it increased the number of identities inhabitants of the various neighbourhoods felt they could relate to.

Summarizing, the positioning of each of the websites on the continuums results in Figure 3.

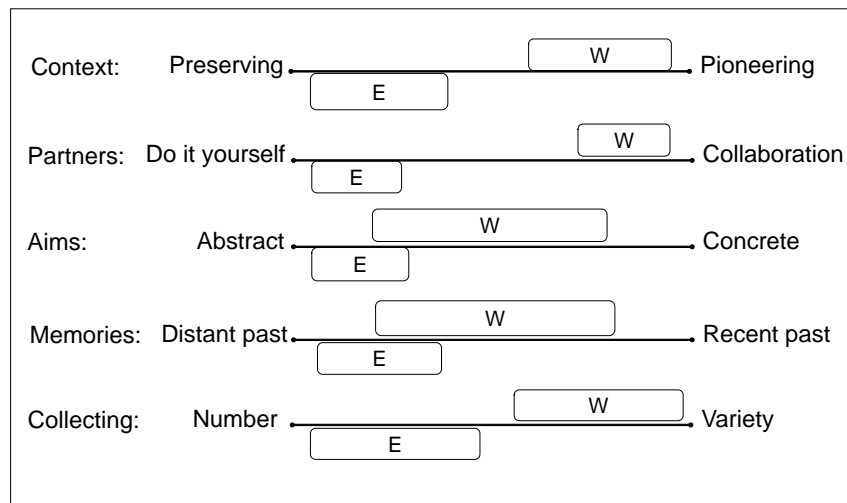


Figure 3: Five continuums based on the organisational dimensions.

Collective Acts of Digital Citizenship

In the previous two sections, we have shown that the way each of the local memory websites is organised has specific influences on group levels of empowerment through emergent properties in its online dynamics. With respect to the study of such digital infrastructures, Couldry et al. states we should be “open both to new ‘acts of citizenship’...and to a wider set of processes that constitute civic culture’s starting-points” (2014, p. 615). Acts of citizenship are acts based on orientations, strategies and technologies through which the actors become “claim-making” subjects, either intentional, based on rationality, or unintentional, based on affection (Isin, 2008). Exploring digital citizenship in narrative settings, Couldry et al. (2014) focus on the processes fostering a civic culture and less on the actual acts that are performed, whereas we focus on both. In addition, contrary to the mentioned studies of citizenship that focus on the individual subject, in this chapter we put more emphasis on collectives performing acts of digital citizenship.

Since the organisation underlying our cases could also be done differently, we argue that the influence of the website on its surrounding community is an “act of digital citizenship” of the

core group participants. To uncover the specific acts of each case, requires further zooming in on the relation between the group and the community levels of empowerment (see Figure 1). Our literature review about local memory websites shows that, in terms of community memory (F), residents are able to create a shared view of how their neighbourhood should be presented online for future use (De Kreek & Van Zoonen, 2013b). With respect to cultural citizenship (G), the existing literature claims that these online environments offer a public sphere where meanings and cultural values are negotiated. Finally, community capacity (H) is attributed to emerging online social networks, where members create discourses in favour of future collective action. Both websites can be claimed to foster the construction of community memory, the practice of cultural citizenship and the growth of community capacity, but they do so in fundamentally different ways.

The Memory of West has a weak online reputation consisting of an inclusive variation of collective identities representing sparsely knit networks which have a number of scattered online social learning places. This corresponds with the argument that “[c]ommunity-level empowerment outcomes ... include evidence of pluralism, and existence of organisational coalitions, and accessible community resources” (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p. 570). The Memory of East has a strong online reputation in terms of an exclusive collective identity representing a few tightly knit groups of participants each having their own active social learning environment. This matches with collective empowerment comprising the “capability to reward (or punish) causal agents, influence public debate and policy, and shape community ideology and consciousness” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 57). With its stronger social capital, the Memory of East is more likely to resist official memory intuitions, commercial popular culture and local politics than the Memory of West. On the other hand, with its more inclusive character, the Memory of West is more representative for the broad cultural backgrounds of its inhabitants than the Memory of East. We regard these emergent properties of both websites – ultimately the capability to resist or to represent – as collective acts of digital citizenship. To take responsibility for or to change these properties requires new literacies with respect to the online dynamics and the organisational characteristics of these websites.

New literacies for collective digital citizenship

We had, and still have, a close relation to the Memory of East and the Memory of West. Consequently, our approach is inspired by the thoughts about “making social science matter” elaborated by Bent Flyvbjerg in his book of the same title (2001). In this context “phronetic social research” is described as being “about producing knowledge that can challenge power not in theory but in ways that inform real efforts to produce change” (Schram, 2012, p. 20). This kind of research is not concerned with generalisable, predictive models but focusses on answering four questions related to enhancing practice wisdom in a certain context (Flyvbjerg, Landman, & Schram, 2012, p. 5):

1. where are we going [with this practice]?;
2. who gains, and who loses, by which mechanisms of power?;
3. is this development desirable?; and
4. what, if anything, should we do about it?

Following these questions, the organisational continuums in Figure 3 and their relation to empowerment have made it possible to reconsider the developments of both websites with the relevant stakeholders. Ideas about how to redirect certain developments towards the future have emerged. This is an ongoing conversation that has already started on various occasions where preliminary insights of our research were discussed directly or indirectly. With ‘directly’ we mean dedicated events where we presented insights which were validated and discussed in terms of whether what they implied was desirable or not. More ‘indirectly’, we followed up on certain topics in conversations during less orchestrated meetings, this way amplifying the opportunity to collectively shape our thoughts.

The best way to illustrate how the insights produced in our research partly fuelled the conversations and discussions about the four questions above, is to turn to an example of a recent development in one of the communities. In the Memory of East there has been a longer discussion during the monthly meetings about the tension between success in terms of numbers and in variety. This proves to be hard to resolve, because the involved language in these two perspectives differs. One person may say how impressive it is that an online memory was visited 350 times during 2 days, because it was spread through Twitter and Facebook. Another person may say that a shy and vulnerable workshop participant has just

published a very personal story online after working on it for months and being hesitant to share it. To ensure the future of the website, the number of visitors for many seems like a stronger argument than that one single memory.

During a focus group meeting, we used the metaphor of an anthill to explain that the website as a whole has emergent properties we are not always aware of. Following that, we showed how the online diversity had decreased since 2010 and that the increasing online activity corresponds to a decreasing group of participants. Interesting enough, this was recognised immediately and interpreted in terms of various organisational aspects. But more importantly, it also fuelled the discussion about the different faces of success. The numerical character of the graphs visualising the decrease of diversity made the urgency for involving ‘other’ residents, topics and neighbourhoods as real as the importance of numbers of website visitors. The introduction of the visuals brought the two convictions about what constitutes success into conversation with each other on a more equal level. . A result was that it fuelled the appreciation for efforts that involved new groups, new neighbourhoods and new collaborations. In the wake of this, more stories of the recent past were contributed to the website. Consequently, the zone covered by the Memory of East grows towards the “Variety” side on the “Collecting” continuum in Figure 3.

It is an important insight for both of the communities in New West and in East that such a quest is not an either-or choice, but both sides on the continuum can exist at the same time without the one affecting the other. The opposite of this is often called the ‘zero-sum game’ with the central idea that one’s increase of power implies the other’s decrease in power (Narayan, 2005). In most empowerment literature sharing social power is not considered as such a ‘win-lose’ choice. On the contrary, it is a “‘win-win’ phenomenon whereby providers gain as well as recipients” (Staples, 2004, p. 214). Moreover, “it can actually strengthen while being shared with others” (Hur, 2006, p. 524).

Conclusions

Theories of empowerment and citizenship both mention processes and outcomes. Dahlgren’s ‘civic culture’ points to a set of interlocking processes that facilitate individual “people’s actual participation in the public sphere, in civil and political society” (Dahlgren, 2003, pp. 154–155). Empowerment theory covers similar interdependent processes, but also includes

collective processes and outcomes: “a mechanism by which people, organisations, and communities gain mastery over their affairs” (Rappaport, 1987, p. 122). Following Couldry et al.’s suggestion to look for new acts of citizenship and underlying processes in digital environments (2014), we have related the two local memory websites’ emergent empowerment properties to collective acts of citizenship. Ultimately, the first case was described as being better able to resist dominant local discourses and the second as being more representative for its neighbourhoods’ residents. Moreover, we showed how these acts are embedded in the core groups’ characteristics along five organisational continuums. Our findings show that it is not only important to study cultural dynamics in an online public sphere to learn about individual civic agency (Dahlgren, 2006), but also to examine the relation between the interests of the core group of participants and the common good for the community. Our close relationship with both cases urged us to feed back the research results to both core groups. This helped them to acquire new literacies about the emergent properties of their collective actions and the organisational aspects with which they could influence this. Based on this, we would like to advocate this participatory approach in order to make research in digital citizenship matter to the communities it makes claims about.

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