Mapping an Emerging Field: Local Memory Websites

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Power of online sharing stories
For example ...

CIRN Prato Conference 2013
... I became involved in the Memory of East ...

Amsterdam Museum 2003 exhibition
Cohesion, empowerment, belonging
Interviews, meetings, life-writing
Memories from every day life
Steered by residents (2009)
2,500+ digital memories
22,000 comments
200,000 visits

... and in a PhD-project.
The red thread of my story today ...

Mapping 80 cases similar to the one I showed you.

• Why?
• How?
• What?
Why map this field?

The present literature contains many claims on the benefits of local memory websites, which I structured according to the three levels of empowerment as described by Rappaport (1987), Zimmerman (2000) and Maton (2008).

The following picture emerged from this ...
Why map this field?

Constructs community memory

Facilitates cultural citizenship

New Directions in Research on Local Memory Websites
Why map this field?

Citizen ‘own’ representation of neighborhood’s past for future use.

For example, the extended representation of deported Jews in WW II.

An ‘independent’ cultural public sphere where meaning in the present is negotiated and cultural value is judged by ordinary people.

For example, the poems containing critical statements towards current local policy.

Emergence of discourses in ‘new’ networks in favor of collective action or social power.

For example, disgust about deportation of Jews and tolerance towards newcomers.
Why map this field?

Especially the claims/hopes on group and community level are attributed to a continuum of participation facilitated by online local memory platforms. (e.g. Vos & Ketelaar, 2007).

Great, but there are some gaps between these claims in the literature and the real world and between the two articles I wrote.
Why map this field? Because, despite the promises ...

1. The representation of the field is incomplete.
   -> What other cases are there apart from the institutional ones applying the method of Digital Storytelling? (descriptive)

2. It is unknown how online participation manifests itself on these local memory websites.
   -> How do they organize themselves towards (longterm) online participation? (causal)

3. The claims on meso and macro level are poorly substantiated.
   -> The institutional cases did not develop online participation, so how does online participation relate to group and community empowerment?
How to analyze the field?

• Finding = Snowballing.
• Selection criteria.
  Non-fictional expression of experience about or in neighborhood.
  Dedicated website at least 20 digital memories.
  Five+ involved residents.
  Limited to neighborhood, district or city.
• 34 Dutch, 24 British, 9 American, 4 Australian, 3 Argentinean, 3 Belgian, 2 German and 1 Spanish (80 total).
• Dimensions: involved parties, aims, methods, digital memories, affordances, number of contributions (MacWilliam, 2009; Burgess & Green, 2009; Kietzman, 2012; Kreek, 2011; ...).
• Qualitatively coded texts from the websites according to these dimensions inductively filling in attributes.
• Exploratory Data (Quantitative) Analysis (Tukey, 1977)
How to analyze the field? (60 attributes)

- Involved partners
  - Participating: knowledge, historical, social welfare, association, resident, ...
  - Supporting: idem, member fees, donations, funds, products.

- Aims
  - Preserving, individual learning, inclusion, community building, products.
  - Community memory, cultural citizenship, community capacity (deductive).

- Methods
  - Researching archives, personal memory, co-creation (p/r), interview (p/r).

- Digital memories
  - Format: video, audio, text, picture.
  - Period: past, present, future.
  - Frame: historical, everyday, report.

- Affordances
  - Navigational: categories, latest stories/comments, news, search, contributors, ..
  - Interactional: email, direct, comments, question, guestbook.

- Number of contributions
  - During last complete year prior to the data collection.
What were (some of) the descriptive results?

Across multiple dimensions

Residential
- Private
- Preserving
- Personal memory
- Community development sec
- Text + image
- Everyday
- Past to present
- Affordances +-

Institutional
- Funds/subsidy
- Aims+
- CB -> community memory
- CB -> cultural citizenship
- Professional in method
- Combination of formats
- Everyday + historical
- Past + present + future
- Affordances ++

Associational
- Memberships/donations
- Preserving
- CB -> community memory
- Researching archives
- Interviews
- Text/images/Audio
- Historical
- Past
- Affordances -

Three types
Whate were (some of) the descriptive results?

1. Involved partners - Aims
   Historical >> Community Memory
   Social Welfare >> Cultural Citizenship

2. Involved partners - Methods
   Historical institute >> Researching Archives

3. Involved partners - Memories
   Historical (!) or Social Welfare >> Present

Across pairs of dimensions
What were (some of) the descriptive results?

4. Aims - Methods
   Cultural citizenship >< Co-creation
   Preserving >< Researching archives

5. Aims - Memories
   Preserving >< Text/ Images, Past, Historical
   Learning or Inclusion >< Video, Present, Future, Everyday

6. Methods - Memories
   Resident only >< Text and Images
   Professional involved >< Video and/ or Audio

7. Affordances - Online contributions
   More affordances ---> More Contributions

Across pairs of dimensions
What were (some of) the descriptive results?

Only 13 over 100 contributions, +/- 3 of each type.
What were (some of) the 'causal' results?

• High involvement of institutes does not lower online participation.
• High involvement of professionals does seem to do so.
• More involved resident methods increases online participation.
• Less accessible formats (video, audio) decrease online activity.
• The type did not influence the online participation.
What conclusions can be derived?

- The field is much broader than institutional initiatives.
- Since the field shows low continuum in online participation, expectations about empowerment on meso and macro level should be tempered.
- Rules of thumb in favor of online participation:
  Foster autonomy and authenticity (Burgess, 2009; Poletti, 2011) by
  - combination of aims
  - professionals < residents
  - at least text and images
  - at least past and present
  - both historical and everyday
  - reasonable set of affordances
What conclusions can be derived?

Last, but not least: there are local memory websites in the field with high online activity, so the empirical data to study the relation with empowerment on meso and macro level is available.
What will my future study look like?

My next steps:

• Data sets of Memory of East and West
• Quantitative content analysis (obvious patterns)
• Qualitative narrative analysis (implicit patterns)
• Comparing the two cases
What will my future study look like?

Main sensitizing quotes at this moment:

• “Organizational and community empowerment, however, are not simply the aggregate of many empowered individuals.” (Zimmerman, 2001)

• ... [the digital memories that we create in the present] “result from a combination of recall and desire, which in turn are incentives to remodel our past and fashion our future” (Van Dijck, 2007, p. 173)

• “the incorporation of ordinary “voices” can facilitate the affective communication of [...] history to a broader public” (Burgess & Klaebe, 2009, p. 164)
Thank you

Ideas, feedback, suggestions, critics, ... welcome

More reading at

http://www.storyhood.nl/category/activities/publications