

Article

## Sensing the News: User Experiences when Reading Locative News

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**Abstract:** This article focuses on user experiences on reading location-aware news on the mobile platform and aims to explore what experiences this kind of locative journalism generates and how such experiences change the users' social interaction with news. We produced a specially designed mobile application and tailored news stories specific to this project called *LocaNews* in order to explore participants' relation to the content in this journalistic format. The result is generated through a field study and a questionnaire of 32 people to find out how they experience the news presented in this format. The user participants' responses are analyzed based on their news experiences, contextualizing places and their social interaction with the news within this form of journalism. Results showed that the local, semi-local and non-local user approaches the locative news in a different manner, but that the average user found this kind of news more interesting and more informative than ordinary news. The participants also have a problem identifying this as journalism, rather than an information service.

**Keywords:** journalism; location-based services; mobile media; locative journalism; locative media; hyperlocal news

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### 1. Introduction

What would it be like if news stories constantly changed depending on the reader's physical location? With a built-in GPS in the smartphone, it is now a possibility to adapt news content to the user's changing physical as well as social context. Mobile phones are used as very personal devices and users could demand news designed to cater to their personal interests. One way to meet this demand might be to take account for the readers' location in the selection of relevant news articles to adjust news stories to specific location while at the same time allowing for continuous change in order

to compensate for relocation through geographical environment. What kinds of experiences will this kind of journalism generate, and how may context intervene? And does this change the readers' social interaction with news?

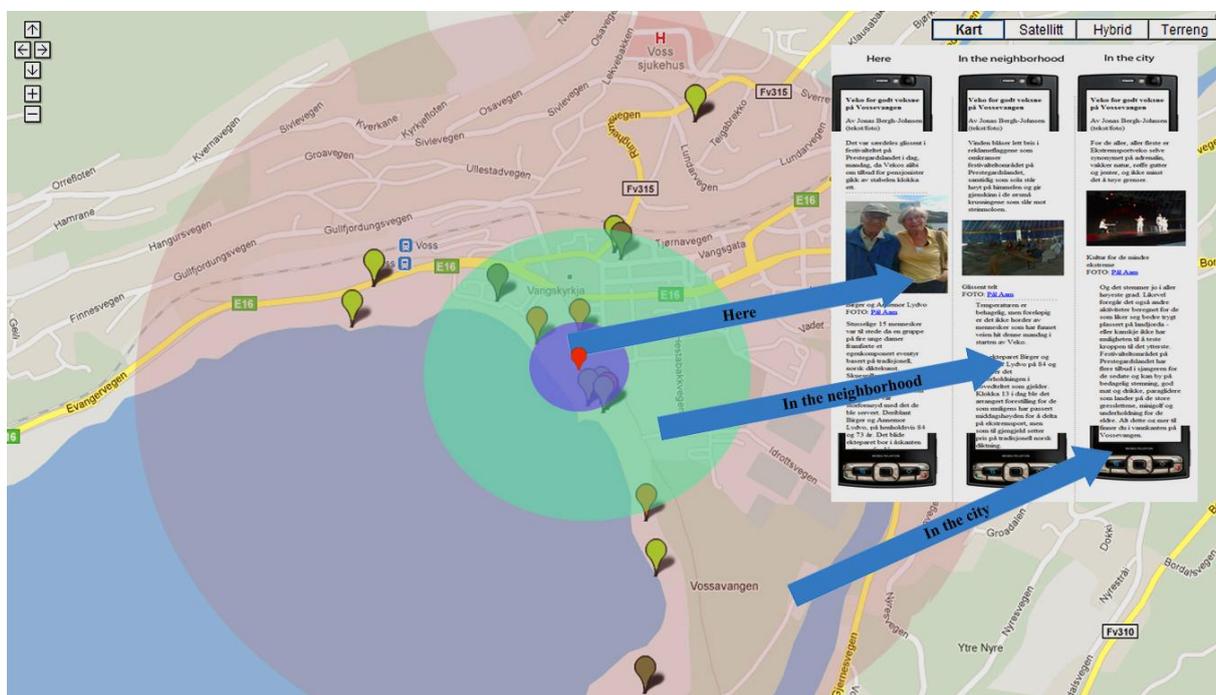
This article assumes that the emergence of mobile technology will change journalistic content and its use. The project of exploring the user's experiences within this form of journalism is investigated as part of a larger pilot study which consists of several field studies. The empirical results gathered from this field study focuses on experiences of users reading location-dependent news through a mobile application designed specifically to this project. The works of Robert Ezra Park and his co-fellows in early 20th century provide and seek a practical everyday view on communication philosophy and suggests approaches for exploring journalism. Alexander Halavais (2003) draws upon the parallels between the rise of the metropolis as technology which led to a renaissance in American Sociology, and the rise of the Internet by suggesting that following the lead of Park, the Internet can have a similar effect on the study of communication [1]. For Park data contextual approach in neighborhoods was a result of his earliest conception of sociology in order to become a superreporter (pp. 90–91, [2]). This contextual view is shared by Dewey and both thought that one can do more than just reading news by importing meaning from the surrounding context. This article shares these views and sets the stage for the contextual approach to locative journalism and the city as a “laboratory” to make such an explorative research approach possible.

With a technical and editorial staff of 13 people, we produced an especially designed mobile application and tailored news stories specific to this project called *LocaNews*. The design of the mobile application can be considered explorative since this form of journalism is none-existing and its purpose is not the application of its results to the reality that belongs to the realm of practice. The mobile application is solely designed by researchers with the purpose to see if this works and to examine its use. The result in this article was generated by participating observation and a questionnaire of 32 people (average age 29) during a sport festival in June 2009 to find out how they experienced the news content presented in this format.

In the *LocaNews* system, journalists created three different versions of any given geotagged news story. Each version receives its own geographical proximity zone, which determines what version the users can access or not, based on their physical position to the news (Figure 1). The news appears on the mobile application interface as *Here* (0–100 m), *In the neighborhood* (100–500 m) and *Voss at large* (exceeding 500 m). One way to describe this tripartial system is that the news is “zoomable”. Zoomable in a narrative sense means that one either moves towards a story or away from a story. Such “zoomable news” requires journalists to consider crucial aspects of the surroundings, such as topography, architecture, human behavior and infrastructure, all of which will impact the shaping of the journalistic texts and affect and alter the relationship between the reader and her/his surroundings. These different proximity journalistic versions addresses differently to the reader in various ways since the journalist already knew the relative distance between the geotagged news and the reader [3]. Objects mentioned in the article are for example described in different manners, depending on if the reader can see the object, is within an acceptable walking distance from it, or is far away from the object. One story about a mountain bike competition called MTB can in the closest proximity version (0–100 m) start with “Where you are standing right now the MTB finals starts at 17 p.m. (...), and the best place for spectators to follow the competition is right beneath the largest jump”. The article does

not describe the MTB course further because the reader already stands at the course and can see it. The other two proximity versions of the same story may focus on how to get there, how big the course area is, famous MTB riders, *etc.*

**Figure 1.** An illustrative picture of the concept and how the different proximity zones correspond to the texts. The red dot in the middle illustrates the reader’s physical location.



The user participants’ responses are analyzed on the basis of the socio-cultural consequences in the place-based differences operative in this locative journalism by local, semi-local and non-local participants. The journalistic production of the news and the usability of the mobile application has recently been discussed in two other papers [4,5] and will not be discussed in this article.

Location-based services (LBS) have been established for many users of smartphones and within the marketing industry. They can be found in services such as digital maps, real estate, Craigslist, Yellow Pages, location-based games and in social networks such as *Foursquare*, *Facebook Places* and *Twitter*. These services represent the fastest growing market within Internet technology businesses (ABI Research in Sutko & de Souza e Silva [6]). PEW Internet studies from January 2011 showed that half of all Americans get some sort of local news on their cell phone or tablet [7]. The PEW report from September 2011 shows that 28% of Americans use mobile and social location based services which also include directions and recommendations [8]. Recently (May 13, 2011), Google announced their *News near you* feature on Google News for mobile devices [9], but so far the news companies have not recognized the full potential of LBS. Google’s *News near you* feature and a few other applications can be characterized as location aware news services that sort and display news based on one’s physical location. The *LocaNews* is the first attempt within the LBS field that changes the current story based on the reader’s location.

In this article, locative news is conceived as a location-aware and location-dependent media application that contains journalistic content. Location-based services are currently generating a lot of

scholarly attention paid to at the moment. In journalism, most of this interest is related to hyperlocal news, as in bloggers or citizen/participatory journalism [10–12]. There is also a large research interest within the field of location-based (mobile) social networks and games [6,13–15].

My focus, however, is based on how newsroom journalism in its traditional gatekeeper function can be presented in the context of a location-aware system for mobile phones and to explore the participant's experiences of this journalism. In opposition to the common meanings attached to the concept of hyperlocal news, which can be considered location-oriented, this system is location-aware or location-dependent in physical terms. The story changes and varies according to where the reader moves in relation to the geotagged news story. This makes the *LocaNews* system different to other media design project. It is necessary to stress that *LocaNews* is purely an analytic explorative project and does not seek to make a system sustainable for the market industry.

The article will first present theory from the contemporary scholars dealing with place-based experiences and locative media and aims to relate the interdisciplinary works of Robert E. Park and his contemporaries. Borrowing from Park brings the urban and journalistic perspective into the present social practices of the mobile phone. As the founder of the term “new journalism” [16] and his view of the public space as “laboratory”, Park's works is seen as fruitful for exploring new forms of journalism in the new social space and in the practices that the mobile phone can represent. This chapter is organized in order to explore my research questions. The overall questions of (1) what kind of experiences does this kind of journalism generate, (2) how context matters, and (3) does this change the user's social interaction with news, facilitate my research question: How does locative journalism affect the consumption of news? Further, I present my method and the *LocaNews* system before presenting the findings at the end. The findings presented are only representative within the group of 32 participants at the present time and place.

## 2. Theory

### 2.1. Place-Based Experience

What is a place-based experience? Are users of locative journalism likely to re-discover a sense of place? What do users gain? What do they lose? These are all big questions, but they constitute the ideational premise in this article. We can recognize the content on the mobile smartphones from earlier media and technology such as television, film, radio, newspapers, *etc.* Despite similarities, there are also many differences. At present, differences occur mainly within the social practice of the medium and in our relationship with place and localness [13].

*Genius loci*, the protective spirit of a place, is an ancient concept upon which philosophers have based their discussion about place and the meaning of place. In contemporary usage, the term still denotes the characteristics of a certain place, but without the guardian spirit. Geelhaar *et al.* challenge the understanding of this term insofar as it designates an inherent property of a distinct place to be perceived in an unmediated manner and therefore no specific surplus can be created or told as the place itself already tells all that could be told or enabled [17]. Further, Geelhaar *et al.* argues that if mediation through means of technology is unnecessary or even impossible, the combination of place and technology could potentially pave the way for the creation of the essential attention that is

necessary for such experience. They give an example of how exhibits, for example at a museum, can utilize technology to help reawaken the visitors' awareness of the place itself as a medium.

According to Joshua Meyrowitz, the localness of experience is constant and the significance of locality persists even in the face of massive social and technological changes [18]. He also acknowledges, however, that there is a shift in how we identify with such localness, referring to George Herbert Mead, among other scholars, to argue that we see and understand ourselves through others. Meyrowitz points to the fact that media have extended the boundaries of whom we understand to be our significant others, and that people and experiences from other localities provide us with external perspectives on our own perspectives to a greater extent than before. But this does not mean that the importance of physical locale is less important, even though Meyrowitz argues that physical proximity has gradually become less influential with the increased use of mobile phones, e-mail and various other modes of transportation. More suitable, perhaps, is Meyrowitz's second argument about what he calls "the generalized elsewhere", a notion which suggests that we construct and develop our reflective self in a different way because of contemporary media and infrastructure. We are now more likely to see our physical locality as part of something bigger than we know of: it does not have to be our place of origin where we were born and raised, but rather the physical surroundings that surround us at any time.

*All experience is local. Everything we see, hear, touch, smell, and taste is experienced through our bodies. And unless one believes in out-of-body experiences, one accepts that we and our body are permanently fused. We are always in place, and place is always with us* (p. 21, [18]).

Even though we are always in place and place is always with us, both place and our perception of it is in a state of constant change. Technology and increased mobility are some of the elements that constitute the always changing context, since they can provide perceptual gains and losses, and bring about different ways of relating and experiencing localness.

## 2.2. How Does Context Matter?

Focusing on context is not new in journalism and communication studies. The fact that news context plays a major a role in the gathering, interpreting, distilling and presenting of news has been closely examined by the scholars of the Chicago school, who made their impact on journalism, media and communication studies chiefly through the works of John Dewey, George Herbert Mead and Robert Ezra Park. Everett Rogers has characterized Dewey as the first philosopher in mass communication and Park as the first theorist of mass communication. Rogers also considers giving Park the title "The first mass communication researcher" in view of his empirical studies of newspaper content, their audiences, and ownership structures [19]. Park looked at the city as one big social "laboratory" which consisted of different worlds, neighborhoods and groups simultaneously connected and in conflict with each other. Such a "city" was to provide the frame or context for journalism analyses and practices. Park gives an example of how this context can be exploited by relating news to other events by plotting event location on a map. "*We had a diphtheria epidemic. I plotted the cases on a map of the city and in this way called attention to what seemed the source of the infection, an open sewer*" (p. 254, [20]). For Park, news contexts were not only an analytic framework, but a

journalistic method for finding solutions and to reveal unseen patterns as well as a way of presenting news in relation to its context. This fits very well into today's online journalism and the idea seems just as relevant today. Park's works seem to be less used by contemporary scholars compared to his co-workers Dewey and Mead, but in the golden age of the Chicago School (1910–1935) his work had significant higher scholarly impact (pp. 100–107, [21]). Rogers argues that Park did not point to specific directions that future communication research was to take and perhaps that is the reason why the relationship between the Chicago School and modern disciplines has been so little appreciated, and often ignored [19]. However, if we follow the historical timeline from the Chicago school as a group, we can identify some followers which indeed have been appreciated and paved way into modern disciplines inspired by this context-explorative way of thinking, e.g., Dewey's "The Great Community" [22], further to Park's approach to the city as a "social laboratory" in "The City" [23], to Harold Innis' examples of empires and communication [24], and to a certain extent Marshall McLuhan's "The Global Village" [25]. Later Park has been criticized for his flirt with nature sciences by borrowing the terms experimental and laboratory [26] and thus his view of the city as a truth-spot [27].

Both Dewey [28] and Park suggested explorative scientific approaches within their "laboratory" frame [29–31]. Thus Park writes:

*The city, in short, shows the good and evil in human nature in excess. It is this fact, perhaps, more than any other, which justifies the view that would make of the city a laboratory or clinic in which human nature and social processes may be conveniently and profitably studied* (p. 46, [31]).

Like Park and his co-thinkers, *LocaNews* uses the city or village as a laboratory and environment for human practice and scientific explorations through the use of location-based journalistic texts for the mobile phone.

### 2.3. Social Interaction with the News

Place-based social practices of *LocaNews* users create mediated spaces. This changes the nature of participants' interactions with news. Since mobile devices are ubiquitous and so integral to our daily activities, we can no longer assume the disconnection between physical and digital spaces [32]. Thus de Souza e Silva refers to "hybrid spaces". These spaces are created by the constant movement of users who carry mobile devices continuously connected to the Internet and to other users. They are transformative spaces insofar as they connect the distant, the far-off, and the here-and-now so intimately. This connection relates to both social interactions and the information space (Internet) [32].

This connection, enabled by technology, can be found in Dewey's argument that the concept of news indicates something that is new because it differs from the old and traditional. Its meaning, however, depends on what the news import and what social consequences it has. This import cannot be determined unless the new is related to the old. It has to be integrated into the course of events (p. 180, [33]). This view of news as a non-static product, which constantly changes by its course of events and the value generated by the citizens', show that users of news can do more with news than

simply reading it. This import and its social consequences can partly be understood by Mead in the relation to experiences.

*We look for the relations of things by their antecedents in the past and judge the future by its relationship to the past to what is taking place. In the same way we understand relations to places by our experiences* (pp. 13–14, [34])

Mead distinguishes between the field of consciousness and the field of awareness. The two terms are often used in the same sense, but “awareness” is more apt to carry with it the value of “awareness of” than the term “consciousness” [34].

While a great deal of previous scholarship on mobile media assumed a disconnection between presence and virtuality (focused mainly on the mobile devices as voice communication) [35–37], much contemporary scholarship assumes their intimate connection. The growing critical consensus is that mobile communication enhances the users’ connection to space and sense of place [38,39]. Mobile devices do not detract from reality. They help to make it more real.

All these views deal with context in some way or another. An important characteristic of location-based applications and *LocaNews* is the potential creation of doubled or merged perceptions of space which is presumably perceived to be different based on previous place-based experiences. The tripartial system of *LocaNews* and the fact that certain stories are programmed to not show up unless the user’s physical location fits the story version’s proximity zones makes *LocaNews* context-aware or location-aware in a technical sense. The users can see how many meters away the story is taking place and at the same time the journalistic story is written for this purpose. This will affect the users’ perception of the news in relation to their surroundings (context). Journalists are often specialized in different fields of journalism such as radio, television, newspaper and the internet. Will there be a different specialization within mobile journalist, which not only refers to the mobile as a journalistic tool, but also in content?

### 3. Method

The *LocaNews* project is a pilot study which consists of four parts or iterations. These parts are conducted in (1) Bergen, (2) Volda, (3) Voss and (4) Volda (city and towns in Norway). Between each iteration we have improved the technical system in addition to investigating different aspects of this system. These aspects focus on the production of the news, the usability of the mobile application, the users’ experiences of the content, and the text itself. This article deals with part three, *i.e.*, the user’s experiences of this form of journalism. Similar explorative approaches to digital design can be found in Liestøl [40]; Løvlie [41,42]; and Nyre [43]. Different approaches to mobile media are treated in Fincham *et al.* [44]; Büscher *et al.* [45] and Goggin *et al.* [46]. The design of *LocaNews* is not an attempt to make a system for the existing industry, but rather to explore how these news stories are experienced. I do not believe the industry can directly adapt this tripartite news story system due to production costs and the current scientific analytic limitations within the system.

To carry out our user studies of 32 participants, we hired and paid media and journalism students from the two earlier iterations to produce the news for our user studies. The students produced 93 news stories with photos. These students were trained in the system and about the idea of writing

location-aware news stories. This was a time and space limited project which was conducted during the Extreme Sports Festival at Voss in the summer of 2009 over five days. During the festival the municipality of 14,000 people increased to around 20,000. Voss topography plays an important role which both the journalists and the users of *LocaNews* must take into account. The town (Figure 2) is surrounded by high mountains, rivers and lakes that create natural paths and lines which the town and its people has to deal with, and thus the topography differs from other large cities with higher urban density like London and New York. The festival was chosen as a frame in order to recruit editorial staff and informants. The editorial remit was to make location-aware news about and around the festival for the locals and many visitors during the event. Within this time and place limited project, we held each of the 32 voluntary participants one-by-one for approximately 80 min of their spare time in order to conduct a questionnaire and field-testing. The field-testing alone resulted in 28 hours of all participating observations. These user studies were conducted by the author and two co-workers. The participants were given a mobile phone with a pre-installed *LocaNews* application. This mobile application was accessible only to the research group and the participants. The mobile application was shut down right after the project.

**Figure 2.** The town of Voss and its natural surroundings (Photo: Terje N. Wikimedia Commons licensed).



The *LocaNews* system allows the users to walk around and read journalistic text tailored for the users' position in different ways. Therefore, if there is a certain important landmark like a public park, building or event, the users can expect to get the corresponding texts. Each news story is written in three different proximity versions, which is what makes *LocaNews* location-aware instead of only location-based. These proximity versions or zones are purely analytically chosen in order to force the producers to tailor versions right here, nearby and far away. They appear as optional categories in the mobile application as *Here* (0–100 m), *In the neighborhood* (100–500 m), and *Voss at large* (exceeding 500 m). The size of the zones was chosen based on the topography and the urban density of the rural town Voss. The users access the news through a mobile application developed specifically for this project. The user will only get access to the story within the proximity zone and will have to move physically to access another version of the same story. In opposition to ordinary news where the editors rank the most important news or place them on top on the site, *LocaNews* is ranked only by distance to the article.

Our 32 participants were on average 29 years old, in which 18 were males and 14 were females. Among the participants 12 were locals and the rest were from all across southern Norway. The participants were recruited at the festival area and in Voss at large. We looked actively for participants, who could represent a balanced group of people based on gender, age and locality. The participants were given a Symbian mobile phone with the *LocaReader* software installed. On average each participant spent 53 min using *LocaNews* [5]. We followed the users around in order to assist them, to ask them questions about the news, and to make sure that the users got to read at least some news stories in all three proximity versions. The participants were also instructed to think aloud about the stories they read. In such field studies, both the limitations and the benefits of the researcher's presence have to be considered [47,48]. The participants completed a questionnaire before and after the user testing. Before the user test the questionnaire contained questions about demographics and their use of technology, mobile phones, maps and relationship to news. After the user test, those participating fulfilled the second part of the questionnaire which consisted of questions about their experiences while using the system and how they relate this kind of news to ordinary news. The analysis is based on both the questionnaire and instant remarks from the users through participatory observation. The analysis will focus on the local, semi-local and the non-local user's experiences with the news, how they relate to places and how they interact with the news.

#### 4. Analysis

I want to explore the users' experiences related to the news content and related environments of this locative journalism. The results should be read with the notice that this study is done at a festival with many events happening at the same time at several different places and that the participants may already have had the feeling of information shortage at the festival. This could be a reason why the participants appreciated this event-based journalistic approach during the project. The testing also took place in a fantastic sunny weather with about 28 degree Celsius. This kind of journalism also contains the limit which all news stories have to be geotagged, *i.e.*, only certain news suitable or pertaining to this system are used, and certain news stories are left behind. The demography of our sample reflects the sports festival fairly well. Our informants were on average 29 years old, came from all across

Southern Norway, were largely involved in the festival as athletes, organizers or spectators, and tended to have advanced media habits (owning smartphones, digital video cameras and personal computers).

We cordially forced our informants to read as many stories as possible and made sure that they read the stories in all different proximity versions. We followed the participants where they wanted to go either by driving them in a car or by walking. We always traversed the main neighbourhoods of central Voss the hotel district, the shoreline and park, and the commercial center of town. In addition there were several far-away locations like Bavallen bike arena (3 km), Bømoe parachute arena (4.5 km) and Gudvangen base jumping (40 km). This was clearly a highly structured experience when it comes to movement and navigation. By doing this we got responses from the same news stories and exposed them to the places where the most stories were geotagged.

Caroline, Anders and Anne are here presented as collective portraits in a descending order, representing the local, the semi-local and the non-local. The way that these people invest meaning in the news and Voss is different in the three portraits. The contrast between locals and non-locals had a representation of 20/12 respectively. The 12 locals had on average lived 25 years at Voss. Among all participants, 8 were from Oslo and 3 from Bergen, so the urban population was well represented. This breakdown is because the locals are better acquainted with the geographical surroundings and will presumably recognize the names of places, buildings and persons, while the non-locals on the other hand can learn useful and important things about the relatively unknown village they are in.

#### 4.1. Portraits: The Local

Caroline is a 39-year woman who was born and raised at Voss and works as a teacher. She is involved in the festival as a spectator. She does not have a smartphone, but is familiar with internet map services. We started the test in a neighbourhood east of the city center, and we took her for a drive to the Centre, to visit the Town Square and the Festival Area where we walked around. She tried out the service for 50 min.

“I know all of this from before”, Caroline exclaimed. For example she knew several of the interviewees by name, among them the old couple who had been interviewed about all the fuss surrounding the Festival. Even though she knew much of the information from before, she found it engaging to read the news stories. They functioned as confirmations, as much as new information. In one story about the best viewpoint for spectators for certain sport events, she disagreed about the conclusion in the article. She still argued that this was a good consumer story which is useful with good descriptions of directions. While she uses her local knowledge when reading the news she also compares it with ordinary news from the area. One of the stories, which can be considered critical journalism, was about an organized event for old people with a very limited attendance. When reading this story she questioned the relevance of the article in this presented news format. “*How come that in this story, the versions get more and more critical the closer you get? I’m not used to this kind of critical news stories from my local newspaper.*” Caroline liked the festival news best and appreciated the useful information in these stories.

Caroline, who knew the festival and many of the sports very well, was just as concerned with the articles timestamps (or the lack of it) as with the geographical proximity. For her it was the combination of time and place that was crucial and not the search for places or events. “*The time shows*

*the most updated story and by that you can sort out which event it is relevant to visit at the present time. If there are changes in the program, you want to know when the article is written. You also want to know when the semi-finals and the finals start so you can reach the right spot at time.*” Caroline also felt that *“The stories in the version Voss at large (exceeding 500 m) is good for addressing what is happening and the closest version is good for telling how it happens”*.

#### 4.2. Portrait: The Semi-Local

Anders is a 29-year old man from an area near Voss, has been a spectator for several years, and is into several of the same sports which are presented at the festival. He works as an architect and will leave Voss right after the festival. He is quite familiar with many of the places in Voss and has no problem navigating by landmarks within this small town. We met him at a private house in the city centre where he lived during the festival, and took him along to other central spots at the festival, among else the festival tent and to Bavallen Bike Arena. He tried out the service for 55 min.

Anders stated that his personal interest dominated which of the titles he accessed first, and not the proximity ranking the system suggested. The proximity ranking was more like a curiosity which he found interesting while he read the story and tried to link the story contents to the surroundings. Also Anders appreciated the information dimension and argued that *“when you use the mobile phone for news you basically have need for instant information”*. He liked the useful tips and stories in this form of journalism and categorized the stories as useful or not when referring to them. Even if he did not find the story useful, he stated that it could be interesting as reportage. He felt that the system could do with only two proximity versions of the news story. *“Two versions (here and Voss at large) would probably do when it comes to orient yourself to which events you decide to seek. With good route descriptions in the version Voss at large (the most distant version) the system can work as a pathfinder and you can quickly find your way the specific event if you find it compelling enough. The versions here (0–100 m) should focus more on the specific event or competition in relation to what you actually can see.”* Anders argued that, as a user, you can get tired of reading “the same” story several times. *“If the purpose is to direct people to a certain place, should the title be the same in all versions. However, that is also quite boring and then you would probably not read them.”*

Anders loved the pictures in the articles and thought they represented the place perfectly and that they worked as confirmations that you reached the right place. *“The best with this system is probably that you can read about places you’ve walked by in the first days of the festival without knowing what it actually is. In addition, of course, to the fact that you get tips which helps you sort out what you should seek and take notice upon.”*

#### 4.3. Portrait: The Non-Local

Anne is a 25-year old woman from the Oslo-area who is a graduate student, involved in the festival as a spectator and concert-goer for the first time. Anne, like Caroline, can be described as an ordinary mobile phone user. None of them have used the GPS on their phone. We met her at Bømøen, the festival tent camp, and took her along to the town centre, and stopped at Bavallen while driving her back again. She tried out the service for 104 min.

Anne found the mobile application easy to use since there were few and simple choices and categories in it. She frequently visits festival in Norway and other Nordic countries. *“This application is perfect for festivals. You can find information both about concerts and events happening on a festival at the same time. You can even get information about what you actual can see. That is useful when you just walk around at a festival, as you often do.”* She kept highlighting the information value and did not like the stories which can be considered as critical journalism. She looked at the application more like information service and thought the festival should implement it in their services. After reading stories she also learned about the places the events took place even though this was not her main purpose for accessing them in the first place. This also led to an engagement and willingness to visit the places described even if she did not care about the specific sport. One example is when she read a story about the ski lift the bikers used to get to their entry of their course. She read the story in the nearby version and found out that the ski lift was actually built by Adolf Hitler in Lillehammer, but got closed down when the Germans left Norway after World War 2. Then an optician from Voss discovered this and relocated the lift to Voss instead. *“Amazing story! I absolutely want to see this lift,”* she stated, and walked the last 300 m in order to see the lift and to read the most near story. She also stated that she first thought this was a pure fact, but then realised that this was an interview with the general manager of the ski resort. Anne also stated *“I am dependent of understanding my surroundings when I visit a new place. This application helps me with that and provides both route directions and information I need about the place and events. It could actually have even more detailed information in the stories, such as prices, opening hours, etc. In one of the stories I have read I was told to walk south. South!!? Which way is that? It would have been better if the story told me to go towards something I actually could see.”*

These three portraits reveal different approaches, use and perception of the news by the local, semi-local and non-local, which seems motivated by their purpose being there, and their local geographical and culture knowledge. Or, like Mead would put it; *their relations to places are understood by their experiences.*

Some of the following results from the questionnaire were more congruent and therefore should not be categorized into the groups of local, semi-local and non-local participants. Most of the participants found the festival related news most interesting. These stories had also the highest priority among the editorial staff. When asked if *LocaNews* could be compared with traditional local or regional news, only three participants answered no. This could mean several things: that they found the quality similar, that our news fulfills their notions of public service, or that our news is so similar to traditional news that they cannot distinguish it from other form of news. The following answers show that the participants indeed found differences when experiencing this kind of locative news. A great majority of the participants found this kind of news more informative than ordinary news and most found the news more interesting (7 people found it less interesting). Here, the term interesting applies that this news encouraged them towards activity and thus became more involved with the news and its belonging surroundings. The majority found *LocaNews* more entertaining than ordinary news and the rest answered that it was indifferent (none answered less entertaining). These responses are mostly related to the event-based journalism presented and the treatment of places in the different proximity zones which they found useful. The participants found the stories about the sport festival the most

interesting. This shows the participants' agenda for this week and the fact that the whole town of Voss is involved or affected by this annual festival.

The participant had no problem understanding what kind of place the news articles addressed even though most of the participants were festival visitors from other parts of Norway. The participants thought the related pictures in the article were clarifying or helped them to better understand the place the articles were written for. When it comes to the different proximity versions in the system, which probably is the most unusual to relate to in reading news, a moderate majority found it easy to notice the differences. There were small differences between which proximity version they liked the most, but a majority liked the nearest version (0–100 m) best, followed by the second nearest (100–500 m) and the most distant (exceeding 500 m). This means that they found the nearest stories the most useful, relevant or interesting. This contextual, tailored and local experience seems to enrich the participants' perceptions of the news.

In order to take advantage of these versions the participants learned to understand the system to develop suitable reading strategies, rather than passively consuming the news. As one participant puts it "*the system demands you learn a certain pattern*" and this opinion was shared by several other participants. These reading strategies were developed naturally by the participants themselves in order to make the system a useful tool for navigation of the news and around the town. The participants found this feature of social interaction with the news useful for attracting or orienting users to a certain place or event. The participants stated that they were more likely to visit the site the article was written for. This could mean that the system itself requires or results in more active readers than traditional news platforms, which supports Dewey and Parks' thoughts that one can do more with news than just reading it by importing meaning from surrounding context. More than half of the participants agreed that this form of journalism could create stronger ties between the user and the neighborhood. Nobody suggested that it could weaken this bond. The users had a clear opinion on how the system should be used or how to get the most out of it. Several informants reported that the most natural starting point were the closest version, the stories right here (0–100 m). One participant suggested that it seems natural to "follow" news stories from the most distant to the closest version. "*If you read the stories the other way around (from close to distant) it felt weird*". Some of the informants stated that they could get tired of reading one news item in three different versions. In particular, that is, when the story does not appeal to their personal interests.

This usability of the mobile application in this project was analyzed in by Bjørnstad *et al.* who concluded that the mobile application system (*LocaReader*) was easy to use and that there were no significant correlations related to technology expertise and preferences or to any other background variable [49] correlated to the USABIL variable [5].

## 5. Conclusions

The conclusions show that the participants liked this form of journalism within this festival frame. They found it overall more interesting, more entertaining and more informative. This event based news encouraged them towards activity. They wanted to visit the place the article was written for and are more likely to move physically than by ordinary news. It is unclear if the participants actually liked *LocaNews* as journalism or pure information or service-oriented news, even though they reported that

the stories could be compared with other professional journalistic products. They kept highlighting the value of information during the field-testing. Potential further work with the *LocaNews* design could go in the direction of information services rather than hard news. The nearest news version (0–100 m) was most appreciated and they had no problem understanding which places discussed or distinguishing between the proximity versions.

The differences between local, semi-local and non-local participants were that the locals recognized a few more persons interviewed and knew about the many of the places mentioned. Since this was during a sport festival, temporal places like the festival tent and some of the course areas were created. In these particular places, the local, semi-local and non-local can be considered almost equal due to this specific event. The locals did focus more on how up-to-date the news was and their “re-discovery” of the place seemed not as important as for the semi-local and non-local. They seemed to seek the time stamp of the article just as much as the geographical proximity. Even though the locals knew much of the information from before, they found it interesting. The news worked for the locals as confirmation of something they knew from before, but in many cases, the stories added something new. It also seemed that the news could be a good supplement to their local newspaper.

The semi-local knew Voss and the festival area. They already knew what kind of sports event they should attend and how to get there. Their initial interests in the news application were the title, not the proximity ranking. They thought two versions of the story were enough because they already knew if they were close to an event. Their motivation for seeking the specific place was already determined by interests and initial planning even though some of the news stories made them seek places they had not planned. These festival-goers had large amount of free time between the events they attended and it was in this free time they were most motivated for seeking places based on the *LocaNews* articles. The semi-local also represented the majority reporting that they wanted the opportunity to read all versions from the same place without moving. The local participants also raised similar demands but they did not plan their festival schedule in the same way as the semi-local.

The non-locals were used to festivals and it seemed like *LocaNews* filled an information gap they previously had experienced. They mainly live in the festival camp with other visitors or non-locals and used this week as a holiday with the many sport events as a frame. They are “scared” of missing the most spectacular events and in need of navigation in an unfamiliar town. They represented the majority who wanted even more detailed information and road descriptions. When navigating to certain spot, they used the descriptions in the article as their only reference and continually looked for landmarks, buildings and other descriptions mentioned in the article in the terrain. The non-locals felt that all three versions helped them filter out what to seek. The nearby version (100–500 m) worked well in order for them to discover events they did not know about in a walking distance from them.

Common for the majority of all participants was that their hunger for site-related information seemed endless. They asked for more information about road directions and for example where they could rent a bike nearby. They loved the attached photos and used them to confirm that they were on the right place. The participants’ chose to read the news based on their personal interests instead of choosing the most nearby news article. My own assumption is that there may be significant differences in participants’ experience reading location-aware news in a rural place like Voss compared with other large cities. This form of journalism could also be more suitable for festivals and other large events

than in everyday journalism which could explain why only one participant reported that he or she did not want to use *LocaNews* in an improved edition next year.

Coping with the many aspects of experiences of locative journalism within the social “laboratory” of Voss are challenging and easy to criticize due to the lack of comparable field studies and the limited participants involved. However, following these different people around while reading locative news gives insights and a sensibility between the news and places not earlier collected. It shows a clear distinction of the participants dealing with this hybrid spaces which is anything than uniform. Looking at one town or city as a true-spot which is directly transferable to other places is not useful in itself, as no personal differences get to be revealed within this frame. Park & Burgess (pp. 142–155, [23]) acknowledges that community properties affect people in a given area and therefore such personal factors can vary. However, it is not the factors but the forces dominant in one urban area that Park assumes to be typical in other areas. These forces go hand in hand with the factors which are elements that co-operate in a place to make a given situation.

Further research should increase the numbers of informants and should implement video, audio and possibilities for commenting, participate and sharing. These features are easy to implement in the mobile application.

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49. These background variables also included locals vs. Festival visitors and their interest in the festival. It was also checked against how they perceived locative journalism as a concept with the same results.

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