4. Articles

4.1. The Reader's Image: Amateur Photographs in the Finnish Newspaper

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The Reader's Image: Amateur Photographs in the Finnish Newspaper

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Within professional journalism, the value of the amateur photograph has undergone a marked shift during the last decade. One indication of the increase in its value is the small advertisements in newspapers that encourage ordinary people – the readers – to send in photographs and thus participate in the organized flow of visual communication. In Finland, of the ten biggest newspapers by circulation, nine ask readers to send in photographs. The one exception is *Kauppalehti*, which is the biggest financial newspaper in the country. The rest are regional newspapers or tabloids that cover all areas of life.

Some time ago, seeing an image taken by an amateur photographer in professional newspapers was rare. Encouraging people to take photographs on such an extensive scale strongly suggests that we are witnessing a significant change in attitude. The process of publishing amateur photographs reflects a new approach towards non-professional photography and its potential as a source of images. At the latest, the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001 can be seen as a milestone, when much of the video and photographic evidence of the impact was obtained by amateurs using video camcorders and pocket-size cameras (Zelizer 2002, 48; Marshall 2011). Regardless of whether we can point to a definitive breakthrough where this development is concerned, it is clear that the use of amateur images in professional publications has increased markedly during the last ten years.

In academic research, the focus on amateur images and the examples of them typically relate to media spectacles that have a massive, even worldwide audience, as was the case with the attacks on the World Trade Center. War imagery, candid photographs of celebrities and politicians and footage from significant accidents or catastrophes are often the core of such studies. The contribution of this paper differs in that it examines published amateur photographs

taken in a Nordic country not involved in warfare and not suffering from any major internal state of emergency. This paper concentrates on defining more precisely the current and future value of amateur images within the sphere of regional newspapers in Finland.

As this research has been conducted to elucidate the focal phenomena from the newspapers' point of view, such issues cannot be brushed aside as [1] the impact of amateur images on the quality of journalism, [2] the newspaper as a media business and [3] the use of power. All of these considerations are fundamental pillars of journalism, as described by John Wilson:

> *The proper relationship between a journalist and a politician is the same as the relationship between a dog and a lamp-post. No one believes, though, that news and journalism are simply a service to democracy. They are products, commercially judged even when, as with the BBC, they are paid for by a tax, not the money earned in the market place. News is a way of making money just as selling bread is a way of making money. News is also in some hands a way of exercising power. The social importance of news remains. In industrial society, which may be called scientific society, news is, for all its failings, a major branch of the infor-mation business, not an option, a basic necessity.* (John Wilson 1996, 28.)

In general terms, the present research is an explorative study. While the three values cited by Wilson above form the foundation of the paper, today the tra-ditional sphere of journalism is subject to more outside influences than ten to fifteen years ago. One such influence disrupting the *traditional* threesome of values is the rise of amateur photographers. Ordinary people are self-deter-mining in that they communicate with ease using photographs regardless of what happens in mainstream media. This has caused newspapers to perceive their readers as possible eyewitnesses and even performers of predetermined photographic tasks. Whether this type of action is called *crowdsourcing* (Howe 2008), *networked journalism* (Beckett 2008) or *co-creation* (Aitamurto 2013), the fundamental idea is the same: A job traditionally performed by employees is outsourced to a large, undefined group of people in the form of an open call. Towards the end of this paper I discuss how some newspapers have gone to very extreme lengths in outsourcing photojournalism to their audience.

110

As mentioned, amateur images highlight bystander presence at a news scene and thus create witness value for the newspaper reader (Salo 2002, 108;

Peters 2001, 719). Live or nearly live images, authenticity and cogency are features used to describe this value (Frosh 2006, Frosh & Pinchevski 2009, Puustinen & Seppänen 2011, Bock 2012, Zelizer 2012). Other functions of amateur images within newspapers have been less actively discussed and researched. What needs to be taken into account is that not all amateur photographs are published solely because of their witness value. In fact, Finnish newspapers today are interested in amateur photographs for rather different reasons. In the three newspapers examined in this paper, two sources – [a] empirical material consisting of 95 photographs and [b] the answers given by staff who were interviewed – indicate that only a fraction of all of the amateur photographs appearing in the newspapers are published because of their news value and thus their witness value.

In Finland, engaging with readers and involving them in making the publication currently seems to have become at least equally important to publishing exclusively amateur news photographs. Established newspapers are interested in building a social bond with their readerships and direct the media time the readers consume towards the newspaper. Naturally the link between the printed paper and the online version is stronger than ever. As newspapers shift towards digital news services, they simultaneously crave a strong position in peoples' everyday lives. This is why the theoretical background in the latter part of the discussion section of this paper brings in the perspective of contemporary social networks and especially society's transition from spatially defined communities to relationally defined ones. This transition, researched by Barry Wellman, has inevitably changed peoples' consumption of news and information (Chua, Madej & Wellman 2001, 101). Understanding personal communities also helps understand the possible future role of a newspaper.

The newly emerging journalistic environment that we can all participate in enables news audiences to interact with both professional and amateur journalists. This adds new value to communication in the form of entertainment, peer support, expertise and social capital (Dahlgren 2005, 151; Nah & Chung 2012, 715). Thus, for newspapers publishing amateur images it is a conscious business strategy that could be analyzed as an act of marketing directed towards their readers (e.g., reader engagement and stimulation of local discussion).

Research Question

111

This paper discusses the values that determine which amateur photographs are published in traditional Finnish newspapers. The approach looks at the pro-

cess from the newspapers' point of view. The questions addressed are: What kind of a publishing platform does the local newspaper provide for amateur images? What kind of value do these images give to the newspaper? How often do these images correspond with the customary or traditional values of news images? and Have the amateur images started a new class or a genre within photojournalism? Overall the aim of the paper is to build an idea of the role of non-professional images in relation to contemporary photojournalism. The phenomenon is also discussed as part of modern visual and socio-cultural behavior in digitalized Finland. As we know, a phone-integrated camera seems to be ever-present – in time and in place.

Methodology and Empirical Data

The conclusions of this paper have been achieved through mixed methods research on three different sized newspapers: [1] *Aamulehti* from Tampere, with a circulation of 130 000; [2] *Kaleva* from Oulu, with a circulation of 72 000; and [3] *Keskipohjanmaa* from Kokkola, with a circulation of 25 000.

The first stage in the twofold methodology is a quantitative visual analysis that reveals the types and amounts of amateur images published in three significant Finnish newspapers. Applying visual analysis to the empirical material was considered useful with a view to making some generalizations – if possible – about image content (Van Leuween 2004, 13–18). The hypothesis was that the published amateur photographs could be categorized using some sort of variables as well as more detailed values. In the process of dividing the images into categories, it was noted that visual content is highly open to interpretation. Accordingly, many images were categorized as falling under more classificatory variables and values than just one. Moreover, in many cases defining some variables, such as gender, proved uncertain. Regardless of these uncertainties, the trends that emerged from the visual analysis (Figure 1) provided informative data and formed the basis for detailed interview questions in the second phase of the research.

The three newspapers were chosen for this survey based on their varied circulations and geographical target areas. The aim was to build a comprehensive understanding of how many and what types of readers' images are published in general. During the 21 days of observation (1–21 January 2013), a total of 95 readers' images were published in the selected newspapers. This amounts to an average of about four photographs per day. *Aamulehti* is most consistent with pictures of the day, as it has a reserved slot for one reader's image

112

per day. The paper quite rarely publishes readers' images as news photographs, the number being an average of two per week. *Kaleva* is the most active in publishing readers' images and the newspaper often even publishes two pictures of the day. The average for amateur news photographs in *Kaleva* is the same as for *Aamulehti*. *Keskipohjanmaa* is the most reserved when it comes to publishing photographs from its readers and may have days without any readers' images in the newspaper.

The qualitative second part of the research methodology consists of three theme interviews with the staff executives responsible for publishing amateur images. The face-to-face interviews shed light on the motivation and standpoint of newspapers in the use of amateur images. The interviews were conducted from an interpretive constructionist perspective, since the study is concerned with the lenses through which the publishers look at amateur images (Rubin & Rubin 2005, 28). It was expected that employees from different media houses would view the phenomenon somewhat differently. The responsive interviewing encouraged by interpretive constructionist is particularly appropriate in such cases. Inspired by previous answers, additional and more detailed questions were posed during the interviews, which proved to be very helpful in discovering the similar and opposing viewpoints that the three newspapers had towards their own publication (Gubrium & Holstein 1997, 171). Owing to the flexible interviewing style, the reasons behind certain work practices were thoroughly discussed.

The responses obtained from the newspapers are discussed and analyzed in relation to the visual content analysis. The employees interviewed at the newspapers were:

- Informant 1. Communications Director and Executive Editor of the Reader's section at Aamulehti, Tampere.
- Informant 2. Reader's Section and Online Executive Producer at Kaleva, Oulu.
- Informant 3. Managing Editor and Executive Editor of the Reader's section at Keskipohjanmaa, Kokkola.

Terminology

The beginning of this paper has used the terms *bystanders* and *amateur images* to distinguish those sources from the members of the newspaper staff and the images and footage they take. I would like to introduce another term that I would prefer to use in this paper: *reader's image*. This term seems to be in use

113

↑ Picture 1. Bats' nest. Published in Aamulehti, Pasi Alanampa.
↗ Picture 2. The savior of the mosquito summer: pantyhose and a fan.
Published in Kaleva, Riitta Marttila.

quite widely, although *photo*, *photograph*, *picture* or *pic* often replaces the second part of the term. For example, *The Guardian* utilizes the term *readers' photographs* widely while *USA Today* describes these images as *reader photos*. In the French *L'Express*, these same photos are referred to as *vos photos*, ("your photos"). In Finland the term *lukijan kuva* ("reader's image") has established itself in all discussion forums and thus become a part of the everyday language.

The term *reader* correlates rather well with the intended photographers since it makes no reference to the photographic skills of the photographer. Significantly, a professional photographer of some sort could be behind some of the readers' images. *Reader* is also a convenient term, because it reveals that the photographer has had to read the newspaper to know about the publication's interest in publishing his or her snapshots. The term *reader's image* also indicates clearly that the photographer and the newspaper do not have a typical working contract but that the photograph has emerged from among the readership. An interesting remark was also made during the interviews to the effect that the newspapers' own professional photojournalists demand that the term *reader's image* be clearly displayed alongside such photographs:

> *Our own photographers fear, or should I say they are concerned about, the overall standards of the newspaper's visual appearance as the numbers of readers' images increase. That is why at least our own photojournalists feel it is important to mark prominently the published amateur photographs as readers' images.* (Informant 3, Keskipohjanmaa.)

114

Even though this concern was brought to my attention in the interviews, readers' participation was seen as something normal and necessary for the survival of the newspapers in the study. Attitudes toward and the status of readers' images are discussed later.

The Two Purposes of Readers' Images

1. Pictures of the Day Decorate the Newspaper

> *The criterion for the pic of the day is that it has to give our audience a good feeling, so in other words the content has to be in someway positive. It can be for example a smiling kid swimming. We also like those photographs that make you wonder and even puzzled, like this picture from a bat's nest. And of course we have nature photographs, like those of birds and squirrels. It's part of the quest to create a favorable atmosphere. Then lastly there can be an artistic premise so that the picture has rhythm, maybe some geometric elements; or maybe the image is just esthetically pleasing. Of course it also depends on what people have to offer us.* (Informant 1, Aamulehti)

Informant 1, from *Aamulehti*, speaks of the criteria that the paper has set out for the readers' images that are published in the "Opinions" section as "Pictures of the day". The two other newspapers follow very similar principles with regard to such photographs. Furthermore, they have very similar fundamental tasks: to create a positive sensation for their readership. Most of the pictures are nature photographs representing scenery or perhaps domestic animals or wildlife. Some of the photographs are from the city, showing empty bus stops, buildings and streets. These images also typically represent a pictorial window on the season at hand and encapsulate the weather from the previous day.

> *Sometimes I admire how good the photographs are that normal readers are able to take. They are not professionals and their photographs display the beauty of our region so well… We've thought of it also as a way for the bond between us and the reader to become stronger and closer, which is something we would like. We know that these readers' images touch the circle of friends and family that know the photographer. In villages many people notice the familiar photographer and hopefully this brings*

115

> *the process of making the paper as well as the final product closer to our audience.* (Informant 3, Keskipohjanmaa.)

Complementing the sample images in this article, the following table demonstrates quantitatively what sort of content was found in the images surveyed. The purpose is to show what kind of trends were the most popular.

Variables

Person	Animal	Setting	Shot location	Values
• Male (8) • Female (5) • Uncertain (4)	• Birds (8) • Squirrel (4) • Cat (1) • Bear (2) • Deer (3) • Sheep (1) • Rabbit (1) • Dog (1)	• Domestic (9) • Public (66) • Uncertain (20)	• Forest (8) • Ocean/Lake (12) • River (4) • Field (4) • City center (6) • Suburb (12) • Mountain (2) • Uncertain (48)	

↑ Figure 1. The trends found in the image content of 95 images.
Values may fall under more than one variable.

As the table shows, the setting in many photographs is a forest, waterfront, field or home garden. Out of the 95 images, 26 had an animal.

Photographs of nature and animals have an esthetic value. The interviewees at all three newspapers share the esthetic achievements of their readers and believe that the photographs decorate the pages of the newspaper, as put into words by Informant 3 in the interview excerpt above. The pleasures of visual culture are nothing new (e.g., Walker & Chaplin 1997, 147; Sontag 1999, 92). As Walker and Chaplin state in their book, humans would pay no attention to visual culture if it did not provide esthetic pleasure. This esthetic value is closely related to the notion of building a social bond between the reader and the newspaper. Locality is important, because feature-type photographs taken by amateurs strengthen the social bond between the media house and the reader as well as among the readers themselves. McCallum (2007, 27) and Meadows (2013, 51) use the term *local talk* in describing local news that is produced from within the community of the medium's audience. The audience values news stories that are made by and/or introduce someone they know or know through

116

↑ Picture 3. Ocean view under the winter sun in Himanka.
Published in Keskipohjanmaa, Satu Joensuu.
↗ Picture 4. Aurora Borealis. Published in Kaleva, Teemu Puolitaipale.
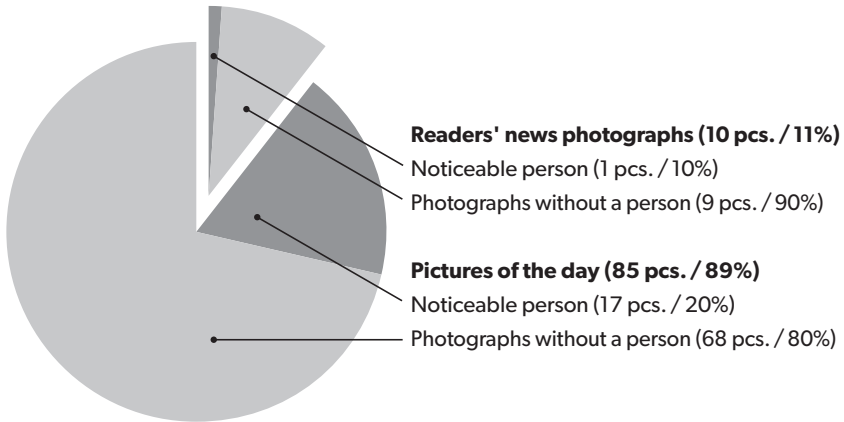
a shared friend. According to McCallum and Meadows, at least a news story should be local and have a *community-level narrative* to make it important for people (Meadows 2013, 51). This all makes sense in that positive familiarity through identifiable locations, people and nature add interest in the publication. In other words we are interested in seeing news from our own neighborhood.

There is another aspect to nature photos. In terms of data protection, these pictures offer an image genre that is a convenient and low-risk channel of participation to get readers involved. As people are excluded from the photographic content, it offers newspapers quick and easy material for publication with little fear of legal repercussions. This is somewhat contradictory compared to the other content of the paper's opinion pages, because nature photographs express very little in the way of opinion. As the sample from the three-week period reveals, only 18 out of 95 images show a discernible person.

The lack of persons in readers' images was one of the topics discussed in the interviews. Since the written content of the "Opinion" sections (nowadays called "From the reader") is highly confrontational and charged with a particular agenda, the question arose of whether images could similarly take a stand and

117

Readers' news photographs (10 pcs. / 11%)
Noticeable person (1 pcs. / 10%)
Photographs without a person (9 pcs. / 90%)

Pictures of the day (85 pcs. / 89%)
Noticeable person (17 pcs. / 20%)
Photographs without a person (68 pcs. / 80%)

↑ Figure 2. The number of readers' images and the number of discernible persons in these photographs in three Finnish newspapers between 1st and 21st of January, 2013.

have a role other than just to decorate the pages of the newspaper. The ideas for the future development of the "Opinion" section were not uniform among the newspapers studied. The two bigger newspapers, *Aamulehti* and *Kaleva*, are cautiously interested in publishing images that also take some sort of a stand or, for example, that point to social wrongs that people have come across in life. In this way in the future readers' images could be compared with any opinions and thus evolve to elements serving as hardcore journalism, making society face its ills wherever they are (Wilson 1996, 28). The smallest newspaper, *Keskipohjanmaa*, is more reserved on this issue and brings out concerns with data protection and publishing images that have an identifiable person or that readers might find offensive in some other way.

> *So for example if there's a reader's image of a person celebrating the end of the school year and we publish that online, it could be that in three or four years this person is applying for a job and knows that if you put her name in Google, the search engine will bring up this photo third in the results. It would be a typical situation that was ok in the first place but became inconvenient later and this person would want that photograph to be removed. We're cautious on this issue.*
> (Informant 3, Keskipohjanmaa.)

118

The newspapers are clearly prepared to deal with peoples' requests concerning earlier issues. Informant 2, from Kaleva, also addresses this question but

does not see it as a problem. According to him, if the article or the image has mistakes or false information, removal is possible. Otherwise there is no legal necessity to remove old image material. Moreover, according to Informant 2, as readers' images are increasingly published, the norms of correctness regarding images and captions must apply to them as much as to all journalistic work.

2. Readers' Images as News Photographs

The second major use of readers' images is in their role as news. To begin with, a reader's image can either function as a starting point for a longer news story or it can support and reveal more information about an event that has already happened.

> The technical demands for a reader's image are much lower than those for our own photographers. I don't see this as a weakness, because the idea of a reader's image is to enrich the story and increase the amplitude of the event. (Informant 2, Kaleva.)

Where news coverage is concerned, the "cutting edge" of readers' images lies in the ubiquitous presence of pocket-size and cell-phone integrated cameras. Each reader is a potential photojournalist everywhere and at any time. For a regional newspaper this can be very useful indeed, because readers' images allow the newspaper to take another step in retaining its role as chair when it comes to sharing local information. If bystander photographs are published in some forum in any case, then newspapers should be interested in offering an attractive site for this. Informant 2 describes well how they do not have the resources to send a photojournalist to all the small villages and their happenings around the Oulu metropolis. He perceives readers as a resource that on their own initiative or with very little guidance share occurrences through snapshots. It is very probable that people share interesting photographs anyway, so for *Kaleva* it is important that people want to send the pictures to its editing office in particular. Informant 2 continues describing that often readers need no incitement, as in the case where streets were flooding in downtown Oulu in 2012. In a few hours the editing office received hundreds of photographs, as people were simultaneously astonished and cheerful about the incident. *Kaleva* published some of the photographs in the paper and put up a gallery online. The web gallery had the highest ranking that year in visits of any of the newspaper's sites.

119

↑ Picture 5. Deluge in Oulu in 2012. Published in Kaleva, Pekka Ala-aho.
↗ Picture 6. Electrical center on fire. Published in Kaleva, Marko Kanniainen.

Informant 2 admits that sometimes journalists end up guiding their readers with photo tasks, as in the case of a thunderstorm in 2013. The editing office had received information about an electrical center on fire some 20 km from the office. This resulted in a wide power outage in one of Oulu's suburbs. One of the newspaper's journalists posted a request on Facebook for an image of the burning center. Informant 2 says that they received a photograph (photograph on top right) only 5 minutes after the post and it was published online, but due to its very poor technical quality it was rejected for publication in the print version of the paper. Thus, newspapers take advantage of social media forums where people are active. On the other hand, Facebook, just like any other social media forum where people can publish images, poses a challenge to and sparks a rivalry with traditional newspapers. It is important for newspapers to be present and active in major social media forums, as these are becoming something like notice boards for ongoing social debates.

I see the criterion for a reader's news image as being the same as that typical of any news. It's the importance and the weight of the event that counts – and of course its appeal. We look at the image and apply the same news criteria as with all breaking news. We might emphasize locality and certainly image content is important. Sometimes it comes down to personal decisions and it's the chief of our editing office who decides. And one more thing about the criterion: Technically the photograph doesn't have to be great if it has an authentic grasp of the situation that highlights presence at the scene – as if it's a documentary from the venue. (Informant 1, Aamulehti.)

120

The comment by Informant 1 is in a way surprising, because it demonstrates that the notion of photography in relation to realism is twofold: Newspapers (and even the general public) today still adhere to authenticity and truth-value in photographs when for decades this idea has been undermined by semiotic analysis. (Kember 1998, 17; Lister 2004, 328; Price 2004, 71.) Arguably, from the newspapers' point of view publishing a photograph is generally better than having nothing. Especially with readers' images many incidents are unique occasions and are quickly over. Any visual image of a scene produces one view of what happened regardless of whether it is all-embracing or not.

In sum, when readers' images are published as news photographs, above all this is because the images possess witness value. The content analysis and interviews conducted in this research support this contention. News-like readers' images are straightforward visual evidence of an event that has happened. They represent a window of sorts on reality and authenticity (Salo 2002, 108). Puustinen and Seppänen (2011, 189) demonstrate in their study that amateur images in newspapers are equally trustworthy or even more trustworthy than photos taken by a professional photojournalist. According to their research, readers' images provide immediate and authentic testimony to the fact that the bystander has been on the spot. According to their study, pre-planning, assignment, briefing and skilled image editing degrade this authenticity.

The question of *who takes the photograph* seems to have posed a bigger challenge inside the editing office. Informant 2 and Informant 3 both recognize a rising but often ephemeral rivalry between amateur and professional images:

> *Sometimes we might have a slightly problematic situation if, say, there is a house on fire 10 km from here. If we send a photographer there, we've probably received plenty of readers' images of the incident by the time our own photographer has left the editing office. Some of these images can be more splashy and visually stronger than those taken by our own photographer. This is because the readers' images have been taken when the fire was still uncontrollable. Certainly readers' images are typically lower in technical quality but anyway these situations may sometimes become awkward when deciding which picture to publish in the newspaper.* (Informant 2, Kaleva.)

Although challenging situations sometimes occur, a printed newspaper sets some restrictions on how many and what type of readers' images can and should be published. The interviews suggest that the restrictions on readers' images are

121

considerations such as technical quality in image resolution and file type, image aspect ratio and dimensions in relation to the newspaper layout and size. Most importantly, newspapers are interested in achieving the appearance and visual impressiveness of traditional newspapers. As the interviewees stated, modern newspapers are compact and use large and effective photographs to avoid scattered and unorganized pages with many little photographs. Clarity and impressiveness are the criteria that typically set limits for readers' images in print newspapers. Naturally, these restrictions are less of a limitation online; space is no limit, and low screen resolution and web-style short news stories in some way favor readers' images. Merely the possibility to build an online picture gallery of tens and hundreds of photographs makes digital publishing different from publishing in a traditional newspaper. For example, the *Aamulehti* picture gallery has over 130,000 photographs taken by over 4000 photographers. The gallery was established in the beginning of 2009 (August 2013) and it is the source from which *the newspaper* selects the pictures of the day for publishing.

Discussion – Participatory Image Sharing

From a journalistic point of view, newspapers face some serious fundamental questions about how to deal with readers' increasingly active role in visual communication. If we think of present-day digitalized networks and their communication possibilities, we see that a modern person is not merely a photographer but increasingly a producer and publisher as well. The Internet provides ordinary people with an environment that could once be accessed only by professional journalists. This means that ordinary people not only have the opportunity to create, combine and send visual content to one another but can also deliver desired information online in a variety of social media forums. What is more, social media, personal websites and blogs offer a limitless audience as long as the marketing and the content is well planned and executed. With this new digitalized journalistic environment being exploited by many talented private individuals and groups, traditional newspapers have to eventually – if not already – compete as one publishing channel among others. The question that must be asked by both a newspaper and its readership is: What more does a newspaper offer to readers' images compared to other publishing platforms?

122   For newspapers the question also leads to questions regarding what part of ordinary peoples' visual communication should be presented on their pages. In other words, when is an amateur photograph too insignificant to not
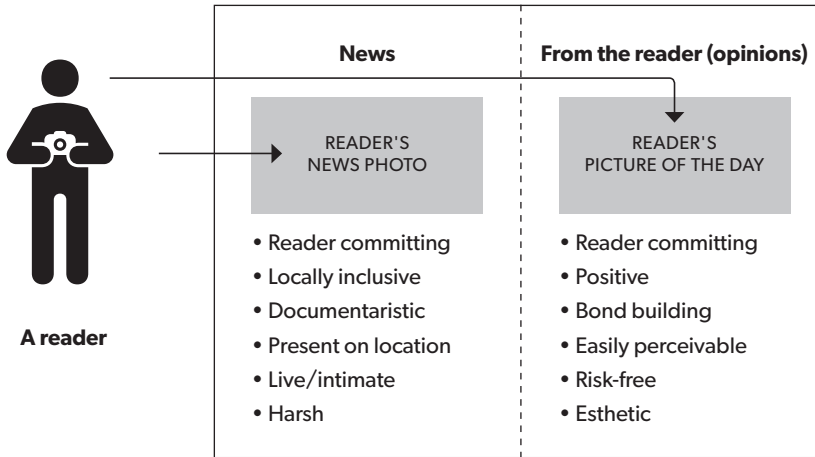
↑ Figure 3. The categories and characteristics of readers' images in Finnish newspapers.

get published? There is a danger that if the bar for publishing readers' images is set too high, people will learn that their images never or rarely get published on the pages of the regional newspaper. This will most likely direct the readers' attention elsewhere in order to get their images "out there". Where a newspaper neglects readers' images completely, the question to be considered becomes whether a modern newspaper can remain, as regards images, completely self-supporting with only its own photojournalists. According to *Aamulehti* and *Kaleva*, this vision is highly improbable. Informant 1 and Informant 2 foresee that the number and types of readers' images are more likely to increase in the future. As a matter of fact, they anticipate that all types of reader participation will grow and diversify.

An interesting observation from the interviews is the similarity among all three newspapers concerning a handful of photographers that send in their work weekly. For example, according to Informant 1 from *Aamulehti*, it is clear that this group consists of individuals that consciously have a camera prepared. They look for the smallest news-like images and are eager to send in the results. They are typically excited about having had their photograph published recently and wish to be successful in doing it again.

This raises cautious thoughts of a situation where amateur photographers are prepared beforehand to serve the newspaper. How extensive and how organized could such a practice become? The division of readers' images into two categories –pictures of the day and news photographs – is significant in

123

this respect as Informant 1 continues that in the case of its "Pictures of the day" *Aamulehti* tries to avoid publishing photographs taken by the same photographer. With news images, there is no such evaluation and potential news photographs are only considered for their news value; the photographer's name is insignificant.

The Change in Communication Is Restructuring Newspapers

As stated in the previous section, the anticipation is that all types of reader participation in newspapers will grow and become more diverse. In some cases readers' images can become essential. New stock photography applications for social media such as *Scoopshot*, *Foap* and *EyeEm* are good examples of digital applications that stimulate reader participation on an entirely new level. The basic idea with these applications is the same: Anyone can upload interesting images online for sale. Furthermore, one can create photo tasks for mobile photographers to carry out. For example, a local free newspaper, *Uusi Lahti*, uses *Scoopshot* on a daily basis. *Uusi Lahti* crowdsources its readers in order to illustrate news stories with photographs. This is one form of strategic outsourcing of photojournalism. *Uusi Lahti* also advertises for readers' images aggressively since *Scoopshot* has a permanent, prominent place on the paper's front page that encourages readers to participate in current photo tasks assigned by its editing office.

The three informants for this paper were aware of the new stock photograph applications, although none of the three actually utilizes them. Yet, the informants are ambitious in that they assign slightly similar photo tasks in the form of photo contests for their readers online through their own website. Informant 2 pointed out that preplanned, assigned photo tasks require certain kinds of news stories because assigning tasks for unexpected and surprising events is quite impossible. Another practice is guiding people to photograph everything abnormal and interesting in life in order to send the results to the regional newspaper's editing office. This again brings up questions concerning the attractiveness of the newspaper compared to other publishing platforms. Ordinary people might start to see the potential revenue in unique shots.

If investing money in readers' images is not seen as attractive enough by newspapers, some other kinds of motivation for the readership must be created to get them to interact. From what has been said so far in this paper, the issue could be considered in two interesting perspectives. First of all, the number of readers' images submitted as pictures of the day represents a significant appetite

124

for positive, locally recognizable images. This kind of participation, which falls well within the category that could be described as community media (Forde et al. 2010; Meadows et al. 2007; Meadows 2013), interests the readership and seems to be highly engaging if not even empowering (Grossberg 1987, 95; Meadows 2013, 48) If there is any cultural legacy of reluctance towards reader participation in the editing office, described here by Michael Meadows, newspapers should carefully question such traditions:

> *The editorial policies of the vast majority of news rooms, if not all, discourage active engagement with audiences (and sources) over meaning. In fact for most, this is seen as editorial interference.* (Michael Meadows 2013, 51.)

Unlike this tradition would have it, in order to keep a steady, high level of interest in the publication, a regional newspaper should fully exploit the possibilities of digitalization in offering people an easy channel through which they can approach the editing office. The engagement principles of community media according to the audience are that [1] they perceive it to be accessible and approachable; [2] they like the laid back, "ordinary person" perspective in the presentation; [3] they want to access local news and information; and [4] they appreciate the diversity represented in terms of both format and content (Meadows 2007, 1).

Secondly, we are forced to take into account the remarkable communicational changes that are taking place in Finnish society as in all Western countries. Modern social network analysis explains the importance of contemporary personal communities, where a shift has occurred from spatially defined to relationally defined communities (Chua et al. 2011). We use personal networks to maintain a mental network map showing who our friends – and even our enemies – are. Who are the people and institutions that we contact and, for example, what social media services do we use? Personal communities (both offline and online) exist between individuals, groups and organizations. For a newspaper, it should be important to establish a firm position on people's personal network maps. Maintaining and strengthening the newspaper's position as a bond between individuals would increase the newspaper's status as the moderator of public debate (Bovée 1999; Carey 1997).

With a glimpse of what can be expected in the future, newspapers will shift from print towards online versions. As this occurs, the importance of the bond between the newspaper and its audience will only increase, because the

125

online rivalry will become keener. With printed newspapers people rarely have a vast range of regional newspapers to choose from. This does not change the fact that already now we tend to satisfy our news hunger from familiar news sites with which we have developed a bond; but with many options to choose from, changing habits and creating new bonds is much easier.

If regional newspapers succeed in maintaining their role as chair in public discussions, it creates reason and motivation for individuals to participate in the making of such web services. In this scenario the social bond between the online newspaper and its sphere of influence is generally acknowledged, as is its power and impact on society.

Conclusions

One of the principal findings of this paper is what can be considered the surprisingly small proportion of published readers' news images. As modern printed newspapers easily have up to ten professional photographs per page, publishing two or three amateur news images per week is a rather modest acknowledgment of that category of image. On the other hand, as readers' images overall are rather uncommon, perhaps each of the individual shots published has more weight. The clear separation into two main categories – [1] *readers' news photographs* and [2] *pictures of the day* – was surprising in that it shows how similarly Finnish newspapers classify and view pictures taken by amateurs.

Secondly, the research provided the classifications used in Figure 2, which depicts the values and the functions of amateur photographs in contemporary newspapers. Newspapers perceive readers' images as an essential part of audience participation in the making of the publication. As discussed through the example of the free newspaper *Uusi Lahti* in the preceding section, stock photo applications make it possible to increase the significance of readers' images even to the point of making them a primary photo source, with the newspaper editing staff creating photo tasks for mobile photographers to carry out. In the near future it would come as no surprise if more of the images produced by professional photojournalism were replaced by photographs taken by amateurs.

126

Thirdly, readers' images provide a real-time window on what is happening within the newspaper's target region. For example, photographs of a house on fire taken on location and instantly sent to the editing office [1] work as a news

tip on what is happening and [2] are also possible material for the next day's paper. Sometimes readers' images can work as the impetus for journalists to build a longer and deeper news story on the subject.

The content of readers' images was analyzed in light of the interviews conducted with the three informants. Pictures of the day have a fixed place alongside other material sent in by the newspaper's audience in "From the reader". Most of the images submitted were nature photographs featuring landscapes as well as wild and domestic animals. There were also many pictures of empty city streets. These images typically possess little news value or express little in the way of an opinion in contrast to the written material on the very same page. The interviewees at *Aamulehti* and *Kaleva* expressed keen interest in amateur photographs with a distinct standpoint, such as pictures that indicate a failure in society, instead of images that have no more than esthetic or meteorological value.

Lastly, in any event the number of pictures of the day attests to people's interest in visual representation of their own community. As discussed in the previous section, community news is highly engaging and even empowering. As newspapers progressively shift to increased online delivery, valuing community news could be seen as a prospect for a profitable future newspaper. Providing people with "hyperlocal" news in the future should become much easier technically, unlike the case with print content. Ordinary people are already members of relationally defined communities. They have full control in that they may pick and choose what type of news they read and from where.

Strengthening the bond between the publication and individuals should be a high priority for newspapers today, since reinforcing that bond also buttresses the role of the newspaper as chair of public discussion. This results in higher attractiveness for the publication and heightened interaction between the audience and the editing office.

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127

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129

61
Näsi: Visual Discussions – Understanding the Socio-Cultural Functions
of Vernacular Photography in Contemporary Communities