# LEGITIMISING THE BBC IN THE DIGITAL CULTURAL SPHERE:

## THE CASE OF CAPTURE WALES

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## Abstract

This paper explores the use of new media by the BBC as a strategy for sustaining institutional legitimacy under a new regulative regime favouring open market competition. Focusing on the case of Capture Wales, a BBC Wales internet-based project that describes Wales from the citizens' autobiographical perspectives, and using a discourse analysis approach, we examine how the BBC re-positions itself in the emerging digital cultural sphere by using technology in the service of public participation. We observe a sense of empowerment in the opportunity participants were given arguing that such empowerment is no small thing, insofar as it clearly demonstrates that the public value produced through technological innovation lies in re-negotiating the power relations between institutional authority and ordinary people – in allowing the latter to appropriate the "means of media production" and to tell their own stories in public. Ultimately the article suggests that competing interests give rise to crucial tensions between ethico-political (serving society) and instrumental (justifying the licence fee) conceptions of benefit within Capture Wales, which in turn produce constant struggles over the visibility as well as the vision of/for this digital storytelling project by the stakeholders involved in its execution.

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## Introduction

This paper explores the use of new media by the BBC as a strategy for the institution to sustain its legitimacy under a new regulative regime that favours open market competition.[1] Even though the BBC, one of the major Public Service Broadcasting institutions worldwide, is not privatised, it is nonetheless now obliged both to adopt practices that originate in the private sector in order to remain competitive in the changing media environment, and, at the same time, to continually secure and consolidate its justification for public funding. The changing media environment we refer to is one of increasing corporatisation, which, for many, implies a crisis for publics. For example, Hardt observes:

> *Who speaks, where and when, and under what social or political constraints, have become important questions, since an individual shouting into the wind or the spectre of town-hall meetings are no match for sophisticated technologies of mass communication* (Hardt 2004, 5).

It is in this context, we suggest, that one of the legitimisation strategies employed by the public service broadcaster, the BBC, is the use of new media for purposes of public participation and self-representation by ordinary people. While noting the long history to self-representation by ordinary people both inside and outside the BBC, we focus on a particular case of this practice: Capture Wales, a BBC Wales internet-based project that describes Wales from the citizens' autobiographical perspectives.[2]

Even though the BBC has established multiple user-generated content hubs, which are designed to host and selectively broadcast citizens' contributions, we choose to focus on Capture Wales, because this online project of self-representation best illustrates the institutional ambivalence of the BBC around its use of new technology as a strategy of legitimisation. We define institutional ambivalence as the consequence of co-existing yet unresolved tensions within the BBC regarding the visibility and status of the project as well as the BBC's broader vision for new media as a means to public participation. Our argument is that, even though tensions around public participation are historically ongoing in the BBC, the use of new media as the vehicle for institutional legitimisation re-articulates these tensions around the idea of "public value," refashioning BBC's institutional identity in new, though not unproblematic, ways.

The chapter is organised in four sections. We begin by describing the context in which the legitimacy of the BBC in the new media market is debated and locate the case study of Capture Wales in this context ("Public Value" and Digital Story-Telling). We move to a discussion of the rationale that informs the BBC strategy to connect the use of new media with projects of public participation (Discourses of Benefit: Civil Society and the Licence Fee) and we subsequently focus on two central tensions, first over the visibility of Capture Wales within and outside the BBC and, second, over the BBC's broader vision regarding the use of new media for public engagement, as these emerge through stakeholders' accounts and other forms of empirical documentation[3] (Institutional Ambivalence Around "Capture Wales": Visibility and Vision). In conclusion, we point to the advantages and limitations of this strategy as it seeks to address at once the demands of the market, in terms of competitiveness, and those of civil society, in terms of publicising the "authentic voices" of ordinary people (The BBC in the Digital Cultural Sphere).

## "Public Value" and Digital Story-Telling

Capture Wales is an award-winning project, which was set up as a partnership between BBC Wales and Cardiff University in order to facilitate people in the making of digital stories: Everyone has a story to tell… each story is as individual as the person who made it (www.bbc.couk/wales/capturewales ).[4] Running monthly workshops between 2001 and 2008, the project pioneered the training of ordinary citizens into the use of new media so as to "tell their own stories," which were subsequently broadcast on the BBC Wales' website. Two elements are indicative of the rationale that informed the project: digital technology and real-life experience. Whereas the former points to the centrality of digital media (cameras, mobile phones, i-pods etc.) as vehicles of public engagement through and with the BBC, the latter points to the valorisation of ordinary individual experience as a privileged domain of BBC's online mediations.

Of course, the mediated representation of "ordinary people's" everyday experience has a history within and without the BBC. In cultural institutions outside the BBC, a perceived lack of representation of the diversity of points of view of the national population has been addressed in various ways, across time . The category of the "ordinary person" lies, for example, at the heart of documentary practice from the Grierson-led movement of the 1930s onwards, suggesting that this cinema explicitly valorised the category of the ordinary:

> *a declared belief in modern citizenship, unprejudiced by older, class hierarchic values and newly committed to exploring "ordinary life" as part of a proper representation of community and nation* (Corner 1995, 82).

Similarly, the 1930s Mass Observation project has been described as an explicit response to the way that "ordinary people" were hitherto represented (Highmore 2002). From the 1960s, the oral history movement addressed the continued perception that there was a serious lack in the mainstream representation of the public in the historical account. Simultaneously, the Direct Cinema movement in the US and Cinema Verité in France offered a specific response to a perceived failure in attempts to represent "ordinary people" – both movements claiming to represent "ordinary people" with minimal mediation. Corner argues that these movements influenced subsequent documentary television and the development of access television in the 1970s (Corner 1994).

Within the BBC, the notion of the "ordinary person" played a key role in early British radio and television, incorporating explicit and conscious representations of "ordinary people" throughout the early years (Scannell 1996; Scannell and Cardiff 1991) Indeed Anthony Smith's edited compilation of reports by and about the BBC makes clear that the institution has always grappled with the question of how to represent ordinary individual experience, as part of a struggle for legitimacy:

> *As broadcasting developed into a double medium, and television joined radio to create extremely powerful concentrations of cultural power in each society, the problems of how to organise the medium, how to finance it, how to supervise it and how to allow the public* some kind of representation *within it multiplied the perplexities which had been present from the beginning* (Smith 1974, 14; our emphasis).

Self and community representation within the BBC, then, clearly predate the new media technology of the internet. The BBC's Access project began with the programme slot, Open Door in the 1970s, in which "The accessees had editorial control over the content and form of the programme" (Corner 1994). Access was, as Corner shows, an explicitly political project that set out to address systemic failures in broadcasting to represent the views and experience of particular groups in society. By the 1990s, the Community Programmes Unit was producing Video Diaries and Video Nation, which were widely regarded as exemplars of the Access tradition on self-representation (see, for example, Carpentier 2003; Corner 1994; Kilborn and Izod 1997; Dovey 2000).

What today marks a shift from the past, however, is the particular combination of two elements: digital technology and real-life experience – albeit scholars had predicted the BBC Access project's increasing focus on real-life experience instead of group and issue politics (Corner 1994; Dovey 2000). Indeed the beginnings of the BBC's move towards a discourse of "public value" can be found in the changing nature of the Access Project from the group politics of Open Door in the 1970s to the individual experience portrayed on Video Nation Shorts in the 1990s. This shift was arguably linked to wider technological, cultural, political and economic contexts, including deregulation and the 1990 Broadcasting Act (Ellis 2000) and the rise of identity politics reflected, as Renov notes, in the growth of the genre of auto-biographical film-making (Renov 2004).

In the context of the current shift, the first distinct element, the amateur use of technology in videos and personal stories is associated with the rise of user-generated content and has been seen both as an opportunity for democratising news flows (e.g. Beckett 2008) but simultaneously treated as a threat to the journalistic values of validity and trustworthiness (e.g. Bennett and Entman 2001). The second distinct element of the contemporary shift, the valorisation of ordinariness, has similarly been met with continued ambivalence, as mediated representations of real-life are frequently caught in struggles over authority and prestige: either accused of popularising content ("dumbing down") in genres such as talk shows or reality television (e.g. Murdock 1999), or celebrated for democratising content (e.g. Van Zoonen 2001). As the presence of "ordinary people" in media spaces continues to proliferate, scholars are addressing (and problematising) such binary oppositions while to highlight ambivalences surrounding the very notion of ordinariness itself (e.g. Syvertsen 2001; Van Zoonen 2005; Carpentier and Hannot 2009; Turner 2010).

The BBC Wales digital-storytelling project introduces a different dimension to these controversies and histories, in that it professionalises the citizen's use of digital technology in their own personal storytelling productions, through BBC-run regular workshops; in so doing, it also seeks to re-valorise ordinary experience as an important part of its own institutional mediations: "each Digital Story is made by the storyteller themself, using his or her own photos, words and voice" (www.bbc.co.uk/wales/capturewales). It is this shift towards teaching the digital and encouraging self-representation (one's own photos, words and voice) that points to the emergence of "public value" as the dominant discourse for understanding the role of the BBC in the contemporary digital media milieu.

Public value reflects here an increasing concern within the BBC to abandon "elitist complacence," whereby the delivery of high quality informational and

educational content was regarded as automatically ensuring public trust and institutional legitimacy, and to regard public trust as something to be constantly aimed for and earned by the public (Born 2004). The rise of public value as a discourse that informs the BBC's key policy concerns is tightly linked with changing market circumstances. Coming to replace the "public service provider" discourse with its universal license fee policy, the discourse of public value promotes a conception of the BBC as one among many competitors for public trust, operating in a mature open market of subscription-based providers and convergent media (McQuail 1998; 2000).[5]

In this new landscape, the public value discourse provides a novel rationale for the existence of the BBC, which both acknowledges the shifting terrain of media industries and re-asserts the continuing importance of the public as the key reference for service provision in the digital age. Public value performs this double act by merging consumer research methods measuring "value" indicators among individual consumers – the public value test (Cole and Parston 2006), with the public interest in delivering service that is beneficial to society as a whole – public value here projecting the BBC's traditional role as an institution of public education that today seeks to navigate its audiences into the digital future.

It comes then as no surprise that the new public purposes, which the BBC White Paper (2006) announces as its priority commitments, reflects with precision the very priorities of the Capture Wales project: "sustaining citizenship and civil society; promoting education and learning; stimulating creativity and cultural excellence…; reflecting the UK's nations, regions and communities."[6]

Indeed, even though the launch of Capture Wales dates prior to the White Paper, it is chronologically located at the centre of debates around the new role of the BBC as an institution with a unique market position with respect to engaging both with new technologies and promoting citizenship.

Specifically, Capture Wales' dual focus on the professionalisation of digital skills and on the re-valorisation of individual experience can be seen as manifestations of the double claim to legitimacy that the public value discourse makes possible. On the one hand, the project provides a space for public education, in the form of skills-training, that generates public value in the form of participation and self-expression; on the other hand, it is geared towards the production of concrete artifacts, in the form of digital content, that can become the object of evaluation along the lines of a public value test.

This dual focus, however, is not without its tensions – tensions inherent in the public value discourse between a market logic of value measurement, which aims to deliver what we call instrumental benefit, and a social logic of the valorisation of public participation, which aims to deliver what we call ethico-political benefit. In the next section, we unpack these tensions in the BBC's public value discourse, by referring to the ways in which BBC Wales' stakeholders argue for the potential benefit of Capture Wales: as strengthening civil society but also as justifying the organisation's licence fee.

## Discourses of Benefit: Civil Society and the Licence Fee

What is the benefit of introducing digital story-telling projects as platforms for civil participation in the BBC? There is no single response to this question but

there is instead, what we may call, a cluster of discourses that provides different, often complementary but potentially conflictual, arguments around the benefit of such projects.

Specifically, two different discourses cluster around the question of what the BBC producers regard as the benefit of using new media to enhance public participation.[7] The first is ethico-political and sees the benefits of public participation in terms of public good, as enhancing the repertoire of voices in civil society; the second is instrumental and sees these benefits in terms of institutional interest, as increasing BBC's chances for public funding. To be sure, the ethico-political and the instrumental are analytical rather than substantial distinctions and, in practice, all strategic decision-making is informed by considerations of both. The distinction is useful, however, in drawing attention to potential discrepancies between the two and particularly to the difficulty in fitting the instrumental benefit of using new media at the service of public funding in a celebratory rhetoric of the BBC as enhancing the dynamics of deliberation in civil society.

The ethico-political benefit for the BBC in running Capture Wales connects the use of new media with new opportunities for citizen participation in public debate. In so doing, it directly reflects the discourse of public value, we mentioned earlier. It does so insofar as public value refers to the BBC's capacity to go beyond "traditional" concerns of equal citizen access and fair reporting and move towards the idea of using new media as a vehicle for citizens to broadcast their own content:

> *the importance of user generated content is growing in the BBC. It's actually, we've come full circle in that it's suddenly got a really huge place because … there's a feeling that we actually don't connect with our audience, the fact that there are people out there that have just got great stories to tell.*[8]

Whereas the BBC's user-generated hubs already testify to the institution's commitment to deliver public value by connecting with citizens and rendering their accounts of events legitimate newsworthy items (Beckett 2008), in fact Capture Wales goes beyond this in two ways.

On the one hand, content production goes hand in hand with new media skills-training, that is with such competences as scanning, editing and uploading still and moving images. In Capture Wales, the development of digital literacy skills by professionals, in the five-day workshops run by the expert team under the auspices of the BBC, is seen as a crucial form of empowerment that enhances people's capacity to use technology and to perform in public. In this sense, the BBC community studio sessions, cyber café functions or internet taster gatherings:

> *are part of a broader effort to … develop as many different kinds of tools as possible, to engage the public with programme makers more directly, in discussion, in contributing to programmes, and to engage people in projects around media literacy and creativity.*[9]

On the other hand, participation goes beyond reporting and becomes self-representation, that is public story-telling organised around experiences of the self and its immediate environment. Capture Wales is a digital storytelling project that follows a grassroots rationale of "digital technology at the service of the people" and, as such, understands the idea of people speaking about themselves to be part of the radical political vision of genuine democracy.[10] The idea of "authentic voices" is

central to this vision. This is partly because of the strong truth claim and emotional power that such voices bring to mediated content, but also, importantly, because of the strategic role that "ordinary" voices can play in transforming the character of the BBC from a paternalistic institution, where "sometimes you get the sense in the BBC that authentic, real voices, need to be interpreted to be communicated," to a contemporary institution that gives people control over the representation of their own lives – what BBC's Director of Nations and Regions called a revolutionary move.[11]

Such rhetoric brings together quite different positions of interest when, for example, in a similar vein to BBC management, the Creative Director of Capture Wales, Daniel Meadows, also uses the language of revolution echoing the (Marxian) radical discourse of people owning "the tools of production":

> *No one has ever given people the tools of production, they've only eked them out, little by little. Oh yes, well you can take a Handicam and film yourself, you know, crying over the loss of your boyfriend but we're going to edit it. You know, that's gone now and it's fantastic, you know. And that we've managed to achieve that is for me, that's where the ground's been broken, that's the difference we've made.*

The defining moment around this shift of control lies in the elimination of editorial intervention on behalf of the BBC: the institution does not edit user content as, in the BBC's Director of Regions quote above, the voices of the people do not any more "need to be interpreted to be communicated." This radical rhetoric by the BBC management and the Capture Wales expert team provides some grounds for the celebration of participation but, as we shall see, leaves intact institutional tensions between, for example, management priorities and those of the creative team or between individual and collective agency of media users.

Parallel to the ethico-political benefit, crystallised in this celebration of popular empowerment through new media, there is also a strong instrumental benefit for the BBC in launching Capture Wales. The project's use of new media to engage the public seeks to re-affirm the relevance of the BBC to increasingly larger constituencies of audience, now potentially lured away by the abundance of digital content on offer, and ultimately to justify its state funding through the licence fee. As part of a broader market-driven process of radical change in BBC's online presence, Capture Wales can be seen as an example of content production that intends to "be made more distinctive, and deliver more public value, in this developing and growing market."[12] Specifically, it can be seen as reflecting a fundamental re-structuring, whereby the BBC closed down a number of websites on the grounds that "they would not meet our new test of public value," whereas it re-oriented others, shifting their "focus on educating people about the creative process of film-making and allow audiences to share this."[13]

Participation through new media appears again as a key word of this strategic discourse on benefit – though, this time, benefit is not understood in ethico-political terms as authentic self-expression but in instrumental terms as an innovative service that increases BBC's competitive position towards other players in the digital market. This instrumental discourse on benefit correspondingly reflects a competing conception of public value, also mentioned earlier in this article, which, rather than relating to public good, is oriented towards the measurement of user satisfaction. The main reference to this instrumentalist conception of benefit is online content,

insofar as content is the only measurable indicator of product quality and user satisfaction in the context of the Capture Wales project.

Online content evidently refers to concrete stories as outputs of the project and is directly linked to the funding of the BBC: "The license fee essentially is about content, so we felt it was really important that the workshops produced the kind of content that we could publish."[14] This reference to publishability contrasts with other examples of digital storytelling, where the outcome does not necessarily have to be published on organisational platforms,[15] and points directly to the institutional criterion of quality – so that the kind of content we could publish, in the quote, means high quality content capable of being displayed on BBC Wales' website. This precondition of quality is repeatedly emphasised by others involved in the production of Capture Wales[16]:

> *I think one of the things the BBC has massively been able to do …is massively been able to inject a level of quality. You know, we have delivered the very best to the people who've made them in terms of our editorial experience, our teaching experience and our technical experience. That matters, the benchmark is high. People don't make crap digital stories when they work with us, but they still feel they're their stories.*[17]

Whereas the quote firmly asserts the ethico-political view on story-telling as an expression of "authentic" voices, in that people still feel they're their stories, its concern with publishability, in that "the benchmark is high, people don't make crap stories," captures a different interest in institutional standards and measuring quality – a concern that could potentially compromise the publication of "authentic," that is unmediated and non-edited content.

The key to striking a balance between the two lies in the BBC seeing its public value provision not only as a matter of the story products themselves but, importantly, of the process of producing stories in the skills-training workshops. This is evident in the quote asserting that "the BBC has delivered the very best in our editorial experience, our teaching experience and our technical experience." Clearly here, the participants' sense of ownership goes beyond online content as product; ownership rather refers to the sense of community that the project seeks to establish among the local stakeholders that participate in the process of story-telling. This conception of community continues to evoke a grassroots view of spontaneous creative encounters in local collectivities, reflected in the metaphor of BBC's digital story-telling projects "as the digital campfire around which people gather to tell their stories."[18] Yet, the BBC's concern with quality deliverables also reveals a more instrumental approach to the learning community as the aggregate of public preferences, which can be assessed in terms of the degree to which participants respond to or interact with expert input by the institution – the public value test measuring quality precisely in terms of "responsiveness to refined preferences" (Horner et al 2006, 44).[19] In this context, measuring the public value of the BBC's digital story-telling crucially involves the organisation's capacity to demonstrate that it can mobilise effective expert-user partnerships with a view to increasing the digital literacy capital of local users.[20] The importance of community here lies not so much in unleashing and promoting the creative resources of the public, but rather in demonstrating the extent to which BBC Wales provides innovative services through stakeholder networking so as to justify and legitimise its public funding. To

the satisfaction of the BBC governors, Capture Wales did indeed work to that effect: "further development of the digital storytelling project Capture Wales/Cipolwg ar Gymru … record attendance at community events and outside broadcasts … all helped deepen the relationship with license payers across the UK."[21]

The use of online content is, therefore, doubly defined by the instrumental discourse on public value: as process, referring to the expert team-media users collaboration in the community, and as product, referring to the outcome of the collaboration. Both these definitions reflect the requirement of the public value of discourse to monitor institutional quality in tangible terms, as authentic stories and as innovative networks. Yet, it is precisely the unresolved tensions between these institutional requirements and the parallel claims to public ownership, popular authenticity and community building, originating in the ethico-political discourse of public value, that produce a fundamental institutional ambivalence in the Capture Wales project. It is to these tensions that we now turn.

## Institutional Ambivalence Around "Capture Wales": Visibility and Vision

Institutional ambivalence is evident in the ways in which the BBC staff refer to their own experience of Capture Wales. In this section, we explore the articulation of such ambivalence in terms of two central themes: the visibility and status of the project among BBC staff, including the BBC management and the Capture Wales creative team, and the vision around the project as articulated by these same stakeholders.

**Visibility and Status.** Despite the BBC's enthusiastic endorsement of digital story-telling, Capture Wales, together with the sister project, Telling Lives, in the BBC English Regions, always remained insignificant in quantitative terms. On the one hand, its hits were too low to be recorded by the Audience Research Department of the BBC, so the project remained outside the range of institutional visibility granted to projects with higher ratings.[22] At the same time, its story-telling products only occasionally made it into the prime time BBC Wales television network, thus restricting the external visibility of its content to the visitors of the BBC Capture Wales website (although there is recently a more continuous presence as a result of the development of BBCi and the inclusion of Capture Wales and other user generated output like Video Nation, "behind the red button"). Nevertheless, at least in 2004, according to the BBC's own internal research into user-generated content, the wider public beyond the project participants did not know about the project at all.[23]

Such problems with visibility inevitably reflect difficulties in the overall status of the project within the BBC. Despite the enthusiasm of top management, which included Capture Wales in one of BBC's reviews towards the Building Public Value Charter renewal, publicity and promotion staff found promoting the project challenging. This may have been a consequence of the very innovative character of Capture Wales, which left press officers with nothing similar to compare this project with:

> *The BBC Wales' press office is set up to promote its television programmes and radio programmes … But … When you're trying to get across to them*

> *... a rather more wide ranging concept about something, and what we're really trying to get is people to get personally involved in the BBC and to use the BBC to get their own personal messages across really, then we have press officers, who are not used to doing that, speaking to journalists who have never come this before.*[24]

The validity of such organisational justifications granted, the net outcome of this lack of engagement has been that the visibility of the project was severely restricted and its status remained local, thereby minimising the dissemination of "authentic" public voices.

Problems of publicity further indicate that it would remain challenging to fully integrate the different stakeholders of this innovative partnership within the BBC. As Capture Wales' Creative Director put it, the expert team's experience of community, youth work and education, as well as professional photography, functioned as a strength for the BBC, but, at the same time, it sustained a sharp distinction between themselves and the BBC:

> *Well the BBC is a funny institution, it is sort of run on this cross between the army, public school and the civil service, in that everybody has a rank, you see. And it's terribly respectful of rank and, I mean I could never work in it if I wasn't doing digital storytelling.*[25]

As this quote clearly suggests, the Creative Director, as well as other members of the expert team, seemed to distance themselves, at least to some extent, from the wider institution whose priorities they did not always share. According to one of the team members, if another funding source emerged, she was certain that the team would happily all leave the BBC; Capture Wales was, she implied, more important than the BBC affiliation. Indeed there was a gulf between senior management's enthusiasm and the inability of the Capture Wales team to achieve a higher profile for the project – "a gap between rhetoric and practice," in the words of the Creative Director. The clearest illustration of this gap is perhaps the fact that the English Region's Telling Lives was discontinued in March 2005, despite the senior BBC management's apparent enthusiasm for digital storytelling.[26]

To sum up, the institutional ambivalence around the visibility and status of Capture Wales refers to a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the celebration of online story-telling evident in BBC strategic documents and in the launch of this project (and similar ones), and, on the other hand, to the minimal visibility of the project within and outside the institution; to the unclear perceptions of the project among BBC publicists; to the difficulties of integration between the BBC and the Capture Wales creative expert team; finally to the short-lived trajectory of its sister project and the ultimate discontinuation of Capture Wales itself in 2008. Whereas the celebratory rhetoric can be seen as reflecting the ethico-political discourse that permeates BBC official documents and management stakeholders, the multiple failures to integrate and formalise the project within the BBC could be interpreted as reflecting a certain reluctance on the part of the organisation to fully embrace the project as a grass-root initiative of public participation, sustaining it only to the extent that it serves the institution's instrumental benefit of monitoring its own public value in terms of innovative product and process.

**Vision.** The central vision of the BBC's digital story-telling initiatives is to turn passive audiences into active communities, where everyone has the chance to tell their story and enjoy the stories of others:

> *From Voices through Video Nation to Digital Storytelling and Telling Lives, hundreds of people with no previous broadcasting experience have taken the opportunity to tell their stories. For some, it has given them the skills and confidence to change their lives.*[27]

Tightly linked to the discourse of public value, again, this vision both aspires to use new media as a form of citizen empowerment at community level and simultaneously to situate the organisation at the heart of a competitive market of innovative transformations towards the digital future. As a consequence, similarly to the discussion on Capture Wales' visibility, the BBC's vision of the project is torn between the ethico-political interest on value, articulated in the "grass-roots" claims to social empowerment and community building, and the instrumental interest of value, best captured in perceptions of Capture Wales as an individualised and skills-based endeavour that facilitates the BBC's public value test rather than strengthen civil society. We explore a key manifestation of this tension around the conception of self-representation in the Capture Wales project, particularly the potential of self-representation to contribute to online community building.

Self-representation is at the core of the practice of digital story-telling; in Rennie and Hartley's words, "a digital story is something personal, generated from photo-albums and people's memories" (2004). As we saw earlier, project stakeholders celebrate the elements of individual creativity and personal involvement that characterise such story-telling in Capture Wales, in particular emphasising the people's access to tools of production and the lack of editorial control in the composition of content. This positive spirit is further reflected in BBC Wales' reporting on participants' workshop experiences:

> *… it's quite extraordinary on the feedback forms, you get this kind of, you know: how much experience have you got with computers to date? And you know, on a scale of one to five, that's often a kind of one or two, and then all the questions about the value people put on the experience are all, kind of, up at five, I mean really it's extraordinary.*[28]

Nevertheless, we need to keep in mind that self-representation texts, far from being the outcomes of unrestricted self-expression, involve an acute awareness of generic convention and a high degree of regulation: "Written with feeling and in the first person there's a strictness to their construction: 250 words, a dozen or so pictures, and two minutes is about the right length." This means that the pedagogic process of teaching skills to media users was simultaneously a process of tight control over the style, genre and length of their individual texts, with a view to securing the quality outcomes demanded by BBC Wales. In the words of Creative Director Daniel Meadows, "digital Stories – when properly done – can be tight as sonnets: multimedia sonnets from the people." In this manner, the highly structured workshop process ensures that a subtle and (thereby all the more) effective gate-keeping mechanism is in place, whereby the rejection of self-representation stories is very rarely necessary because the creative workshop itself leads to the production of a very particular form of self-representation: family photographs

and a first-person voice over. Participants did not deviate from this very specific repertoire of genres of self-representation, even if they might have felt restricted by the representational possibilities of such genres, because the participatory logic of "having a voice" through BBC's digital storytelling went hand-in-hand with skills-training in the production of a very specific textual genre.

The strict regulation of the workshop process by the creative team is clearly dictated by a sound educational rationale: the learning of a creative craft means, at least to an extent, being subject to the power of the expert.[29] Yet, as is the case in all pedagogic power relationships, the vision of empowerment in Capture Wales, that is allowing the users' "authentic" voices to populate the BBC online content, was achieved under a certain institutional condition: rather than authenticity meaning people "gaining" some control over what to say and how to say it online, authenticity here involved a narrow definition of self-representation (family pictures plus voiceover) and of the content and style of people's story-telling practices (digital "sonnets"). Whereas this institutional condition leaves some space for the articulation of the ethico-political interest to public value, as we shall see below, Capture Wales (probably unavoidably) seems to privilege the instrumental interest insofar as the regulation of content guarantees the delivery of measurable products (quality outcome) without necessarily delivering the promise of "democratising" their content (the grassroots aim of "giving voice" and building community).

The ethico-political moment of the project seems to lie, in particular, in the empowerment that the project makes possible for its participants through the process of skills-training itself – a process delivered by a creative team with top quality expertise and strong commitment to the cause of digital education. Together with the stories themselves, as the quote below implies, it is the quality of the team that defines the participants' experience of digital storytelling and their relationship to the institution itself:

> *Whatever else happens, the experience of the people in the workshop, and their relationship with us, is crucial…. Because that's what makes it special, that's what makes it different … that's why picking the team is very important.*[30]

As a result of the BBC Wales' choice to collaborate with "one of the highest quality media teams in the UK," the workshops indeed turned into a uniquely rewarding experience for participants. As BBC Wales' Head of Talent, Maggie Russell's, put it:

> *Now what is fantastic is, I haven't heard one story in four years of somebody having a bad experience making a digital story…. I think it's to do with the quality of the team that are delivering it….it's to do with, we are probably one of the highest quality community media teams anywhere in the UK.*

This strong quote clearly emphasises the value of teamwork in the Capture Wales' training process and the potential for individual agency in making stories that the project managed to mobilise (in the remarkable line that there seems to be no account of somebody having a bad experience making a digital story). What is left out of this quote, and indeed from broader institutional considerations, is the dimension of collective agency in the Capture Wales project. A central part of the ethico-political interest of public value, which focuses on the strengthening of civil society and the democratisation of ordinary voices through digital platforms, col-

lective agency draws attention to the fact that the creation of community requires more than the sharing of autobiographical narratives. In the words of Rennie and Hartley (2004), it requires an effort to use new media platforms in ways that enable the "narratives produced … to become more than the sum of their parts." With its current dual emphasis on capturing individual lives and creating community,[31] the project throws into relief the difficulties of sustaining the ethico-political interest. Such difficulties may have to do with the practical impossibility to keep such communities going for any length of time beyond the five-day span of the workshops themselves – inevitably here the concern is with the former, capturing lives, rather than the latter, creating community. Yet, such a collection of individualised accounts on private lives can only be defined as a public in the narrow sense of being dispersed in the space of digital display rather than in the broader sense of sustaining communities of communicative action, that is formations of collective deliberation over shared concerns with a sense of common purpose and commitment.

Along these lines, a more instrumental version of the vision on digital story-telling is put forward by the BBC's Head of Talent, when asked to reflect on the success of Capture Wales:

> *I mean the important thing for me is that we've done it, we've done it really well. It continues to be valid. As long as it continues to be valid, we'll continue to do it. But, you know, it may be that this has sparked off a new idea and we should be doing the new idea.*[32]

This "it's good as long as it continues to be valid" logic reveals a vision of Capture Wales, perhaps not shared by all stakeholders inside or outside the BBC, as just one "idea" among many that generally signals the institution's innovative spirit rather than a conscious investment on the power of new media to publicise ordinary voices and strengthen civil society.

## The BBC in the Digital Cultural Sphere

Our discussion suggests that the BBC is approaching digital story-telling as a tool to enhance its institutional legitimacy through expanded public participation, in terms of both educating the public via skills-training and providing voice to the public through new online content. Following its agenda to increase public value, this emphasis on digital story-telling is part of the BBC's broader move to incorporate audiences in its organisational practices through interactive sites and user generated content hubs as well as journalistic blogging. Such practices should be seen as the BBC's efforts to restyle itself away from its traditional elitist profile and closer to the contemporary profile of an innovative, open and inclusive organisation; simultaneously, they are also efforts to render itself competitive in an open market regime where the national audience cannot be taken for granted as the BBC's "natural" constituency but needs to be persuaded in terms of the network's added value vis a vis other content providers.

By embarking on this self-restyling project, the BBC further contributes to a restructuring of the cultural public sphere, the sphere where citizenship is not exclusively about political deliberation but also about personal narrative, lifestyle choice and aesthetic appearance, precisely by renegotiating the boundaries between the expert and the ordinary, the private and the public (e.g. Couldry et al. 2007;

Dahlgren 2007). Of course, as we have noted above, the BBC has throughout its history been engaged in struggles for legitimacy (e.g. Smith 1974), thereby constantly shifting and negotiating these boundaries but, as we have sought to show, the form this battle currently takes is particular to the current context of digital innovation and open market competition.

The use of new media in this process is strategic in the sense that these media provide a central platform for the BBC's articulation of a public value discourse – a strategic discourse which makes a dual claim to legitimacy in terms of measuring the BBC's economic performance (value for licence fee money) and enabling the democratisation of ordinary voice and agency. This duality, we argued, produces a fundamental ambivalence between instrumental and ethico-political conceptions of benefit – an ambivalence that we explored in terms of how the visibility and vision of the digital story-telling project Capture Wales figures in stakeholder accounts within the BBC.

Capture Wales, let us recall, has been a successful BBC Wales – Cardiff University initiative that brought together an expert creative team with a large number of media users to produce a series of highly praised short digital stories, thereby demonstrating how local partnership in skills-training can offer an empowering experience of mediation for ordinary participants. Our discussion, however, indicates that the relatively low visibility of the project outside the circle of those already involved as well as the systematic failures to integrate and formalise the project within the organisation may be seen as compromising the ethico-political benefit of the project, sustaining it only to the extent that it serves the institution's instrumental benefit of monitoring its own public value in terms of innovative product and process. At the same time, the vision of Capture Wales to publicise autobiographical accounts that enhance civil society seems to be troubled by a narrow conception of self-representation (family pictures) and a loose dispersion of individual voices in the digital space. What would further the ethico-political interest, in this context, would be a stronger sense of commitment of the BBC to a temporally sustainable project of publicising people's voices or a reflexivity about how to turn this digital space into a space of collective deliberation over matters of common concern. In the light of our remarks, the interest, at the moment, seems to be restricted to the BBC demonstrating its capacity for innovative service delivery, a key assessment criterion for the organisation's economic value, rather than maximising ethic-political value.

What our discussion ultimately indicates is that, as a consequence of this ambivalence around the ethico-political interest in its public value claim, the BBC re-positions itself in the emerging digital cultural sphere by using technology in the service of public participation – and thereby also redrawing the hierarchical boundary between the private and the public. It does so, however, only to the extent that it enables individual users to disseminate private stories in public space rather than in the sense of enabling collective participation in sustained projects of cultural citizenship, where the voices of individuals may be put to the service of (deliberating over) a common good. In this manner, the potential of digital story-telling to establish a space of publicness where new styles of communicative agency and new forms of authoritative discourse populate the cultural sphere, engaging with but also challenging the traditional hierarchies of broadcasting,

was not fully realised. Clearly, a sense of empowerment for project participants lies in the opportunity they were given in the workshops to get a brief glimpse of the world of media production and to act out the roles of the media presenter and/or performer. This is no small thing, insofar as it clearly demonstrates that the public value produced through technological innovation lies in re-negotiating the power relations between institutional authority and ordinary people – in allowing the latter to appropriate the "means of media production" and to tell their own stories in public. For such sense of empowerment, however, to give rise to more complex forms of collective agency, the BBC's technological innovation needs to be embedded in communicative channels that make it possible for digital stories to be effectively circulated and cited as powerful and legitimate chains of reference within broader projects of civil engagement.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we use the case study of Capture Wales in order to examine the role that the new media play in the innovation efforts of a major broadcasting organisation, the BBC, in the context of the UK's de-regulated media market. We argue that the BBC's use of new media, as a privileged site for the users' engagement in digital storytelling, can be understood as a strategic legitimisation move in the BBC's attempt to reposition itself in the digital cultural sphere. This attempt is based on the double-edged nature of the emerging public value discourse that the BBC is promoting for itself in the contemporary media market. Competing interests within the discourse, however, give rise to crucial tensions between ethico-political (serving society) and instrumental (justifying the licence fee) conceptions of benefit within Capture Wales, which in turn produce constant struggles over the visibility as well as the vision of/for digital storytelling by the stakeholders involved in its execution.

## Notes:

1. For a related discussion see Thumim, Nancy and Lilie Chouliaraki. 2009. BBC and New Media: Legitimisation Strategies of a Public Service Broadcaster in a Corporate Market Environment. In L. Chouliaraki and M. Morsing (eds.), Media Organisations Identity. Palgrave, London.

2. Capture Wales began the BBC's broader Digital Storytelling initiative. A similar projects in the English Regions network was entitled Telling Lives. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/tellinglives/). Celebrating the potential of digital media to strengthen public participation, the Capture Wales project was initiated by Cardiff university academic, professional photographer and Creative Director of the project, Daniel Meadows, and launched in April 2001 by Menna Richards, controller BBC Cymru Wales. Working with an adaptation of a Californian model of digital storytelling, this pioneering project has won four major awards, including a BAFTA Cymru.

3. The empirical material is drawn from N. Thumim's PhD Thesis entitled "Mediating Self-Representations: Tensions Surrounding 'Ordinary' Participation in Public Sector Projects," London School of Economics (2007). Interviews were conducted between September 2003-2004.

4. There are several books and articles about digital storytelling either recently published or forthcoming; see, for example, Digital Storytelling, Mediatized Stories, in the Digital Formation series at Peter Lang Publishing (edited by K. Lundby), Story Circle. Digitial Storytelling Around the World, to be published by Blackwell (edited by J. Hartley and K. McWilliam at Queensland University).And see also: Kidd, 2005; Burgess, 2006.

5. For the emergence of the concept of "public value" see Moore 1995, whose definition of public value as the delivery of a set of social as well as economic outcomes that are aligned to citizen

priorities in a cost-effective manner, has been very influential in subsequent developments of public value models. Cole and Parston (2006: xiv) have formulated two key questions for the delivery of public value by public service organisations, which focus respectively on the social value of what these organisations are bringing to the public and on the economic value of how effectively they are spending taxpayers' money: "Why (or to what end) does this organization or program exist? And, how will we know when the organization or program has achieved its intended purpose or goal?" (Cole and Parston 2006: xiv). It is largely these two questions that the BBC is seeking to address in launching digital-story telling projects, such as Capture Wales.

6. BBC White Paper: "A Public Service for All: the BBC in the Digital Age" (March 4th, 2006).

7. We use the term "producers" to refer to staff members at BBC Wales who are involved in various ways, and to various degrees, in the production of Capture Wales. The project teams are those most closely involved in the day-to-day production of the projects. In addition, personnel from different levels of the institutions are involved in the funding, production, marketing and display of the self-representations. (Thumim 2007, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of London).

8. Carole Gilligan, Editor of the BBC user generated content-website, Video Nation – which followed from the BBC Community Programmes Unit Terrestrial television project of the 1990s.

9. Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

10. See development of oral history as a political force to counter dominant histories (e.g. Perks and Thomson, 1998).

11. Pat Loughrey, Director of BBC Nations and Regions at the International Digital Storytelling Conference, Cardiff, November 2003.

12. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, CBI Conference 2004.

13. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, CBI Conference 2004.

14. Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

15. For example, in the original initiative of the Centre for Digital Storytelling in Berkeley, California, where emphasis falls on individual "writing" and self-expression rather that any sense of public value: … "our primary concern is encouraging thoughtful and emotionally direct writing."

16. For example, by Daniel Meadows, Creative Director, Capture Wales; Gilly Adams, Head of Writers' Unit, BBC Wales, and leader of the Capture Wales Story Circle.

17. Interview with Maggie Russell BBC Wales' Head of Talent.

18. Michael Grade, BBC Chairman, ICM Conference 2004.

19. Indeed, the instrumental conception of public value involves an understanding of the concept in terms of "finding ways to harness professional expertise in order to shape and guide public preferences," thereby measuring public "responsiveness to refined preferences" (Blauge et al, 2006). A clear example of this instrumentalist use of public value as capitalising on local expertise so as to have a measurable impact on specific communities is the UK government's use of Jamie Oliver's TV documentary series, "Jamie's School Dinners" as a model example to show how "public value can be created by responding to that shift [in consumers' preferences]" (Oakley, Naylor and Lee 2006).

20. The aim [of Capture Wales] is to work with local communities to generate material capable of being displayed on local web-sites, BBC web-sites and, selectively, on broadcast television, including on BBC 2 Wales Internal BBC document Welsh Lives – original Capture Wales proposal.

*21. www.bbcgovernorsarchive.co.uk/annreport/report03/audiences.txt - 24k.*

22. Emma Trollope, Audience Research, BBC Wales, notes from a phone call.

23. Sparkler Report (2004), internal report about BBC user generated projects; press articles copied and collected by David Cartwright, Head of Press and Publicity, BBC Wales.

24. David Cartwright BBC's Wales Head of Press and Publicity.

25. Interview with Daniel Meadows, Creative Director, Capture Wales.

26. Capture Wales discontinued running workshops in 2008, although it continues to publish digital stories made by partner organizations on its website. Given the commitment of the expert team and the inspiring leadership of creative director, Capture Wales did manage to turn a two month project… into a one year pilot and then a three-year commission, which ultimately ended up lasting seven years (Meadows personal website).

27. Building Public Value: Renewing the BBC for a Digital World, (BBC, June 2004: 72).

28. Interview with Mandy Rose, Editor, New Media, BBC Wales.

29. This position reflects a particular type of institutional agency that Capture Wales makes available to its participants, namely that of "conditional freedom" (Chouliaraki 2008, 846). We use the term conditional freedom, in the context of our study, to refer to the function of institutional practices to regulate, but by no means determine, the participants' relationship to new media by opening up a restricted number of educational and creative possibilities for them to engage with. As an economy of institutional regulation, we argue, conditional freedom is not resolutely negative but rather inherently ambivalent, positive as well as negative.

30. Interview with Karen Lewis, Production Manager, Capture Wales.

31. This tension echoes Joe Lambert's, CDS' Director, book title Digital Storytelling: Capturing Lives, Creating Community. (2002, CDS, Berkeley, California) and is critically discussed by Beeson and Miskelli (2005, 5).

32. Interview with Maggie Russell, Head of Talent, BBC Wales.

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