

**1d. Title of the research proposal**

*Exploring Journalism's Limits: Enacting and theorising the boundaries of the journalistic field*

**1e. Summary**

The field of journalism is undergoing major changes. The challenges are so profound that the question today is how it will survive and what shape it will take. Within academia, there have been a number of calls to radically alter the way we are defining and researching journalism. They provide new ways of conceptualising journalism from a scholarly perspective. What are missing however, are new approaches to study the radical changes from a maker's perspective. This proposal for embedded research puts forth an approach in which the maker's perspective is at the centre of the research.

A fundamental question is at stake: If the forms and formats in journalism blur more and more with other information providers in the public domain, then what sets journalism apart, if anything? We aim to provide insight into the challenges that journalists experience, the implications for wider society and the ways in which to research and conceptualise the new forms of journalism. With an enactive research approach (also called participatory or action research), we will participate in the creation of an interdisciplinary team of makers that will reflect, enact and stretch the boundaries of journalism.

The variety of makers, including activists, animators, artists, hackers, web developers and graphic designers as well as journalists will make various types of content (including journalism but also branded content or marketing). In this way, we gain unique insight into the central question: *How is the definition and practice of journalism enacted in a multi-disciplinary, multi-form and multi-function environment?*

*Keywords:*

Journalism; Boundary work; Enactive research; Media production; Media Maker's perspective.

**1f. Main field of research**

<b>Code</b>	<b>Main field of research</b>
	<i>Music, theatre, performing arts and media</i>
	<b>Sub disciplines</b>
32.70.00	Journalism and mass communications
32.80.00	Media studies

**1g. Public summary**

*Journalistieke grenzen verkennen*

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Wat is journalistiek en wie is een journalist? In een snel veranderend – digitaal – medialandschap staan deze definities ter discussie. De onderzoekers starten in samenwerking met de creatieve industrie een interdisciplinair netwerk van journalisten en mediamakers en analyseren de *organisatie*, de *werkwijze* en de *producties* die zij voor verschillende opdrachtgevers maken.

## **Research proposal**

### **2a. Type of research project**

This project concerns: Embedded research

### **2b. Research programme**

#### **1. Innovative character and potential for groundbreaking scientific contributions**

##### ***Introduction***

The field of journalism is undergoing major changes. The challenges are so profound that the question today is how it will survive and what shape it will take (Kasem et al. 2015). With new institutions (for instance Google News), publishing platforms (such as Blendle), news producers (including citizens), and new ways of working (individually, in networks, or in start-ups), journalism is more amorphous than ever. In turn, journalists are increasingly making efforts to **defend and define what journalism is and what it is for** (Carlson & Lewis 2015). Such 'boundary work' shows that the **where, what** and **who** of journalism are undergoing major change.

First, 'where' journalism is produced is no longer easily recognisable. Traditionally journalism has been performed in editorial settings such as the newsroom. Today more and more work is done in fluid networks that transcend newsrooms (Deuze & Witschge 2016; Heinrich 2014). Journalism is done in freelance work, start-up settings and in new constellations such as in the network of journalists 'de Coöperatie'. More than half of Dutch journalists work as freelancers (Vinken & IJdens 2013) and this impacts journalistic work, as research is starting to show (Bruno & Kleis Nielsen 2012; Hunter 2015). With **myriad spaces and ways of working**, researchers are finding that **capturing and tracing journalistic work is increasingly difficult** (Robinson & Metzler 2016).

Second, and related; 'what' is produced for 'whom' is also undergoing change. Mass media journalism is being replaced by networked journalism whereby the relationship between makers and their public is changing: from sending information *to* a public to communicating *with* a public. Journalism in a new media landscape is about producing (creation), but it is also about transparency (curation) and interaction (communication). It is important to find a new way to research these practices, to find ways to trace what journalism looks like. Journalism is deemed an important media genre because it provides information for citizens, mediates between politicians and the public, and holds those in power in check (McNair 2000; Peters & Witschge 2014). However, in the current media landscape - where journalists have to work more like entrepreneurs - and where they balance commercial and editorial work (Vos & Singer, 2016; Fisher 2015), we **need to reconsider 'what' journalism is and how it differs from other genres**, such as marketing, arts, politics and activism.

Third, there are many **new actors in the field of journalism gaining prominence**, be they marketeers, animators, web developers, hackers or others. These actors are looking for new ways to collaborate with each other - in interdisciplinary teams - in order to produce new kinds of journalism that fits the changing needs of the public. To do justice to the ways in which the output of the journalistic field is radically shifting, we cannot stick to our old definition of who a journalist is. Instead, we need to broaden our conceptualisation to capture all activities performed by those involved in the journalism production process.

One of the main ways the production of journalism is changing is through the **shift from a largely institutional setting to one of networked individuals** (Deuze & Witschge forthcoming). Journalism that is produced in independent or start-up environments forgoes a number of safety nets that the editorial setting provided (Witschge & Schram): 1) The legal safety net is missing, and if journalists get sued there is no longer a bigger brand behind it that can pay for the costs. 2) Ethical standards are held

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up at the individual level rather than the editorial level, and commercial interests potentially weigh more directly in journalist agenda setting. 3) A financial safety net is missing, and decisions on whether to investigate or pursue certain stories may be weighed against the need for steady income.

In this research we propose to **explore, theorise and test** ways in which **developments in the journalistic field impact work practices**. In doing so we address a number of responses in the industry that show the state of change that the industry is in:

- Support networks for freelancers have become more active and popular in the past decade, in particular for a growing group of independent journalists; in the Netherlands these are, for instance: the FreeLance Associatie for entrepreneurial journalists, the Nederlandse Vereniging van Journalisten (Dutch Union of journalists);
- Editorial settings are mimicked and networks are installed, such as the journalistic cooperative 'De Coöperatie', Bureau Wibaut (a collective for independent, senior journalists sharing office space) or Verspers, a training and publishing platform for starting journalists;
- Funds have become available from different places to support the health of journalism, whether they are foundations such as Addeesium, companies such as Google, or governmental organisations such as the Stimuleringsfonds voor de Journalistiek (a fund for journalistic renewal);
- New types of journalism that actively resist traditional formats to engage the public in new ways, such as Mindshakes (a 'club of young journalists and creative film makers, art-directors, directors, and content makers') or the Correspondent ('a daily medium, free of advertisement, with an aim to provide the world with more context').

#### ***A maker's perspective***

Within academia, there have been a number of **calls to radically alter the way we are defining and researching journalism** (see for instance Wahl-Jorgensen 2009; Anderson 2011). They provide new ways of conceptualising journalism from a scholarly perspective (see also the various contributions to the Sage Handbook of Digital Journalism (Witschge, Anderson, Domingo & Hermida 2016)). What are missing however, are **new approaches to study the radical changes from a maker's perspective**. The challenge to gain insight into the challenges that journalists experience and the implications for wider society. A fundamental question is at stake here: If the forms and formats in journalism blur more and more with other information providers in the public domain, then what sets journalism apart, if anything?

To research changes in the field of journalism, we need new approaches that embrace the multifaceted nature of journalistic work, the networked as well as individual nature of journalistic work and the blurring of work practices, outputs and platforms. To this end, we propose the method of **enactive research** (also called participatory or action research (Steyaert & Landström 2009; Grubenmann 2016)): During this project's two-year period, as a network of researchers and practitioners, we will participate in creating a new form of journalistic work. The two applicants (Tamara Witschge and Klaske Tameling) will work together with a postdoc (to be hired), a senior journalist (Geesje van Haren) and the director of one of the main start-up incubator centres (Lucas Hendricks) to set up a new network of media makers. Next to these core participants, the team will consist of a variety of media makers, who will work as freelancers, to mimic the way in which agile media production teams work in the current media environment.

This team of media makers and researchers will seek, trace, and expand the boundaries of journalistic work, exploring new forms of working. In this way, we aim to research, but also reflect, enact and stretch the boundaries of journalism. The practitioners in the team, all highly experienced media makers, together with people working on a commission basis, will produce content in such a way that we can research boundaries at these dimensions:

- 1) **What is an editorial 'space'?** Reflecting the hybrid and agile ways of working in journalism (Deuze & Witschge 2016), and the new spaces of working, the team will be hosted at a start-up incubator,

A-lab. In this space only a few desks may have 'permanent' inhabitants: mostly the team will work in changing settings and sizes, some will be connected to the team from a distance, other members will employ the available desks on an irregular basis, reflecting the ways in which co-working spaces are inhabited. Questions that we will address include: How does interdisciplinary cooperation gain shape, and do we see work practices settle, hierarchies form, and other structuring or anchoring mechanisms evolve?

- 2) **Who are the makers in the journalistic field and how do they work?** The team includes journalists, but also other media makers, ranging from animators; documentary makers, web developers, photographers, designers, artists, business analysts, sales and marketing representatives and data hackers. With this we aim to acknowledge the diversity of actors that play a role in providing information in the public domain, looking for new business models and exploring how each of them practices media making, explores shifting definitions, and provides insight into differing self-understandings.
- 3) **What is journalistic output and how do we determine quality?** To reflect the radical changes in what is deemed journalism and what journalists do, the team will have a broad mission to create 'quality information.' As such, rather than be limited by narrow definitions of what journalism is, the makers will search for and take assignments from a variety of clients. These will include governmental, non-governmental, commercial and individual clients, including, but not limited to news organisations.

### **Theoretical contribution of the project**

As indicated above, the field of journalism is undergoing major changes and challenges, that potentially impact not just the way in which journalism is practiced, but also the way it is understood, and by implication, its role in society. To explore the way in which journalism's boundaries are stretched, upheld or questioned through the three dimensions identified above – what is an editorial space, who are journalism's makers and how do they work, and what is a journalistic product and how do we determine quality – we adopt here a practice theory approach (Schatzki 2012). We adopt a bottom-up approach, firmly embedded in the practices of media makers, rather than employing a strong normative, and a *a priori* definition of journalism (Witschge & Harbers, forthcoming). In particular, as we aim to explore, and enact, and perhaps stretch the boundaries of journalism, we apply Bourdieu's Field theory (2005), and in particular look at interfield relations (Bernanke & Phelan 2016): how does the journalistic field differ from, and how is it impacted by, adjacent fields of media makers?

## **2. Articulation of research question**

The research acknowledges that the field of journalism is highly informed by media makers in adjacent fields (for instance: animators, web developers, or game designers), and that the work of journalism is informed by the activities and perspectives of a variety of actors (for instance: marketers, hackers, visual artists, graphic designers). The research aims to gain a comprehensive insight into the ways in which fields and actors interact, structure and destabilise the field of journalism, focusing in particular on the journalistic space, maker and output. The main research question is:

*How is the definition and practice of journalism enacted in a multi-disciplinary, multi-form and multi-function environment?*

### **3. Research plan/feasibility/deliverables**

To answer the research question, we employ the approach of enactive research (Steyaert & Landström 2009). Such an approach is currently already successfully applied in the NWO funded VIDI project of Tamara Witschge. As part of that research, two PhD students are currently working both as entrepreneurial journalist and researcher. It shows, similar to other research that has applied this innovative method (Johannisson 2009), that through this approach insights are obtained that would not easily be obtained through research that 'only' considers the work of makers in the field from a distance. The approach is highly suitable for the type of embedded research agenda that drives the NWO Smart Culture Roadmap that this proposal seeks to address.

The enactive approach allows insight into the process as it is on-going, from the perspective of the media maker. In particular, for the research proposed here, the main reasons for choosing such an approach are that it allows for:

- A non-normative approach to understanding journalism: Inspired by practice theory (Witschge & Harbers, forthcoming), we acknowledge that journalism is both a discourse and a set of activities, and that what we understand to be journalism is ever evolving. Rather than defining it a priori, we want to seek and stretch the limits of the definition and see how people respond to such boundary work.
- Knowledge from within the field: Recognising and embracing the premise of the Smart Culture Roadmap, we aim to work closely with the partners in the field, tapping into their knowledge in such a way, that their insights and knowledge queries are at the heart of the research, rather than an addendum.
- Insight into starting phase: The most interesting, or at least informative stage of a new endeavour is often its starting phase: It is in such a phase that the contested boundaries become visible, the self-understandings are considered and questioned most openly, and responses to the endeavour heard most vocally. The proposed method allows us to capture such important data in progress, rather than neatly remembered in hindsight.
- Ability to stretch and test the boundaries and gain insight into the responses: The current project deliberately aims at stretching the boundaries of journalism, and we believe that this NWO call is most adequate for such a proposal: Within journalism itself, there is little room to radically alter the working practices, given the economic considerations that are always at the heart of new endeavours. With the embedded researcher we can start to seek the edges of the field, seek collaborations with unusual suspects, whether they are artists, hackers, or activist, and as such invite responses from both inside and outside the field of journalism about the intrinsic and extrinsic values of journalism as a field.
- Knowledge circulation: As highlighted above, we work together with the partners in the field, and as such we do not aim for knowledge utilisation, but rather knowledge circulation: Tapping into the vast body of knowledge available in the creative sector, we will share our insights in an iterative on-going process, rather than as a finished story at the end.

#### **Innovative data collection: PhotoVoice**

To allow for a media makers' perspective, we employ a mixed-method approach, using both traditional methods of interviewing and ethnography (conducted by the applicants and postdoc) complemented by the photo-voice method: Each of the media makers are asked to document (take photos) of moments, objects, events, activities, emotional expressions that express the issues they come across. We will on a regular basis invite the participants to provide their insights by selecting and discussing the pictures they took.

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This practice-oriented method allows us to, in a low-barrier manner, tap into the collective and individual knowledge already present in the sector amongst media makers. The method is used more often in health sciences (Nykiforuk et al. 2011) and allows those working in the field to voice what represents their identity, ways of working, aims and worries.

As presented in the overview in Table 1, the practitioners will be invited from the start to take pictures (re)presenting issues/objects/challenges in their work. At various times during the project Witschge will invite the practitioners to reflect on the pictures, either individually or in groups, to gain insight into the discourses connected to their work.

Parallel to this data collection method, Tameling and the postdoc will conduct interviews and ethnographic work, in particular to gain insight into how practitioners define what they do, how they view their own field and related fields, and how actors from different fields interact with one another. They are both part of the media production team and will spend at least one day a week taking notes, doing interviews, and writing up their analysis. Being at the centre of the team, they will be well-positioned to gain an insiders' perspective.

Bourdieu's field theory will provide a way to synthesize the data into a comprehensive and holistic understanding of journalism as a field, providing insight into the ways in which different actors involved in the process shape and constitute the self-understanding and practice of media production.

### **4. Composition research team**

The research team is constituted by a combination of academics and practitioners.

Academic project lead: Dr. Witschge (associate professor, University of Groningen). Will manage the project, interview media producers and coach postdoc, analysis.

Media production lead: Dr. Tameling (senior researcher, University of Applied Sciences Utrecht), media production, ethnography and interviews, analysis.

Coaching production team: van Haren, senior journalist; Hendricks, strategic advisor creative industries  
Researcher: Postdoc, to be hired, participation media production team, interviews and ethnography, analysis.

Media producers: To be invited at time of funding, but the consortium partners have extensive networks of media practitioners.

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Table 1: Timetable and work plan for requested personnel\*

Activity	Staff	Month	1	3	5	7	9	11	13	15	17	19	21	23
<b>1. PROJECT DESIGN</b>														
1a. Literature review	AS													
1b. Research design	All													
1c. Design media platform	All													
<b>2. DATA COLLECTION</b>														
2a. Photovoice	MP													
2b. (Group) Interviews Photovoice	TW													
2c. Interviews	KT, PD													
2d. Ethnography	KT, PD													
<b>3. DATA ANALYSIS</b>														
3a. Photovoice interviews	AS													
3b. Interviews and ethnography	AS													
3c. Field theory	AS													
<b>4. WRITING / DISSEMINATION</b>														
4a. Conference papers	AS								◆					◆
4b. Journal articles	AS									◆				◆
<b>5. KNOWLEDGE UTILISATION</b>														
5a. Knowledge exchange events	All		○			○				○			○	
5b. Journalism courses	GvH, KT, TW									○			○	
5c. Trade journal articles	KT						○			○			○	
5c. Results published on Verspers	GvH		○		○			○		○		○		○
<b>6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT</b>														
6a. Supervision project	TW													
6b. Coaching media makers	KT, GvH													
6c. Coaching Postdoc	TW													
6d. Contacts with industry	KT													
6e. Managing media contacts	KT													
6f. Administrative tasks	TW													
6g. Research Coordination	PD													

\* AS = Academic Staff; GvH = Geesje van Haren; KT = Klaske Tameling; MP = Media Practitioners; PD = Postdoc; TW: Tamara Witschge

◆ **Key deliverables Academic output**

*Conference papers:* The academic participants will each seek to produce and present one (co-authored) conference paper per project year.

*Journal articles:* Envisaged output is four articles in peer-reviewed journals: two co-authored by PD, KT, TW; one co-authored by PD and TW; one single-authored by PD.

○ **Key deliverables knowledge utilisation (see section 2c)**

## **2c. Knowledge utilisation/valorisation/relevance to the theme of the call for proposals**

### **1. Network creation**

The proposal is designed in such a way that it allows for:

- **Media maker's perspective:** This proposal features the media maker's perspective at the heart of the proposal. The industry and academic partners have co-designed the proposal and work together in the professional and knowledge activities. Tameling and the postdoc are embedded in the media team at the incubator space A-Lab and Witschge will organise bi-weekly consultations with consortium partners.
- **Collaboration between practitioners and academics:** Both applicants are thoroughly embedded within media making networks (see section 2f.b), allowing them to connect to and address concerns from within the field.
- **Collaboration between university and university of applied sciences:** developing our experience with enactive research, we can help gain insight into and experience with those research designs that connect the academic knowledge with the practice-oriented knowledge available in the university of applied sciences, and formalises the collaboration between the knowledge partners.

### **2. Knowledge utilisation and implementation of project results**

Key events in the on-going knowledge circulation process (flowing both from academia to the industry and the other way around) are:

- Sharing of insight into the results by way of master classes /lectures for the curriculum of Journalism degrees at both universities and universities of applied sciences;
- Regular blog posts in trade journals (JournalismLab, Villamedia, Nieuwe Reporter, Persinnovatie);
- Publishing the insights as they are ongoing on the publishing platform of the consortium partner Verspers (every two months);
- Four knowledge exchange events that bring together creative professionals and researchers to discuss concerns, research directions and results (in months 2, 8, 14, 20) at A-Lab.

### **3. Connection with the Roadmap Smart Culture, the aim of the call, collaboration**

This project is designed in such a way that it shares both aims of the call: it proposes research "into new forms of artistic and cultural production and organisation" and taps into the "wealth of empirical material" offered by the developments in the creative industries allowing for more in-depth research. By employing enactive research –participating in media making– it addresses all three the levels of the call.

- **Product:** how is journalism produced by a variety of makers and how is journalism as a product undergoing fundamental change?
- **Sector:** Acknowledging that journalism involves a variety of makers, and researching what distinguishes it as a 'field', the results of the project will provide us with broader insights into the fields of media production practices and the transformations in the creative sector.
- **Society:** Given journalism's societal relevance, it allows us to address questions around the 'smart society': what is the sustained role of journalism for helping society organise social, public and political life.

### **4. The societal importance of the project**

This project is of great societal relevance, particularly in relation to journalism's importance for our democratic society. Providing insight into the problems and opportunities that feature in work practices of creative professionals it addresses concerns regarding whether and, if so, how journalism can fulfill its societal role.

### **2d. Number of words used:**

*section 2b: 2974*

*section 2c: 500*



## **2e. Literature references**

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