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Bringing the banjo back to life: The field of Dutch independent folk music as participatory culture
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Abstract

In this paper we investigate factors underlying the production of independent folk music (indie folk) in the Netherlands. By studying the creation, distribution and reception of indie folk music through in-depth interviewing, we argue that the social production of indie folk music is affected by a shift towards 'participatory culture' brought about by the rise of the Internet and Web 2.0. We note how Web 2.0 helps musicians to educate themselves and to develop careers in music. Secondly, from the perspective of both musicians and gatekeepers, participatory culture links their preferences for participatory aesthetics, decreasing boundaries between creators, distributors and users. Within the idiom of folk music, they distinguish themselves from the mainstream, creating more sincere performances. Thirdly, from the perspective of the audience, fans actively contribute by organizing small-scale events, enabling the audience to establish (trans)local scenes, reframing music as a social experience.

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1. Introduction

After the collapse of the '1960s folk revival' (Rosenberg, 1993), falling below the radar of mainstream music, folk music rose to the surface just before the start of the new millennium. From the early 1990s, new genres of folk music have been added to the 'folk music stream' (Ennis, 1992), including 'free folk', 'New Weird America', 'freak folk', and 'indie folk' (see Keenan, 2003; Petrusich, 2008; Encarnacao, 2013, for a historical overview). Similar to the '1960s folk revival', the genre gained widespread public attention through the popularization of acts such as the *Fleet Foxes, Lumineers, Bon Iver, alt-J*, and *Mumford & Sons* (International Federation for the Phonographic Industry, 2013). In this paper, we investigated the social processes that allowed folk acts to emerge and attract the attention of the global music industry and its audiences in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

This study is particularly focused on investigating the production of contemporary folk music in the Netherlands, a relatively small European country of 16.9 million people (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2015). The Netherlands is located at the semi-periphery of the global music market, with the scope of music industry activities generally oriented toward global trends in pop music (Hitters and van de Kamp, 2010). The transition of global music into a national context also holds for contemporary folk music: 'indie folk' became an industry-based genre (Lena, 2012) around the year 2005 [1] with Dutch musicians producing indie folk music for a national market. This has resulted in a second wave of folk music since the Dutch version of the 1960s folk revival from the mid-1960s through the late 1970s (see van Poecke, forthcoming).

Independent folk music (indie folk) is defined here as a genre, structured around a set of key aesthetics (see section 4.3 below), rather than as a mode of distribution or an ethos (*cf.*, Fonarow, 2006). Although there are marked differences in aesthetics and institutional politics between various subgenres [2], we have chosen to not strictly differentiate among them for several reasons. First, our empirical work indicates that Dutch folk musicians generally position themselves within a broader category of 'indie folk', and disregard other genre classifications as too narrow or, in the case of 'freak folk', as somewhat offensive. Second, this research indicates, in ways similar to Hesmondhalgh (1999), that indie folk defines itself partly by distancing itself

from a punk ethos, thus moving from the margins of the music industry towards its center. Hence it becomes a term designating a particular sound or genre rather than an attitude [3].

Although folk music has traditionally been seen as the antithesis of industrialization and technological development, tapping into a romantic discourse of authenticity (Rosenberg, 1993), we argue that the genre of indie folk fits well into new conditions of media production embedded in "participatory culture" (Jenkins, 2006). This results from indie folk being grounded in a "folk ideology" revolving around values of egalitarianism, participation and inclusiveness [4]. Similarly, online participatory culture is often ideologically defined as a folk culture for the digital age, as it builds community by sharing, operates on the basis of collective instead of individual ownership, and thus implodes the hierarchy between specialized producers and passive consumers [5]. Whilst the rise of Web 2.0 and the emergence of indie folk in the first decade of the new millennium happened simultaneously, and, as we suggest, can be related to each other, systematic links between these phenomena are rarely addressed in the literature. It has been suggested that the digitization of music production would have led to a resurgence of music with a "folk culture-like quality" [6]. This analogy is often continued with Web 2.0, where theorists recognize the emergence of online "digital folklore", manifest in phenomena such as amateur re-workings and re-circulations of commercial video clips (Blank, 2009). We have taken this argument a step further by looking at the relevance of participatory culture in a different habitat — that of the domain of independent labels, DIY music producers and active music fans. Drawing from 47 in-depth interviews with indie folk musicians, gatekeepers and audience members, we argue that the shift towards greater participation related to the emergence of Web 2.0 not only constitutes a creation of online digital folklore, but is also representative of the creation and production of contemporary folk music, structured around a set of "participatory aesthetics" (Turino, 2008; see below).

This article is organized in the following way. In the introductory sections, we first (2.1) address how innovation in popular music production can be studied from a 'production of culture perspective' (Peterson and Anand, 2004). Secondly, we investigate to what extent the Internet and Web 2.0 have changed the structure of the global music industry, including the conditions of music production and distribution within this new structure. Accordingly, we provide an overview (2.2) of relevant work on music scenes. Having introduced data and methods (section 3), we present our findings in section 4, which is structured in four parts, focusing on (4.1) DIY career building; (4.2) self-organization by active indie folk fans; (4.3) distancing from punk ethos in musicians' careers, and (4.4) changes in the institutional politics of Dutch indie firms and promotional platforms. This paper concludes with a reflection on the emergence of folk music as a strategy to bring authenticity back to music.

2. Theorizing innovation in popular music production

2.1. Participatory culture entering the music industry

Sociologists working within the 'production of culture perspective' have emphasized that although culture generally evolves gradually, it can occasionally be subject to rapid change (Peterson, 1990). Change may occur not because of special accomplishments by a few creative individuals (the 'supply side' explanation), nor due to changes within an audience or consumer patterns (the 'demand side' explanation) but rather because of changes in the structure of the system of cultural production (Peterson, 1990). Accordingly, Peterson and Anand (2004) identify six constraints or factors that facilitate the production of culture in systems: technology, law and regulation, industry structure, organizational structure, occupational career and market forces.

Peterson [7] highlighted that technology and law and regulation often are two factors that can set change in motion, and therefore "define the context in which the others operate". This can be observed, for instance, in relation to the emergence of television in the mid-1950s which was an important factor in the rise of rock 'n' roll music, displacing the then dominant jazz aesthetic of the U.S. popular recording industry (Peterson, 1990). Furthermore, Ryan and Peterson (1993) observed that the development of new digital technologies would lead to changes in job skills and aesthetic standards. These changes would lead to an emergence of music with a "folk culture-like quality" [8] thanks to the access to relatively cheap do-it-yourself (DIY) computer equipment and software.

Ryan and Peterson (1993) were pivotal in a debate on the effects of digitalization of media and the accessibility of the Internet to the internal structure of the media landscape [9]. A recurrent issue within this debate is the notion of "media convergence." Jenkins (2006) noted that it is not simply a technological shift — a transition from old (mass) to new (digital) media — but rather a confluence between two systems of cultural production. In his words:

> convergence (...) is both a top-down corporate-driven process and a bottom-up consumer-driven process (...). Media companies are learning how to accelerate the flow of media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments. Consumers are learning to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other consumers. [10]

Media convergence would shift the power balance between specialized media companies, independent firms and everyday users, blurring boundaries between 'active' producers and 'passive' consumers (Ritzer and

Jurgenson, 2010). Jenkins [11] therefore referred to this system of media production as 'participatory culture,' a culture "in which fans and other consumers are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content" [12].

As Ardèvol, *et al.* [13] argued, what remains problematic in the debate on media convergence "are questions of power relations, agency and the role of the media industry in shaping 'media practices'". Although they acknowledge that in the current media landscape the traditional roles of producers, gatekeepers and audiences are changing, they question whether the blurring of boundaries between producers and consumers undermines the hegemonic power that media conglomerates might still have in agenda-setting [14].

Focusing particularly on the music industry, the question of changing power relations has led to diverging opinions. Wikström [15] argues that digitization has transformed the music industry to such an extent that it is relevant to talk about a "new music economy" characterized by three basic features: (i) high connectivity and little control; (ii) music provided as a service rather than as a product; and (iii) increased amateur creativity. The emergence of a new music economy is somewhat contradicted, however, by recent statistics, which indicate that the contemporary recording industry is still highly centralized. Approximately 74 percent of the physical and digital music market is controlled by three major companies: Universal Music Group, Sony Music Entertainment and Warner Music Group (*Music & Copyright*, 2014). Though a large number of independent firms control about a quarter of the international music market, the bulk market share of the major record companies persists. This challenges views on the internal dynamics of the commercial music industry, characterized by long periods of dominance by large firms on the one hand and short spans of resurgence by independents, often due to technological changes, on the other (*cf.*, Peterson and Berger, 1975; Lopes, 2002).

Drawing on Jenkins (2006) and Wikström (2009), Baym (2011) argued that Swedish independent record firms deal with participatory culture more effectively than major record firms [16]. Rather than approaching the audience as a market, owners of independent labels approach their fans "as equals with whom they can build a larger community that benefits them all" [17]. By giving away free samples, hosting file sharing on their Web sites, writing label blogs and by creating direct interaction between fans and musicians, they are able to build communities based on sharing. In so doing, they adapt the ideologies and practices of the gift economy — based on values of trust such as egalitarianism, community and collective feeling — rather than producing music for the market place. In practice, however, both types of economies are often interrelated, placing indie producers in a balancing act [18].

In their study of international fan labor in the Swedish independent music market, Baym and Burnett (2009) found that fans are creating communities without industry support. They do so by forming relationships with artists in organizing small-scale events. According to Baym and Burnett [19], these active music fan communities are the "manifestation of the 'participatory' culture behind Web 2.0". They argue that

> "their social response to the pleasures of music is situated in deeply
> meaningful social phenomena that harkens back to much earlier phases of
> musical history, phases before there was an industry, when music was
> always performed in communities by locals for locals rather than by distant
> celebrities for adoring fans" [20].

By investigating the role of fan labor in the Swedish independent music market, Baym and Burnett approached the reception of popular music as a form of cultural production in its own right [21]. Baym and Burnett focus on

> "how people's media practices mix with institutionalized media practices and
> how they contribute to define cultural production" [22].

Their study expands the boundaries of popular music production beyond the confines of the recording industry (*cf.*, Hesmondhalgh, 2005; Strachan, 2007). Outside the boundaries of the recording industry, numerous actors are involved in the small-scale production and dissemination of popular music. This active fan labor often takes place in (trans-)local music scenes (Bennett and Peterson, 2004). These scenes occasionally form spaces where 'scene-based industries' [23] emerge — with fan and institutionalized practices intermingling with media.

2.2. Music scenes: Between professionalization and bohemianism

Ryan and Peterson (1993) predicted that digital music technology would lead to the revitalization of local and regional music scenes. They argued that "[b]ecause it is now easier than ever to produce a professional quality product, and yet still difficult to promote and distribute it nationally, many artists [will] focus on developing a reputation within the area where they are known from frequent live appearances" [24]. Local and regional scenes are thus central to the local distribution of music and the establishment of musical careers, especially after the introduction of digital music technology.

Apart from distribution, scenes are also sites of cultural production (Currid, 2007). As Currid argued, social and cultural activities are part of cultural scenes. The boundaries of scenes, often invisible and highly elastic, are based on genre, activity and location (Straw, 2004). In this paper, we define the concept of music scene, following Bennett and Peterson [25] as "clusters of producers, musicians, and fans [who] collectively share their common musical tastes and collectively distinguish themselves from others". Moreover, we consider the concept of 'scene' at the intersection of community and genre. Consumers form informal networks with musicians and promoters based on genre conventions, bringing in their own skills and expertise, thus co-creating activities and collaborations both within and among scenes are rather common (see Currid, 2007).

Scenes are not only informal networks. They serve as spaces where individuals acquire knowledge, form social relations and learn accepted behavior. They also serve as the basis for professional careers [26]. Such informal networks occasionally form the center of scene-supporting industries, "the domain of small collectives, fans turned entrepreneurs, and volunteer labor" [27]. Scene involvement can thus involve a range of different roles. Fans, for instance, can function as publicists, promoters, archivists and curators of music they like and aim to promote among peers — as exemplified by Baym and Burnett (2009). The productivity of scene members has been noted by Shank (1994), who, following Deleuze, ascribes a "productive anxiety" to scene members that would stimulate involvement, so that "spectators become fans, fans become musicians, musicians are always already fans" [28].

While informal exchange is a central characteristic of scenes, Hauge and Hracs (2010) described different forms of trade within (trans-)local music scenes. A more traditional way of trading is bartering, by which "individuals or groups trade goods and services for free" [29]. Other forms of trading are "adjustable value exchange" and "full value exchange". Adjustable value exchange "implies the exchange of monetary payment commensurate with the economic and symbolic status of individuals involved" [30]. The amount is often determined by what was perceived as fair but can be lowered if individuals have little money but high cultural capital. Full value exchange, then, is "exchanging goods and services for full price" [31], but raises the question of how monetary value is ascribed to symbolic goods and services.

Creative collaborators paying each other full monetary value establish a sense of professionalism. Hauge and Hracs [32] observed a growing sentiment amongst indie producers that described formal and "professional agreements as more efficient, productive and creative". However, most of the transactions were still described as favors among friends. One explanation for these seemingly contradictory arrangements between indie producers is that they aim to invoke a bohemian ethic as a defense against accusations of 'selling out' or being too business-minded. According to Hauge and Hracs, indie producers need to brand and collaborate to compete, but they also need to disguise these strategies to make it appear unplanned and spontaneous, because "'trying too hard' is no longer cool" [33]. They observed a tension between the more traditional bohemian careers rooted in do-it-yourself (DIY) ideology and the notion that the commercial success of indie musicians was "increasingly predicated on their ability to embrace and operate within the mainstream" [34]. This relates to earlier research by Hesmondhalgh [35], who pointed to the fact that independent (record) firms increasingly move towards professionalization through the establishment of economic and political relationships with corporate firms.

Hesmondhalgh [36] interpreted this move towards professionalization as a consequence of the 'conservative' institutional politics of independent firms, characterized by a preference to stay true to their indie aesthetics. According to Hesmondhalgh, independent firms could only do so by forming commercial relationships with major firms (thus 'selling out'). Otherwise independent firms ran the risk of marginalization ('burning out'). Hauge and Hracs (2010), however, saw 'selling out' or commercialization of indie producers as a response to the demands of DIY production induced by digital technologies. As digitization leads to an oversupply of products and increasing global competition, it encourages "musicians to be original and stand out from the crowd" [37]. Building relationships with professionals in the field, then, is a strategy for independent musicians, producers and firms to bring their self-produced products to international audiences. In Toronto, Hauge and Hracs more specifically observed how entrepreneurial musicians strategically enlisted "the services of other creative individuals to enhance the symbolic value of their products" [38]. Moreover, they developed visual styles that supported their sound, invested in cross-media packaging and professionalized their management (see also Hracs, 2015). Hauge and Hracs (2010) observed that musicians involved in small-scale production were less affected by the increased professionalization but adhered more to participation, bartering and developing a sense of intimacy. Here, the scene as a (trans-)local cultural space remains of central importance to music distribution, as predicted by Ryan and Peterson (1993). In interviews conducted for this study, however, we observed a similar shift towards professionalization among independent musicians, institutions and promotional platforms.

3. Scope of research: Data and methods

This paper is part of a larger research project investigating the production, reception and aesthetics of independent folk music in the Netherlands [39]. In order to investigate the factors underlying the social production of Dutch indie folk, gatekeepers, musicians and audience members were interviewed. In total, 47 semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted, lasting between 50 minutes and two hours and 20 minutes. Two interviews were double interviews, which eventually resulted in a sample consisting of 49 interviewees in the age bracket 18–55.

Most of the interviewees were living in larger urban areas in the Netherlands (notably Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Utrecht and Groningen) and have similar high educational backgrounds in the humanities, arts, social sciences and natural sciences. Thirty-nine of the interviewees were male; 10 were female. Although the genre of indie folk characterizes itself as egalitarian rather than hierarchical, the sample of respondents seems to be consistent with other research indicating that folk music seemed to be generally male dominated (Badisco, 2009) and that folk music revivals were "middle class phenomena which play an important role in the formulation and maintenance of a class-based identity of subgroups of individuals disaffected with aspects of contemporary life" [40].

All of the interviews with musicians and audience members were conducted face-to-face in a domestic setting, with the exception of two interviews using Skype. All of the interviews with gatekeepers were

conducted face-to-face in an institutional setting, with the exception of one interview using Skype, and one interview using e-mail. Names of the interviewees have been changed to protect their privacy. Most of the interviewees, however, clearly stated that they did not mind using their own names, indeed stating that they were not in favor of using pseudonyms.

For the sampling of bands and musicians we used criterion sampling, meaning that either the musicians themselves, their record label or the press positioned them within the category of 'indie folk'. All of the musicians (14 in total) were able to make a living performing and recording music, though some held multiple jobs (Hesmondhalgh and Baker, 2011). Gatekeepers (10 in total) were selected on the basis of their long-term involvement in the promotion and distribution of Dutch indie music, and were ranging from the head of business operations of a recently established independent music platform to one of the product managers of Warner Music Benelux. Finally, for the sampling of audience members, we used maximum variation sampling, aiming to include a diverse range of respondents within the sample, containing male and female audience members from different age groups. Most of the audience members (19 in total) were approached and selected during concerts of folk acts whose music was categorized as 'free folk', 'New Weird America', 'freak folk', 'indie folk' or 'folk pop' either by themselves, their record label or the press [41]. Some additional respondents (six in total) were approached using the snowball method. All of the audience members were only selected if they considered themselves to be strong aficionados of indie folk music in general or the indie folk acts in particular.

The interviews were conducted following the epistemological guidelines of "active interviewing" [42]. This is a type of interviewing acting as an "interpretive practicel" which is "part of a broader image of reality as an ongoing, interpretive accomplishment' [43]. The interviews were structured around the following five topics: (i) musical taste formation; (ii) personal descriptions/definitions of indie folk; (iii) personal affinity with indie folk music; (iv) use and understanding of indie folk music in everyday life, and (v) broader artistic, cultural and political interests. The interviews with musicians were complemented by questions based on the topics of (i) career path and (ii) use and understanding of indie folk aesthetics. Interviews with gatekeepers, lastly, were complemented with questions on the selection and marketing of indie folk acts included in their rosters.

The interviews were transcribed and coded using *Atlas.ti*, enabling us to search for patterns in interviews. The interviews were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis, placing a premium on the content of the text (the "whats") rather than on the "hows" of replying [44].

Analysis of interviews pointed out that the distinctions between producer, gatekeeper and consumer made sense, although the boundaries between the categories were often blurred. This was seen as typical of folk music, where the bundling of tasks and the establishment of close connections between artists, distributors and audiences were part of the conventions defining the genre [45].

The presentation of our research findings will follow in the next section. It is structured in four parts, focusing on (4.1) how digitization relates to DIY career building; (4.2) how Web 2.0 results in the formation and establishment of (trans-)local indie folk scenes; (4.3) how we perceive a shift from a punk ethos towards folk aesthetics in the careers of musicians; and (4.4) how we perceived a similar shift in the institutional politics of professional music institutions, partly resulting from the more relational instead of oppositional ideologies characteristic of participatory culture.

4. The field of Dutch indie folk as participatory culture

4.1. Building your own career: DIY production meets the industry

Studying the career paths of musicians interviewed for this paper, we found that some followed conventional routes. Beginning at a pop academy, art academy or music conservatory, they started by playing in living room concerts, toured bigger music venues in the Netherlands, participated in local and national music competitions and eventually signed record deals with either a major label or with a large independent record firm. Most of the musicians, however, were self-taught, and had used DIY strategies to develop their careers. In many cases, they established their own record labels, built their own sound studios and rehearsal rooms, produced, recorded and mixed their own songs and records, designed and screen-printed their own album art and sometimes even built their own instruments.

Rikke (31, Rotterdam), a singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist in the Rotterdam-based indie folk band *Half Way Station*, explained his DIY career path. During the interview, he explained how he decided to become a musician by learning to play the banjo and guitar, using YouTube videos as instruction manuals:

> (R): When I listened to folk back in the days, I watched a lot of YouTube indeed, but that's something I don't usually do anymore.
> (N): But you got to know a lot of music through YouTube?
> (R): Yeah, especially the folksy stuff. Those people are dead, so you have to.
> (N): Yes, exactly. So you started searching. And how was it then? You typed in a musician, and then you started clicking and watching more videos?
> (R): Hmm ... I had a period that I was working on those American banjo players. I collected them.

(N): And so you learned to play the banjo that way?
(R): Yes, because of YouTube, and the guitar as well. [46]

After graduating from an art academy, Rikke decided to start earning his living by writing folk songs and performing live music. He first performed as a singer-songwriter in the style of pre-war bluesmen and early Bob Dylan — "as just a guy with a guitar, banjo and harmonica playing blues and folk songs in the local bar", as he said. The local bar was also where he met a fellow singer and songwriter who, during one of his concerts, spontaneously appeared on stage and started to play and sing along. Interestingly, Rikke framed the formation of his career as typical of the folk tradition: two self-taught musicians who accidently met, learned to play and performed music through live performances and spontaneously swapped instruments on stage.

After touring in Dutch music events and festivals and participating in several local pop music competitions, the two-man formation gradually evolved into a five-man band, including a pianist, bass player and drummer. *Half Way Station* self-released two studio albums, in 2012 and 2015, respectively, which were self-financed and for which band members did everything themselves — from building microphones to writing, recording and mixing of songs, designing album art and printing album covers. Rikke self-consciously framed his urge to do things himself as part of DIY discourse, or, more accurately, of the embattled stance that characterized DIY ethos:

> We've reached a point in our careers that we have done a lot of stuff ourselves ... Print screening, cutting, folding, gluing, recording, even the instruments, the microphones, we all made them ourselves. Everything done by ourselves. And we found a sort of confirmation in that. And now I am working on, ehm, if we now cooperate with people, it should be the right person. (...) These days nobody between 20 and 30 makes an arrangement for 20 years (...) or signs a contract for three years. (...) But that makes it very difficult at the same time. Everything is very volatile. For example, many bands work like this: a songwriter, a bunch of musicians — of one label, or with whom they have studied at conservatory. They hire them, pay them 50 bucks per show, well, and they tour along the festivals. If it's a hit, then they continue doing it for another year, or try to make an album that flops then. If it's not a hit, well then the whole group falls apart. And this is the kind of rhythm among which the bands that are stayers are the exception.

Underlying the appropriation of the DIY attitude often is a rejection of mass production or wider consumer culture in favor of a more 'authentic' folk culture [47]. In many cases, the music industry against which DIY producers define themselves is perceived as artistically homogenizing and exploitative (Strachan, 2007). This became apparent in the way Rikke described his career as having grown 'organically', as well as the way he criticized the volatility of the music industry. This explained Rikke's preference for being a 'stayer' in the field and building sustainable relations with co-musicians and audiences. The band, therefore, is organized as a foundation, which enables Rikke to build financial capacity, since income from the band is not paid to the musicians, but directly flows back into the foundation. This approach, however, requires that band members earn income outside of producing and performing music.

Tessa (26, Utrecht, professional musician and music teacher), singer-songwriter and guitarist of the Utrecht-based indie folk bands *Orlando* and *Wooden Saints*, provided a different example of DIY cultural production. After graduating from the Rotterdam Conservatory, she lived together with band members in cheap housing near Utrecht. At that localtion, they built their own rehearsal room and recording studio, writing and recording music inspired by popular indie folk acts. Tessa explained her motivation as:

> Right now everything costs a lot of money, such as practicing. For example, if you want to use a rehearsal space, it costs money. Because we are living here, it is actually for free. Same thing with a studio, this is also very expensive. But we have it ourselves. Thus we make sure to do as much as possible by ourselves, also because it pays the most. You know, if you sign with a label, then part of the profit goes to the label. While if I sell it, taxes go off, but the rest is for us.

In this example, digital computer technology allowed musicians to create their own studios, record their own music, produce their own albums and establish their own labels. However, Tessa's remarks also illustrated that tapping into DIY discourse is not necessarily part of an anti-establishment ethos. It is as much the result of cost reduction and pragmatic realism.

DIY production enabled indie folk producers, such as Rikke and Tessa, to increase the scale of their operations and to compete with other professional musicians operating in the semi-periphery of the Dutch music industry. We did not see, however, that digitization enabled independent music producers to circumvent intermediaries and gatekeepers, as sometimes inferred, or that it led to "disintermedialization" [48]. Besides their willingness to do things themselves — either out of ideological or pragmatic reasons — Dutch indie folk musicians are focused on building relationships with professional institutions operating in the international music industry, rather than, in the words of Rikke, "aiming to be a religious DIY-er". As our research suggests, they work together with bookers, pluggers, copyrighters and marketers, organizing concerts and arranging press coverage. They most often have distribution deals with larger Dutch independent record firms, such as Snowstar Records, Utrecht, Excelsior Recordings, Amsterdam, and V2 Benelux, Hilversum,

through which their home-produced music is disseminated to Dutch music stores and international streaming Web sites, such as Spotify. In order to secure these distribution deals, indie folk musicians need to build local recognition and gain symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 2011), depending on gatekeepers such as radio DJs, music journalists and talent scouts. Most of the musicians interviewed for this paper explicitly mentioned the importance of participating in local competitions, such as the annual 'Popronde', a traveling music festival touring along 31 Dutch cities. Tessa' explained:

> (...) The first 'Popronde' [in 2012] we played in Nijmegen. (...) And there we did a session for 'Cortonville', from Erik Corton [Dutch radio DJ and TV personality]. He has this Web site, and our gig has been widely viewed on the Internet, that was our first thing directed to the outside world, although we were around for some time already. But we didn't perform that much, I think this was our fourth performance. And that went really well. It was filmed, and Erik Corton said: 'I want to follow you guys, because I think you are great!' So in September we did the 'Popronde' and in November we recorded our first album. In the meantime, we also toured with Wooden Saints, and more and more bookings came in. More and more people heard about us and they loved it.

These observations are consistent with notions of "media convergence," arguing that grassroots creativity coexist with corporate convergence, rather than undermining power bases of major institutions 'within' the music industry. These observations are also in line with earlier research by Hauge and Hracs (2010) (see section 2.2), who observed shifts from traditional bohemian careers towards increased professionalization. Dutch indie folk musicians are 'home-grown', but distance themselves from 'religious DIY-ing'. They choose to operate within the confines of what was adequately referred to by one respondent as "the alternative mainstream" (Atze, 35, Utrecht, editor-in-chief, '3voor12'), rather than existing at the margins of the Dutch music industry.

4.2. Deep scene involvement: The active fan as organizer

Although the binary distinction between passive and active usage dominant in the debate on participatory culture appears false [49], it is worth observing that most of the fans interviewed for this paper could be generally termed 'active users'. They worked as amateur journalists, participated in online music contests, actively shared music with peers through social network sites and created online user profiles on sites such as Last.fm and 8-track, to map their musical tastes. Most of the audience members, moreover, explicitly referred to themselves as 'active listeners', expressing their discomfort with randomly skipping through digital playlists or defining music as background noise. They purchased music on CD or vinyl to support their favorite artists and bands. Lastly, most were amateur musicians, playing music for entertainment or, more commonly, to deepen the understanding of their favorite indie folk songs. Thus, although our interview sample is limited, these observations are contrary to claims that the commercialization of music would drive out amateur musicians and reduce users to silent and passive consumers [50].

As part of their deep involvement with indie folk music, some fans were actively participating in the promotion and dissemination of indie folk music by organizing small-scale events. An example of such involvement was provided by Rolof (28, Utrecht, health care social worker), indie folk fan, amateur musician and founder of the *Raspberry Sessions*. The *Raspberry Sessions* were a series of concerts which took place in a residential group in the center of Utrecht. At the start of the interview, Rolof explained his first ideas on organizing the event:

> I am also a musician and I was part of a band (...) I was thinking about opportunities to release material ourselves (...) So, releasing everything in-house so everything you are producing stays within a small circle of peers. Well, that didn't work (...) But the name Raspberry Records was still on my mind and that has turned into *Raspberry Sessions*, by way of self-organizing and inviting people yourself and taking care of the musicians, that they are paid well for what they are doing and contribute to the event.

Rolof, struggling as a musician to sustain a micro-label, continued to be involved in the field by organizing events. The aim of the *Raspberry Sessions*, as Rolof explained, was to make sure that artists were paid a proper fee, achieved by asking visitors to pay a fixed entrance price:

> Often they walk around with a hat, which is a nice gesture, but results in people thinking: 'okay, I throw in two bucks' ... whereas there are so many good musicians! I would like to take care of these musicians and make sure that they are properly paid for what their status is, as well as that their music gives people something cheerful on their free afternoons. Then I thought: well, we can work around that by charging a fixed ticket price.

Rolof adapted to a form of "full value exchange" (Hauge and Hracs, 2010) to become financially sustainable and to circumvent the risk of not being able to pay musicians reasonable fees. This could be interpreted as a form of 'implicit commercialism,' since the mission statement of the *Raspberry Sessions* was non-profit. Underlying the organization of the event was criticism on commercial music business, as Rolof explained:

> I like it when it happens within my own network. Thus, that you don't need to use official music industry resources. For very slick pop music it is great if

there is a direct link between the industry and broadcasting it on the radio. Then people can earn lots of money with it. But that's not what I want.

As an organizer of the *Raspberry Sessions*, Rolof was concerned with adding value, forming a network revolving around his organization and letting visitors experience music in a more intimate and local setting. This was seen as contrary to "very slick pop music", which Rolof saw as industrialized and profit-driven.

The sessions occurred thanks to the availability of facilities in the residential group where Rolof lived. The house, which has a history in the 1980s squatting movement, includes a small stage with professional equipment and a bar. Moreover, the residential group was the home of highly educated individuals, employed in creative jobs. These people provide easy access to their networks and maintain strong relations with each other. The ability of Rolof to take advantage of these human resources was crucial to the success of the *Raspberry Sessions*, as he explained:

> The fun thing is that everyone wants to cooperate. So if I come up with a nice idea, people are saying: 'If you need help I can do this or that'. And that is awesome. In fact, the *Raspberry Sessions* cannot even exist without the help of those people. But I also need those people who are willing to join the event as a spectator. So it exists by virtue of my own environment.

Although the *Raspberry Sessions* was primarily promoted online, particularly on Facebook and Twitter, with tickets sold via e-mail, the event would not have occurred without off-line resources. As a space where an active music fan such as Rolof brought in his own skills, expertise and network, it needed a physical place to facilitate strong ties, as well as social capital and "relational attributes," such as trust, loyalty and a sense of duty, to exist and be sustained (Nicholls, 2009). Thus, although the Internet and Web 2.0 lowered the threshold to self-organize and to self-promote events, it was driven by 'off-line' networks, plugging into existing technological and physical infrastructures, providing a convergence of 'old' and 'new' media.

The organization of the *Raspberry Sessions* is an example of a contribution to the establishment of a local indie folk scene, "the clustering of fans, promoters, and musicians around a specific geographical focus" [51]. Harmen (29, Groningen, professional musician), singer-guitarist of the Groningen-based indie folk band *Town of Saints*, provided an example of a contribution to the establishment of a translocal scene — local scenes that were "connected with groups of kindred spirits many miles away" [52]. Besides a professional musician, Harmen at the time of writing was the organizer of the Melodica Festival Groningen. Melodica is the name of a festival concept founded by Australian musician Pete Uhlenbruch in December 2007, who organized the inaugural festival in Melbourne, Australia. Various editions of the festival have popped up around the globe, with organizers forming online networks by maintaining contact through Facebook as well as regularly visiting scheduled events.

Harmen organized the festival together with a group of friends and volunteers. The audience largely consisted of active folk music fans, most of whom were members of a local scene assembled by Wishfulmusic. Wishfulmusic organizes living room concerts in Groningen starting in January 2011. The two co-founders of the organization actively participated in the organization of the Melodica Festival. One of the co-founders, Wouter (36, Groningen, customer service employee), explained his urge to organize the festival and other small-scale indie folk activities:

> The idea is to get musicians and the public together, to create a nice atmosphere through which beautiful music can be made and people feel comfortable. (...) Eh, it's all about the experience. The experience of music is totally different during a living room concert from a concert in a popular music venue. There, there always is a certain division between the audience, the musicians, and the stage. (...) But during a living room concert, it's a collective experience, then you listen to music intimately. And during living room concerts (...) there is no one talking during the music. So all the attention goes to the musicians, and that's pretty comfortable for them, that there are no disturbing devices.

In ways similar to the *Raspberry Sessions*, the aim of organizing living room concerts and the Melodica Festival was 'to tear down the stage' — to create a sense of intimacy and community among musicians and audiences and to establish egalitarian relationships between them. It was an attempt to frame music as a social experience rather than as a commodity. This is confirmed by the mission statement of the festival, which is "to foster a sense of community in an increasingly challenging industry" (Melodica, 2014).

For their contribution to the festival, musicians were indirectly paid by selling merchandise and directly by donations from the audience. These donations were gathered throughout the weekend by volunteers walking around with a hat. Both were forms of "adjustable value exchange" (Hauge and Hracs, 2010). Acoustic folk music was largely featured at the Melodica Festival, referred to by Harmen as "coffeehouse folk", a term through which he created as a historical linkage with the international coffeehouse folk scenes of the 1960s. The term 'coffeehouse folk', however, also uncovered the aesthetic politics of the festival, emphasizing 'intimacy,' 'community' and 'collective feeling'. This was evidenced by the request of the organizers to reduce 'noise' during performances. Throughout the festival organizers urged the public to silence their voices during songs, to mute or shut down smartphones and discouraged the audience from photographing or video recording musicians. In doing so, they implicitly criticized the mediation and visualization of live music performances through user-generated content, which was regarded by the festival organizers as an indirect and insincere way of experiencing music (Holt, 2011). Participants were expected to be fully immersed within the music (reframed as a social experience), rather than distracted by devices, such as smartphones and

video cameras, as well as conversation. This indicates that the self-organization of indie folk events, such as Melodica, although encouraged by the emergence of Web 2.0, should be seen as an antidote to the visualization and mediatization of popular music consumption. Moreover, although events such as Melodica are grounded in a folk ideology emphasizing participation and inclusiveness, indie folk fans at the same time occupy a 'commons' distinguished by symbolic boundaries. As evidenced from remarks in interviews, these boundaries were particularly directed at distancing themselves from 'mainstream' popular music, which was predominantly imagined — and accordingly framed — as commercialized, insincere and mediatized [53].

4.3. Relational over oppositional aesthetics: Distancing from punk ethos

> Just look at our stage performance, how we play. That is simply four in a row. Just that all four of us are very close to the people. (...) That is very folky; to draw the line towards the public like that (...). We sometimes play dynamic, but often very small as well. Many songs are acoustic. That is very much folk; that it's intimate and acoustic.

These remarks are from the interview with Danny (21, Utrecht, professional musician) and Samgar (27, Utrecht, professional musician), singer-guitarist and singer-percussionist, respectively, of the Utrecht-based indie folk band *Mister and Mississippi*. Contemporary indie folk acts use a "participatory framework" in performance [54]. The use of a participatory framework in performance practice is exemplified, as most of the musicians interviewed for this research indicated, by their intention to act and perform 'sincerely.' 'Sincere' should be understood as a conscious effort to reduce the 'modern' *caesura* between performer and audiences [55]. Most of the folk musicians perceived this artist-audience distinction as hierarchical, as a loss of their integrity and as a devaluation of music's capacity to create an experience of intimacy, community and sociability. Moreover, they intentionally contrasted their own ways of performing music with what was perceived to be common in the "imagined mainstream" (Crewe, *et al.*, 2003), often related to very 'commercial' and 'mechanical' forms of popular music. As Rikke explained:

> You sometimes have the tendency as a band to choose the safe path. To make a set list and push it through; knowing each second what you are doing. (...) Usually all bands would do that. [...] We are of course auto-didactics, but at a certain moment we noticed, when we were playing on larger festivals, that so many bands aren't actually bands, but a songwriter with rented musicians. (...) The drummer has such a thing in his ear, "click clack, click, clack ... ." and you can imagine that if the drummer plays like that, that it is possible to play along with tapes of recorded orchestrations (...) and many bands make use of that.

The willingness to perform 'sincerely' functions as an ideal, meaning that in their performance practice bands do not literally 'tear down the stage'. Even during (tiny) living room concerts there is at least a performative distinction between musician, organizer and audience member. However, when analyzing interviews on how musicians defined indie folk music, this produced a set of key aesthetics — revolving around 'traditional' folk idioms — by which they purposely aim to decrease the hierarchy between creators as specialists and consumers as passive receivers. These key aesthetic features generally included (i) the frequent use of harmonic singing, to emphasize communality; (ii) the preferred use of acoustic over electronic instruments, to connote simplicity and naturalness; (iii) the downplaying of musical virtuosity and soloing; (iv) the preferred use of constancy of rhythms, to connote egalitarianism; (v) the use of limited (and open) chords and arrangements, to encourage spontaneity; (vi) a preference for more open song structures through the use of improvisation; (vii) the use of polysemy and metaphor in language, to actively invite the audience to interpret lyrics in own terms; and (viii) the distancing from using persona(e) in performance practice, to emphasize honesty.

In the musicians' preference for participatory aesthetics it is possible to look at similarities between indie folk and other genres associated with the DIY ethos, such as punk, rock, electronica, hip hop and world music (see Strachan, 2007). Similar to or, more accurately, inspired by 'traditional' folk music, these genres are influenced by egalitarian ideals in the creation and experience of music (Beaver, 2012). Nonetheless, when analyzing the career paths of musicians, we observed a clear distinction and transition from punk *ethos* to folk *aesthetics*.

Although some musicians were involved in the small-scale production of indie folk music in earlier phases of their careers, most switched from being punk musicians towards becoming folk musicians. Some of the musicians interviewed for this paper saw something 'folky' in the 'keep-it-small-and-simple' way of creating punk music, defining punk as a form of "folk music on speed" (Tonnie, 38, Middelburg, professional musician and programmer). At the same time, they erected symbolic boundaries and distinguished punk from folk music. An important factor underlying the distinction between folk and punk music seems to be that punk ethos is regarded as 'out of sync' with the social conditions of contemporary (late modern or postmodern) society characterized by a critique of the master narratives of modernity (Lyotard, 1984), the master narrative of oppositional subcultures included (Hebdigde, 1979). More accurately, it is believed that being anti-establishment is associated, somewhat paradoxically, with dogmatism. As Geert (36, professional musician), front man of the Leeuwarden-based indie folk act *The Black Atlantic* explained:

> So we live in a god-less world, of course already for a hundred years, in a moral vacuum. (...) I find it difficult to have a discussion about morality and ethics without a universal truth. I don't get much out of that. (...) I think it's interesting to not show it [music] as too one-directional. I do have certain

ideas, but I think it's not too exciting to put it on top of everything. I'm not a political punk-band.

The critical attitude of contemporary indie folk artists, as expressed by Geert, could be explained by the fact that they are part of a generation born in a postmodern world characterized by irony, fragmentation and high levels of reflexivity and are thus very critical of teleology and modern beliefs in utopias (Beck, *et al.*, 1994). Hence, their preference is for polysemy and metaphor in language (as well as for open song structures, such as improvisation), rather than opting for a "final vocabulary" (Rorty, 1989). This relates to a recent strand of literary theory, which argues that contemporary conceptions of authenticity "seem more concerned with re-establishing connections between individuals and society than in advocating individual protest and autonomy." In other words, authenticity is "redefined in terms of sincerity" [56]. More specifically, this means that the notion of authenticity has been detached from an embattled stance and is reframed as an act of decorum, as a way of coming to terms with morals and values prescribed by society (Trilling, 1972). In the context of this research, the turn towards sincerity in indie folk music should be seen as an attempt by musicians — and fans — to distance themselves from the industrialization and specialization characterizing the production of mainstream pop music, and to redefine the creation and performance of music as a social and transparent enterprise. It is a form of aesthetic politics, fitting into a context of a network society (Castells, 2003) in which hierarchical distinctions between established (corporate) institutions and independent (grassroots) producers do not altogether vanish but, as this research pointed out, seem to ideologically diminish.

4.4. Doing things together (DTT) over DIY: Adapting to participatory culture

The appreciation of sincerity over authenticity is not exclusive to the careers of musicians. It is also reflected in the politics of institutions involved in the promotion and distribution of Dutch indie folk music, of which the majority is part of Dutch indie culture [57]. Analyzing the narratives of gatekeepers on the foundational history of their enterprises revealed that most are fans turned entrepreneurs [58]. Thus, in ways similar to active fans described earlier in section 4.2, most of the gatekeepers have a history in earlier DIY movements and started their business as amateur journalists, amateur musicians or as amateur organizers of small-scale events, after which they became professionals working in Dutch music industry.

Some of the gatekeepers have roots in former local punk movements and gradually adapted to participatory culture, whereas other gatekeepers saw a direct opportunity to start their business with the advent of Web 2.0. An example of an institution that has roots in online participatory culture was provided by Atze (35, Utrecht), editor-in-chief of the multimedia platform '3voor12':

> In the 1990s, at 3FM [one of the major radio stations and taste makers in the Netherlands], you had this coordinator, and he decided to organize the station according to horizontal programming. That is, one profile, one concept on what the station should be. And no longer the fragmentation all the stations were used to until then. (...) The VPRO [one of the major Dutch broadcasting services] disagreed, which resulted in that they were marginalized. And then the Internet emerged. Well, 1998 still was the year of the so-called dialup connection, and ehm, streaming wasn't there yet. However, the VPRO started protesting about this issue, and started to make a lot of noise. And the protesting was well received, so the VPRO kept investing in that, and gradually started to organize events and live sessions. These were broadcasted on the radio, or were released online. And then there were all kinds of niche stations, when broadband came along this was suddenly available. Thus, a punk radio channel, a hip hop channel, no folk music, I guess.

'3voor12' is exemplary for online participatory culture characterized by the confluence of both top-down (corporate) and bottom-up (grassroots) cultural production. Grounded in the advent of the Internet at the end of the 1990s, it allowed VPRO as a major broadcasting service to divide itself into smaller niches and to start distributing part of the indie aesthetic, such as punk and hip hop. Currently, the platform has become institutionalized again, since it shares radio programming with the mainstream radio station and 'mothership' 3FM. However, '3voor12' is still focused on the online world, for it hosts two digital television channels as well as a 'pre-release' streaming Web site (the so-called '3voor12 Luisterpaal') directed towards promoting albums that do not neatly fit within the conventions of more commercial radio programming. Moreover, although folk was not part of a niche in the early days, it became part of their core business, as Atze explained, somewhere around 2005, the moment 'indie folk' became an industry-based phenomenon. From that point, '3voor12' has been a crucial promotional platform for both international and Dutch indie folk music, of which the promotion of the latter, is seen as "one of the tasks of a public broadcasting service" according to Atze, receiving governmental funds for their activities.

Other institutions, as noted earlier, have roots in earlier DIY scenes and gradually shifted towards an emphasis on connectivity. Interviews with gatekeepers produced various accounts of the distancing from DIY ethos by moving towards what was referred to as doing things together (DTT). An example is Snowstar Records, an Utrecht-based independent record label, where a number of the musicians interviewed for this research have signed contracts. Snowstar Records (2015) describes its business model as:

> Back in the days, Snowstar Records was about punk rock and DIY. Since then the attitude stuck, but the genre shifted towards calmer music. Nowadays a typical Snowstar Records release would be indie/folk/singer/songwriter-esque. (...) Everyone in our roster knows each other and helped shape both the label and this scene by contributing in their

own way. Most of the bands even share members, or have at least shared stages. The Snowstar family is about Doing It Together.

The label represents itself more like a 'family' than a 'business', emphasizing the 'embeddedness' of the label in the Utrecht indie folk scene. They describe the label as a 'family', not only because acts affiliated to the label share members and stages, but also because it shares free content with fans on its Web site, and even organizes events such as indie label markets and label parties. In doing so, Snowstar Records lowers the barrier for fans to be in direct contact with both the musicians and the label, reinforcing a sense of community. This relates to research by Baym (2011) who found that indie labels are directed towards incorporating elements of a gift economy into their business model.

Peter (35, music curator, Berlin) provided a second example of how DIY is increasingly framed as DTT. Talking about the historical formation of the annual *Incubate Festival* (for which he worked as a curator at the time of the interview), a city festival organized in the city center of Tilburg, he explained:

> The festival comes a bit out of the DIY and punk tradition. And there the idea is of course as well that you do everything together. It is do it yourself but actually it is doing things together and making sure that you are supporting the local scene. (...) But this festival has become broader in the course of the last 10 years, much more open, and we have left the negative attitude behind us (...). The last years we were very busy with involving as many people as possible with the festival. We even had topics like *We are Incubate* and *You are Incubate*. And we have had piracy as a theme, which is most of all about the sharing of culture as well instead of keeping it all for yourself. We were the first festival where people could share tips in public. And we opened up (...) the entire Web site. All on Wiki basis, anybody can change everything. Thus it is very much the open source idea. (...) Making culture together, and that is a much more positive attitude which we can also keep.

Here, we see how the institutional politics of the festival, grounded in the local punk scene of the mid-2000s, shifted from being oriented at debunking the 'establishment' towards a more cooperative attitude, aimed at building relations with other indie institutions, working 'within' the system rather than at the margins. This could be interpreted as a way of explaining how the festival has become institutionalized over the course of its decade of existence. It receives public funding and therefore needs to co-operate with local institutions in order to legitimize its activities. However, earlier remarks illustrated how institutionalization is no longer regarded as something 'not done' but, rather, as something that is 'in sync' with an open attitude of (co-)creating culture. Although the DIY ethos of the former local punk scene, as Peter explained, could be interpreted as a form of "doing things together" too, it is framed as a form of participatory culture which is very 'self-involved'. This attitude is contrasted with the current mission statement of the festival, which is perceived as more inclusive and relational [59]. Thus, although the festival is situated in a field characterized by global competition, and while the festival itself remains true to its roots by acting as an 'incubator' for indie culture (and thus creates fences to distinguish 'indie' from the 'mainstream'), its relational attitude is exemplary of the way in which some Dutch indie institutions adapted the logics and values of participatory culture. By doing so, they contributed to the aesthetic politics of indie folk music. However, we are not arguing for a simple homology between aesthetic and institutional politics. Indie folk music is but one of the genres currently promoted by Dutch indie firms, and thus co-exists with metal, techno, free jazz, hip hop, post-rock and many other genres. Although all of these genres share roots in indie discourse, characterized by aesthetic values such as proximity and consensus building [60], they do not all explicitly emphasize the somewhat romanticized version of widespread participation common in indie folk music. Nevertheless, this research does indicate that there is a relation between the abandoning of autonomy and punk ethos, and a move towards the promotion of music emphasizing the relational and intimate character of creation, performance and experience.

5. Conclusion: Bringing authenticity back to music

The significant growth of indie folk music over the last 25 years is seen, as one music critic aptly wrote, as a way for a new generation of folk musicians and fans to "bring authenticity back to music" (Jonze, 2013). Looking at the history of folk music, that seems a plausible statement. With the recording industry adapting an 'oligarchy model' in the first half of the twentieth century, popular music became a highly specialized and mass-produced commodity (Peterson and Berger, 1975). This paper has emphasized how popular music is reframed by indie folk practitioners as a social experience rather than as a commodity. It is a strategy of a new generation, indeed, to bridge the modern *caesura* between producer, distributor and consumer, which is counter-hegemonic to the commodification of popular music over the last century.

As this research indicated, respondents generally imagine and define mainstream popular music as mechanical, distant, profit-driven, specialized and mediatized. This indicates that indie folk practitioners, in ways similar to their 1960s counterparts, aim to create fences between the broader categories of folk and pop music. More accurately, they tend to regressively define indie folk music as a genre by distancing themselves from the imagined mainstream, commonly associated with pop music. This embattled stance causes indie folk music to function as a more authentic alternative to commercially successful music. Particularly within smaller (trans-)local music scenes, indie folk music is regarded as the antidote to mainstream pop music, enabling

practitioners to form communities and to celebrate music in more intimate and social settings. 'Folk revivalism' might be representative here of a nostalgic aesthetic emphasizing the inherently relational and interpersonal nature of popular music production, performance and experience [61].

In this paper we suggested that the field of Dutch independent folk music should be characterized as participatory culture. This was observed in how digitization enabled musicians to educate themselves and, accordingly, to self-develop careers in music. Secondly, from the part of the audience, it was noted that Web 2.0 helped to create networks and establish (trans-)local music scenes — the social 'interstices' where aspiring indie folk musicians often acquire experiences necessary to become professional. Thirdly, from the part of the gatekeepers, it was found that they reconciled with participatory culture, becoming platforms for the promotion and distribution of Dutch indie folk music. We have argued that the emergence of online participatory culture is not in opposition to corporate cultural production. In fact, the contrary seems to be the case, epitomized by the emergence of the 'alternative mainstream,' a commercial zone 'within' the mainstream where bottom-up production converges with top-down distribution.

Moreover, this research has shown that Dutch indie folk musicians and fans, in conjunction with their discontent with the 'mainstream', prefer to distance themselves from the oppositional attitude characteristic of former punk movements and scenes. They do so by adhering to participatory aesthetics and by emphasizing DTT over DIY, within their own networks, but also by collaborating with actors working within the confines of the (alternative) mainstream. This might be indicative, as Hesmondhalgh has previously suggested [62], of a longer history of independent music firms, characterized by a move towards professionalization as a means to become aesthetically and commercially sustainable. However, this research indicated that the move towards professionalization within the field of Dutch independent folk music is constituted by other forces as well. First, it is because punk ideology is seen as 'out of sync' with the deconstruction of autonomy and authenticity by postmodernism, with a reframing of ideology in terms of sincerity and connectivity. Secondly, it is affected by the adaptation of online participatory culture by Dutch 'independent' music institutions, a form of institutional politics fitting indie folk music, structured around a set participatory aesthetics.

Lastly, while changes in technology made it easier for musicians to create and produce music themselves, they are still dependent on the distribution systems of both larger independent and established institutions. This was most evident in strategies to "stand out from the crowd" in order to attract the attention of gatekeepers in an increasingly competitive industry (Hauge and Hracs, 2010). Intermediaries thus remain crucial, enabling musicians to disseminate their music to international audiences and to gain the symbolic capital necessary to move from the margins towards the center of the music industry. While technology lowers the threshold to create and produce music, it places musicians in a balancing act between abandoning their autonomy and seeking ways to market their music without 'selling' out. 🔴

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Notes

1. Petrusich, 2008, chapter 15.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 51.

4. Frith, 1981, p. 16.

5. Jenkins, 2006, pp. 136–141.

6. Ryan and Peterson, 1993, p. 195.

7. Peterson, 1990, p. 313.

8. Ryan and Peterson, 1993, p. 195.

9. See Slot, 2013, chapter 1, for a theoretical overview.

10. Jenkins, 2006, p. 18.

11. Jenkins, 2006, p. 331.

12. Jenkins, 2006, p. 33.

13. Ardèvol, *et al.*, 2010, p. 264.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Wikström, 2009, pp. 4–8.

16. Strachan (2007) has found similar practices among independent labels in the U.K.

17. Baym, 2011, pp. 22–24.

18. Baym, 2011, pp. 26–32.

19. Baym and Burnett, 2009, p. 434.

20. Baym and Burnett, 2009, p. 446.

21. See also Ardèvol, *et al.*, 2010, p. 263.

22. Ardèvol, *et al.*, 2010, p. 265.

23. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, p. 5.

24. Ryan and Peterson, 1993, p. 193.

25. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, p. 1.

26. Straw, 2004, p. 413.

27. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, p. 5.

28. Quoted in Hesmondhalgh, 2005, p. 27.

29. Hauge and Hracs, 2010, p. 121.

30. Hauge and Hracs, 2010, p. 122.

31. *Ibid.*

32. Hauge and Hracs, 2010, p. 122.

33. Hauge and Hracs, 2010, pp. 120–121.

34. *Ibid.* Articulated in the 1970s punk movement, DIY ethics can be described as "make your own culture and stop consuming that which is made for you" (Duncombe, 1997, p. 2). It is thus more than 'doing stuff yourself'. As Beaver (2012, p. 30) puts it, underlying DIY is "a rejection of 'inauthentic' mass-produced consumer culture in favor of an 'authentic' folk culture, a celebration of amateurism, and most importantly, the desire for individual control over cultural production".

35. Hesmondhalgh, 1999, pp. 56–57.

36. Hesmondhalgh, 1999, pp. 52–53.

37. Hauge and Hracs, 2010, p. 118.

38. *Ibid.*

39. The research project, titled *Reshaping authenticity: The production, aesthetics and reception of independent folk music in the Netherlands (1992–present)*, is conducted by the first author and is funded by the Erasmus School of History, Culture and Communication, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, the Netherlands.

40. Livingston, 1999, p. 66.

41. Audience members were approached and selected during the concerts of *Mumford and Sons* (Ziggo Dome, Amsterdam, 30 March 2013), *Woods* (Paradiso, Amsterdam, May 20, 2013), *Animal Collective* (Melkweg, Amsterdam, 27 May 2013), *CocoRosie* (Tivoli, Utrecht, 29 May 2013), *The Lumineers* (Heineken Music Hall, Amsterdam, 18 November 2013), and during the yearly *Incubate* Festival (16–22 September 2013, Tilburg, the Netherlands) and the yearly *Le Guess Who* Festival (28 November–1 December 2013, Utrecht, the Netherlands).

42. Holstein and Gubrium, 1997, p. 113.

43. *Ibid.* The interviews were conducted by the first author.

44. Riessman, 2005, pp. 2–3.

45. Alexander, 2003, pp. 115–116.

46. The interviews were originally conducted in Dutch; excerpts in this paper have been translated to English by the authors.

47. See Beaver, 2012; end note 2.

48. Slot, 2013, p. 21.

49. Since 'users' are always actively interpreting media content on both cognitive and bodily levels; see Jansz, 2010.

50. Hesmondhalgh, 2013, pp. 113–115.

51. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, p. 6.

52. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, pp. 8–9.

53. See Crewe, *et al.*, 2003, on their notion of 'the imagined mainstream.'

54. Defined by Turino (2008, p. 26) as "a special type of artistic practice in which there are no artist-audience distinctions (...)".

55. Bohlman, 1988, chapter 8.

56. Haselstein, *et al.*, 2009, p. 18.

57. Though some Dutch indie folk acts have been picked up by a few major labels, such as V2 Records Benelux (*e.g., Mister and Mississippi* and *Blaudzun*). As one of the product managers of the Warner Music Group informed us, "folk music is a trend like any other trend (...) and is only interesting when acts are able to make a cross-over to a broader audience, like *Mumford and Sons* did". Although this research is very limited in the sense that we were not able to reach out to more professionals working for the majors, it can be deduced from this remark that interest in contemporary folk music was framed as a "trend", meaning that it was audience- rather than product-driven.

58. Bennett and Peterson, 2004, p. 5.

59. In practice, the relational attitude has mainly resulted in the establishment of what the festival referred to as a "social festival model", a Web site on a wiki basis in which users created personal profiles; contributed by editing profiles of artists; and by shared and organized festival timetables with other visitors and peers.

60. Fonarow, 2006, chapter 4.

61. Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 56.

62. Hesmondhalgh, 1999, p. 57.

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Editorial history