The Valorisation Addendum

Sharing Expertise and Experience
It is mid-July 2019, and millions of Europeans are travelling far and wide to enjoy their holiday away from home and the workplace (Graafland, 5 July 2019). Many of these people go by car. According to Statistics Netherlands, in 2017, 43 per cent of the Dutch citizens travelling abroad for their summer holiday did so by car, and close to 90 per cent of the Dutchmen who spent their holidays in the Netherlands used a car to reach their destination (CBS, 2018). It is therefore not surprising to find discussions about automobile travelling in the media around this time of year. Recently, a Dutch journalist contacted me to contribute to such feature. She asked about my knowledge of in-car technologies and assumed that new information and communication systems had made older technologies redundant and consequently changed the character of long car journeys: the paper map, so she argued, had been substituted by real-time updated navigation systems and people no longer listened to (foreign) radio and traffic news but turned to their own playlists.

While this story sounds convincing, I replied that so-called ‘old-fashioned’ technologies rarely disappear the moment new technologies are introduced. The continuing use of radio traffic reports is a case in point: accessibility of new information and communication technologies inside automobiles has not resulted in an instantaneous change in people’s listening, navigating, or driving practices. To illustrate this, I presented several examples from my qualitative and exploratory research into people’s experiences with listening as part of their automobile habitation; findings I discuss in chapter 4 of this dissertation. These examples contradict a linear view of technological progression, and support David Edgerton’s “shock of the old” premise; a discussion I introduce in chapter 1. I ended the interview hoping that my contribution to the article would leave the journalist as well as readers with a slightly broader understanding of technological innovations in the realm of automobile.

The persisting attention for automobile travelling, traffic news, and the linear view of technological development brings me to the topic of this addendum: the valorisation of my PhD research. For those unaware of recent discussions and changes in the scholarly domain, ‘knowledge valorisation’ is officially the third main task of Dutch universities, after teaching and research (see VSNU, 2019). The definition of the term valorisation, adopted by the Landelijke Commissie Valorisatie (National Commission on Valorisation) in 2011, reads: “The process of creating value from knowledge through making knowledge suitable and/or available for economical and/or societal usage and to translate into competitive products, services, processes and new businesses” (Van Drooge & Vandeberg et al., 2011, p. 8).

While I strongly support efforts for making research outcomes accessible to the general public, I would like to express my discontent about the explicit demand for the commodification of research. The position paper of the collective Science in Transition (Science in Transition, 2013) or the report by Van Drooge and De Jong (2015) present lengthier critiques of the problems with the current definition and indicators of knowledge valorisation. A common other issue of critique, which I support, is that explicit pressure on
researchers to evaluate the impact of their efforts principally in economic or other quantitative 'quality measurement' criteria undermines the wealth of possibilities scholars (ought to be able to) explore to share and valorise their research findings.

In my own PhD project, plans to communicate about my research were developed at the very beginning of the process, and I am happy about the outcomes of those efforts. I experienced first-hand how my research was positively valued by external audiences, and how fun valorisation activities can be. In this addendum I will reflect on the relevance of my thesis for other scholarly domains, what opportunities I seized for sharing my research findings, and how I intend to communicate about my PhD research in the nearby future. With this overview I aim to show that ‘valorisation’ can be done throughout a project, not only at the very end. In fact, my experience has been that a sensitivity for outreach activities can have a positive influence on the research process. Reaching out to others and communicating about my project helped me to stay informed, engaged and inspired throughout the project. This is why, personally, I welcome a broad definition of knowledge valorisation and would invite every colleague to experiment with different outreach activities. At the end of this addendum, then, I will highlight three ways in which my PhD affects my current research and educational activities.

Explicating the Relevance of my Research

The design of my project—studying developments in three different countries, over approximately 70 years’ time, from three different vantagepoints, while keeping an eye on the evolving discussions about sustainable mobility—necessitated an interdisciplinary research approach, combining different methods and theoretical frameworks. Additionally, my research implied data collection from a highly diverse range of sources. Consequently, I encountered people having varying backgrounds: engineers and traffic reporters, radio hosts and archivists, drivers from all ages, scholars from various academic disciplines, and countless other individuals who had a relation with my topic in one way or another. In this section I will highlight the most innovative ways in which my thesis returns new knowledge to these stakeholders.

First, my research is relevant for the professionals I have studied: traffic reporters, people and organisations in radio broadcasting, manufacturers of information technologies and radio systems, policymakers, and experts in the field of traffic management. For these professionals, my thesis illuminates how all their efforts and operations are connected, and explains several of the historical shifts in the practices and underlying sociotechnical systems within which they operate. This broad yet thorough discussion of the system of traffic reporting can help the relevant professionals to reflect on their own role and expertise in this system and seek new or closer alliances with other stakeholders in the same field. The benefit of knowing and meeting with people in the same sector was also underlined by the participants in my expert meetings. Two of them were especially positive about the opportunity my research had provided to share experiences with co-workers in other parts of the traffic reporting sector. The study that is presented in this thesis can therefore be used as an incentive for more or closer relations between the various organisations that are involved in the sociotechnical traffic reporting system. As such, this study has the potential to reduce
fragmentation of knowledge in the field of traffic reporting, and may help to shape new strategies for addressing important challenges in the future.

Second, this thesis enlarges our knowledge concerning one of the grand challenges of our time: the negative externalities of the increasing number and length of traffic jams. Compared to past and present research on the effects of automobility and traffic management, my exploration of traffic reports as part of motorists’ overall listening-while-driving experiences adds more knowledge about the social character of traffic news. This social nature firstly pertains to the broadcasters of the information. Traffic reports are allocated significant amounts of airtime and reporters play an important role in radio shows. As a result, listeners gradually become used to the reporters and the form and content of the reports. Additionally, participants referred to radio traffic reports as an intermediary between them and their family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances. Such qualitative user experiences complement studies on the influence of traffic news on traffic flows, and should therefore be included in discussions about the value of radio traffic news.

In the literature reviews in chapters one to four of this thesis I have already explicated the relation between my research and earlier studies in the scholarly fields this study aims to contribute to Science, Technology and Society studies (STS), media studies, and mobility studies. Because of the width of my study, however, the findings may also provide interesting details or ideas for further research to scholars in other disciplines. To scholars concerned with the efficacy of traffic news, my study of people’s automobile habituation underlines the importance of the senses, and particularly the aural environment, for the apprehension of traffic information while driving. I invite scholars in this field to include this sensitivity for the senses more explicitly in their research. Additionally, people concerned with organisation theory and development, political theorists, or innovation scholars, may use this thesis to study the process in which a single technological innovation gets momentum, investigate the importance of governmental and non-governmental organisations in the development of a sociotechnical system, or identify the connections between (evolutions in) sociotechnical systems and the experiences of professionals and users of radio traffic news.

Past and Planned Dissemination and Outreach Activities

During my PhD, I have published several items to communicate with scholars in the various areas of study I engage with in my research. In a professional publication I co-authored with Karin Bijsterveld, published in the *Journal of Radio and Audio Media* in 2015, I contemplated on the role of traffic reports in drivers’ experiences of traffic jams. We argued that traffic reports are at once part of the strategies to keep people tuned in to the radio, while at the same time offering clues for an escape or bypass of impending traffic jams. This publication was especially relevant for people in the field of media and mobility studies, because it presented traffic news as a novel starting point for investigating the nexus of the media and mobility domains. I advanced this part of my research in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis.

When the analysis of the Dutch traffic reports was completed, I presented my methods and findings at the 4S-EASST conference in Barcelona, Spain, in 2016. This paper
was then edited for publication in the interdisciplinary peer-reviewed journal *Transfers* (Dieker, 2018). In that article I discussed my methodologically innovative approach for studying traffic reporting: adapting Raymond Williams’ theory of flow from media studies to the analysis of radio broadcasting, combined with mobility studies. In the fall of 2017, I also presented a paper, drawing on my research presented in chapter 4 of this thesis, at the Mobile Utopia conference in Lancaster, United Kingdom. In addition to these conferences, I presented my work during two seminars: at the Technology, Innovation & Science group of the Technical University Eindhoven in December 2016, and at the *Knooppuntcafé* (‘junction café’: a recurring event where people with different backgrounds within media studies meet) at *Beeld en Geluid* in December 2017. At these conferences and seminars I spoke to scholars and professionals in STS, media studies, and mobility studies. The interdisciplinary nature of my project frequently proved an interesting addition to the research that was presented in the sessions I attended. For example, I added insights from media studies—Williams’ theory of flow—to mobility research, and used theory from the history of technology on the evolution of large technological systems to explain the development of traffic reporting to media professionals. This way the interdisciplinary nature of my research enriches ongoing research in each of these domains.

Throughout my PhD I have also communicated my findings to general audiences. I published two blogs on the website of *Beeld en Geluid* in which I shared elements of my analysis of Dutch traffic reports as the research unfolded (Dieker, 2016b, 2016c). These blogs were primarily intended for people involved in radio studies, shedding some light on my research process from a methodological point of view, and people interested in Dutch radio history more widely. I could also draw on my research when I was approached by a journalist of the Dutch radio station BNR. He interviewed me in September 2016 and November 2017 about the development and relevance of radio traffic reports in contemporary radio programming and traffic management (Dieker, 2016a, 2017). A final public outreach activity I would like to mention here, was my pitch at the PhD pitch night that was part of the TEDxMaastricht event in September 2018 (Dieker, 2018). At this occasion, eighteen selected PhD’s were asked to present their “idea worth sharing” in a five-minute presentation to a large lay audience of students are residents of Maastricht. In my pitch, I had the audience listen to two short excerpts of American traffic reports, from 1979 and 2018. These examples illustrated my takeaway message of that evening, that something as ‘mundane’ as traffic news in fact changes in form and content, and that we should take this awareness into account when discussing the problem of traffic congestion in the present and future.

In many instances, the interviews I conducted with my research participants and professionals in the field were also a form of valorisation. The invitation to participate in my research was an opportunity for the interviewees to sit back for a moment and reflect on their everyday activities, whether as professional involved in the creation of traffic news or as member of the reports’ intended audience. Many of the participants in fact noted that they had never, or only marginally, thought about their own relation to radio traffic reports. For them, it was interesting to reflect on their own habits and preferences for gathering information prior to or during their commute. Several professionals whom I interviewed were especially interested in the methodology of project. They were for example curious to learn ow the international comparative aspect of my study, upon completion of the research, could
provide an opportunity to reflect on their own professional practices. Conducting interviews, then, was a valuable means for reaching out throughout the PhD trajectory, making people more aware about their own relation to traffic news in the process.

My research also featured in my teaching at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Maastricht University. I taught a bachelor course in which the students learned about the ‘networked’ nature of our society, introducing them to several key concepts from Science, Technology and Society studies. In this course I could share my knowledge about information and radio systems. Also, at the masters level, I shared my experiences with research methods, and taught a skills course about qualitative interviewing. A special opportunity for teaching something about my research and academic training to a lay audience arose with the valedictory celebrations for Wiebe Bijker. As a gift, many of his (former) colleagues and students wrote short chapters for an introductory ‘roadmap’ to STS research for secondary school students. Together with two fellow graduates from the Cultures of Arts, Science and Technology master programme, of which Wiebe had been the co-founder and director, I wrote a fictional scenario in which 16-year-old pupils are taught some of the basic principles of social constructivism. My contribution to the chapter illustrated these principles on the basis of a short history of the technologies that enable the reception of traffic news on the road.

In the nearby future I will continue to share my knowledge about traffic information systems and sociotechnical change. In September 2019, I will give a guest lecture at the Athena Institute of the Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam. In that lecture I will present different approaches to studying innovation, and explain how my historical study of evolving traffic information systems relied on a social constructivist understanding of the interrelations between scientific, technological, and societal change. In November 2019, I will present a new paper at the Dutch radio centenary conference at Beeld en Geluid. At that occasion I will add an international perspective to Dutch radio history, showing how traffic news featured prominently in the first attempts to develop a broadcasting system that was, technically, truly European. Finally, the Dutch motorist association ANWB has expressed interest in my research and has invited me to present a thorough overview of my research on the shifts of radio traffic reporting practices since the 1950s at the ANWB headquarters in The Hague.

In conversations about my topic, I have frequently said that radio traffic reports are a gratifying subject to study: virtually everybody is familiar with them, yet very little is known about them. Very often, I would receive positive responses to this observation (frequently involving one or two anecdotes about instances in which traffic reports had helped or not helped someone to evade a jam). Of course, the mere fact that people have personal experiences with traffic reports does not mean that my findings are also relevant to them. Nevertheless, the many engaging responses to my research have led me to believe that my study of traffic news could potentially be an interesting read to a wide audience. For this reason I will consider options to turn this manuscript in a (popular) science book after the thesis has been defended.
Traversing into new Trajectories

In June 2019, I accepted a position as researcher and teaching coordinator at the HAN University of Applied Science in Arnhem, the Netherlands. Here, I am affiliated with the Automotive Research Department. Even though there was no vacancy, the heads of the department were interested in experimenting with more multidisciplinary researchers in their team. To validate the added benefit of such a strategy, I am currently valorising my knowledge of (auto)mobility, technology and society, sustainability, and my experience with qualitative research methods on a daily basis. To illustrate this, I will briefly mention three ways in which my past research and educational experiences feature in my new job. After all, this thesis is not the only means by which the knowledge I accumulated during my PhD research comes to fruition. In fact, many thoughts and details did not make it into this manuscript. Yet the experience of doing this PhD has shaped me as a researcher and as a person, and consequently I could argue that I am the result of my research. So what am I doing with myself, professionally?

First, I have stepped into several ongoing research projects to which I contribute my knowledge and skills to the team’s work. I am currently also (co-)authoring funding applications for new, interdisciplinary research in the area of automobility. As a researcher I am trying to stimulate interdisciplinary and multimethod enquiries, hoping to bring together knowledge and research skills that circulate in the scholarly and more applied sides of (auto)mobility and automotive research.

Second, I am adding some qualitative social science and humanities research, in particular from the field of STS and mobility studies, into the curriculum of the new specialisation ‘Intelligent Mobility’ that is part of the HAN Master of Engineering Systems. In short, I will introduce students of this programme to two STS mottoes that I believe are very relevant for future engineers: (1) we live in a ‘technological culture’ which means we cannot understand technology or society without including the one in the study of the other, and (2) because of the social dimension in technological innovation, technological trajectories could always have been otherwise if different decisions had been made in the past. The proposed additions to the current, primarily technical curriculum are thus intended to sensitise the students to the social nature of technological innovations, introduce them to some basic principles of responsible research and innovation, and, on a more practical level, make them reflect on the ways in which the mobility-related technologies they study and will themselves contribute to might affect the way we can be mobile.

Third, and perhaps most ideally, I aim to narrow the gap between ‘academic’ and ‘applied’ research in the Netherlands. I believe that there can be a close(r) connection between research, education, and knowledge valorisation or (public) outreach efforts. However, for such synergies to become fruitful, it is important to be attentive towards the conduct, language and objectives of ‘the other’ and of oneself. Here, I am inspired by the positive response of the participants in the expert workshops I organised at the end of the PhD. The participants appreciated the opportunity I had given them to talk to one another, and create more rapport between them. I aim to grow in my own capabilities to facilitate such exchanges and create new sustainable relationships. I intend to do so, at least, by maintaining my position in the academic community and actively participating in a network of non-academic, local stakeholders like business, governments, knowledge institutes, and
knowledge associations. The knowledge, experience and skills I have obtained during my studies and PhD will thus find their way into yet unknown places.
References


