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Community-First Criticism: Reviewing Art and Culture in Local Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

This article explores community-conforming criticism published in local or community newspapers. Currently, professional cultural criticism is largely focused on capital-based and regional newspapers, as well as cultural magazines, implying the specialisation of work and compartmentalisation of content, while local newspapers cover a wide variety of societal issues and dedicate attention to culture in genres other than the review. The article analyses the findings from a three-year development project launched by the Finnish Critics' Association (2020–2023) that aimed to rethink reviewing in local journalistic settings. An analysis of the stories published until the summer of 2022 ($n = 28$) and semistructured theme interviews with the involved critics and staff journalists ($n = 14$) show the potential and challenges for local journalistic cultural criticism. Based on the analysis, I develop a theoretical framework for community-conforming criticism that places the primary focus on social values of art and preferences that rise from within the local community.

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Introduction

Arts and culture have been reviewed in journalism since the emergence of the modern institution of journalism. As a genre and practice, reviewing has been mostly established in daily newspapers and cultural magazines in the printed press and public broadcasting with national outreach (see, e.g., Chong 2020; Vassenden, Furuseth, and Thon 2016). The concentration of reviewing and criticism within news outlets with national circulation, run in capital and major cities, has contributed to a strong focus in reviews on (high) arts produced by institutionalised actors rather than evaluating less established or professionalised forms of arts and culture. In turn, this has frequently aroused critiques regarding the elitism and exclusivity of criticism, while also leaving art criticism as the “delicate plant” of the cultural-journalistic ecosystem, subject to conjunctures in production and constantly running the risk of being outsourced and decreased in volume (Widholm, Riegert, and Roosvall 2019; see also Jaakkola 2015; Riegert 2021). The fact that arts and

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culture have been reviewed in local newspapers rather nonsystematically, however, does not indicate that audiences would be infrequently engaging or not interested in cultural productions in local communities.

Local newsrooms have been struggling with the effects of digitalization that have changed the consumption patterns of audiences, even if digital channels have also presented new opportunities (Hess and Waller 2017; Casero-Ripollés, Marcos-García, and Alonso-Muñoz 2020; Hastjarjo 2017). Media concentration has generated news deserts in rural areas, and the local public debate has become less controlled by journalistic actors, leading into democratization but, from the journalistic perspective, also for de-professionalization (Nygren 2020; Nielsen 2015). To maintain their status, local newspapers have attempted to re-build relationships of trust and reciprocity with local communities (Wenzel and Crittenden 2021; Jenkins and Graves 2019; 2022; Nyre and Maiden 2022). Costera Meijer (2020) suggests that putting more emphasis on audience responsiveness, learning about the local area, telling stories from within the community, and facilitating regional orientation while honouring complexity can turn out to be strategies for survival for local newspapers, as they increase the value of news for local audiences.

Reviewing new cultural products has been seen as a way of conversation with interested audiences and a way of producing value for them (Jaakkola 2022c; Orlik 2009). Against this context, we can ask whether reviewing in local contexts could serve as a means of advancing the perceived meaningfulness, relevance and proximity of content among local communities. To explore the potential of local criticism, a three-year development project was started in Finland, aimed to experiment with the professional production of art reviews in local nondaily newspapers in rural areas. In the current article, the goal is to inquire the findings of the development project by exploring the potentials and pitfalls of local art criticism. Because a project of this kind is rather unique in its aim, it is worth looking at the specificities of the content produced: When the professional production of reviews is supported in local settings where these reviews have no established standing, how do the practitioners, who basically has free reign to shape and adjust the reviewing in this context, create criticism for a local audience? What kinds of challenges appear, and what are the major tensions between the archetypical national-reach criticism and the local journalistic norms, routines and practices?

Here, reviews refer to a specific genre that aims at evaluating a new piece of art in public. As a genre, reviews belong to a specialised type of arts and cultural journalism, in which the review should be written by an acknowledged expert in the area of culture being covered (Blank 2007; Titchener 1998). Currently, reviews are also becoming more prolific beyond journalism and journalism professionals, with citizens and consumers both encountering and producing reviews as part of their social media use and customer experiences (Jaakkola 2022c). Therefore, it is interesting to envision how reviews function as part of the dynamics of local journalism and local communities not only because of the reviewing practices are becoming more diversified in general, but also because reviews are increasing in their volume and popularity beyond professionally produced journalism. Whereas the past few decades have produced a significant body of research discussing community news and community-centered journalism initiatives (e.g., Lauterer 2006; Lowrey, Brozana, and Mackay 2008; Reader and Hatcher 2012; Robinson 2016; Wenzel and Crittenden 2021), cultural journalism and particularly its subgenre art reviewing have barely been studied in local contexts (see, e.g., Gulyas and Baines

2020). The question initiated by the development project is thus what “community reviews” look like in relationship to the institutionalized tradition of reviewing in national newspapers. How can the essential character of reviews be maintained in small communities where “everyone knows each other” and nurturing trust and harmony may be regarded as having more importance than arousing diffusion and debate?

I start by discussing local newspapers as a production context for reviewing in the Finnish context. I also examine the genre practice and its special conditions of production before proceeding to describing the development project in more detail. After this, I turn to the research design and empirical analysis. In the analysis, I examine the conceptions of reviewership, culture concept and value production in reviews generated in the development project.

Local Cultural Journalism

As in many other countries, local newspapers are distinguished from national and regional newspapers in the Finnish media landscape. Local newspapers are, according to the definition of the Finnish News Media Association (2022), issued one to three times a week and either subscribed or circulated to households for free; newspapers in the former category are referred to as “local newspapers”, which are often published in rural areas outside cities, and newspapers in the latter category are “city papers”, but both categories are subsumed under the label of “local journalism”. This type of journalism is mostly produced and published in smaller cities and sparsely populated rural areas, and it can thus also be characterized as rural (community) journalism (cf. Zion et al. 2016; Guth 2015). In 2020, there were 137 local newspapers with an issue frequency of one to three days, the number of which has decreased by about a third since 1980, when there were 186 titles (Statistics Finland 2021).

Although national and regional newspapers show a tradition of producing reviews on a systematic and regular basis, local newspapers typically lack continuity. The news coverage produced in small newsrooms is largely dependent on the small number of staff writers and a network of freelancers because many of the rural and city newspapers are one-person newsrooms. Nevertheless, local newspapers in Finland have been regarded as channels for cultural mediation early on. Even before the internet, local newspapers were considered the “venues for cultural consumer service”, including “essential information about local cultural offerings, programmes and schedules” (Paikallislehdistö 1977, p. 5; see also Mikkola 1972). Moreover, local newspapers have been seen as community-building instruments, functioning as “letters to home” and “family albums” for those involved and perhaps those who left home (Ojajarvi 2014). Addressing the critical needs of local audiences, Napoli and colleagues (2018, 20) place “opportunities for participation in libraries and community-based information services, cultural and arts information and recreational opportunities’ into the category of “civic information” provided by local papers.

In general, local newspapers have been strongly regarded as *news* media, with a clear focus on information-oriented formats and opinionated materials that are mostly based on op-eds and letters to the editor (Aldridge 2007; Franklin 2007). In Ojajarvi’s (2014) quantitative content analysis of eight local newspapers in Finland, almost 70 percent of the content in 2000–2009 was news, while reports, commentaries (columns, causeries

and other commentaries), letters to the editor and personal portraits at most each occupied 10 percent of the content. Reviews were not mentioned as a distinct category, which points out to only occasional review coverage, if any. The most frequently covered thematic areas were work life, leisure time activities, law, order and accidents and sports (Ojajärvi's 2014, 42). In contrast, in national and regional newspapers, reviews have occupied about a third of the entire coverage of culture pages since the 1970s in Finland (Jaakkola 2015).

Local cultural journalism largely aligns with the conceptual frames of community journalism (Lauterer 2006; Reader and Hatcher 2012) and collaborative local journalism (Jenkins and Graves 2022). Community journalism refers to locally oriented, professional news coverage that focuses on city neighbourhoods, suburbs or small towns, hence placing the reader at the centre. Collaborative local journalism leans upon the collaboration between journalists and civil-society groups (Jenkins and Graves 2022). Both forms of journalism aim at nurturing the community instead of watchdogging that community (Robinson 2016, 116). Small newspapers largely depend on advertising revenues from local actors, which makes it challenging to exert criticism towards these actors (Aldridge 2007). The functions of community journalism may appear as contradictory to the aims of criticism and reviewing, where the critical monitoring dimension is the core feature. The community-supporting function may have been one of the main reasons why reviews have not been adopted to local newspapers. Without critique, reviewing is regarded as losing its strength (see, e.g., Elkins and Newman 2008). It may thus seem somewhat challenging to insert a tradition of writing into a news outlet that prioritizes the proximity to its objects of coverage and audiences instead of endorsing an approach that may be regarded as distance-building. How local reviews deal with this challenge without losing the very identity of arts criticism is an interesting aspect to explore.

Review Genre and Institution

Review distinguishes from other opinionated journalistic genres such as column and essay in its specialized functions and practices of production. Criticism, in broader terms, is an institution embedded in the artworld (Hohendahl 1982; Becker 1982). The institution of arts reviewing has, nevertheless, been developed in media with a national outreach, and local or rural areas have not played a role in this development that has been mostly focused on the cultural supply of larger cities, as well as monitoring national and international debates. The focus on major cities has, in turn, been with a focus on high culture and the cultural institutions maintaining it (Alexander 2003). In local newspapers, culture has been less systematically covered, as small media organizations have not been able to establish distinct culture pages and culture desks, no journalistic work differentiation has occurred and while the focus of the newsroom staff has been on local political news, the cultural coverage has typically been left to occasional freelancers. Cultural coverage has thus traditionally been *less differentiated and internally structured* in local news outlets.

According to the traditional understanding, journalistic reviews are “public summaries and evaluations that assist readers to be more knowledgeable in their choice, understanding or appreciation of products or performances”, “answering two questions: ‘what is it? Is

it any good?” (Blank 2007, 7). As a critical, opinionated, specialist-written journalistic genre, the task of a review is to present “a studied evaluation” and “an overnight reaction” (Titchener 1998, 3) as stand-alone texts. The critical process consists of “knowledgeable comprehension, positive/negative ascertainment, and resulting carefully considered judgement as a means of reasonably estimating the value of the particular work under scrutiny” (Orlik 2009, p. 8). Criticism has multiple functions, and the basic functions of criticism include guiding the audiences (acquainting them with new cultural objects), building bridges (opening up lines of communication and understanding between creator and consumer), suggesting new directions (providing the audience with new interpretations), proposing systemic or structural change (providing the audience with more macro-sociological analysis), serving as a watchdog (discovering the concerns of citizens and cultural consumers and defining what the public needs to know) and entertaining the audience (expressing ideas in a manner that captures the audience’s attention) (Orlik 2009, p. 27). Despite a predominant focus on an aesthetic object, reviews have functions that attempt to serve both cultural consumers and institutions as part of the wider cultural landscape. The cultural intermediation that reviews aim at accomplishing is a way of placing new cultural products on the market to the historical and situated contexts of consumption by constructing a meaning, against which these products can be better understood, and a value, with which the product can be placed onto the cultural map of existing products and considered for consumption.

The genre of review leans upon at least three fundamental principles that constitute the essential prerequisites for producing criticism in newspapers and distinguish it from other journalistic genres (Jaakkola 2015). The basic principles are constantly contested by new and emerging forms of reviewing—admittedly, —cultural journalism and reviewing have during the past decades become more oriented towards forms of popular culture and the historical-evaluative function has become less dominant (see, e.g., Purhonen et al. 2019; Jaakkola 2015)—but anyone who engages as a reviewer needs to take a stance to these signature features of the genre. The distinctive features of reviewing are the following:

1. A review is written by an author specialized in the field of art that the review deals with, someone who calls him- or herself a reviewer and is acknowledged as a representative of a field to articulate the good taste within it (Bourdieu [1996] 1992[[1996] 1992]). Writing a review thus requires the adoption of a special authorship position that is not solely a journalistic one but also draws on the so-called aesthetic paradigm of the dualistic professionalism of arts and cultural journalism (Jaakkola 2015).
2. A review constitutes an object relation, that is, it is made in relation to a cultural artefact (Orlik 2009). The product or service that is chosen for the review object is the point of departure for the review; without it, the review would not exist. The choice of a review object is related to representation of different cultural fields, the choices of which constitute the culture concept, the accumulated representation of culture (Jaakkola 2015; 2022a). Typically, the culture concept in reviews encompasses forms of legitimised forms of high and popular culture, as reviewing is basically a tool for canonisation of a cultural field (Alexander 2003).
3. A review has an evaluative function: its fundamental objective is to evaluate the review object (Titchener 1998; Blank 2007). Even if reviews also exert other value-creation

functions (see Jaakkola 2022b) and the evaluation does not solely deal with aesthetic experience (Blank 2007), the evaluation is a distinctive function, because if no attempt to answer to the question of whether the review object is worth a cultural consumer's investments is made, the genre shifts into something else, such as an essay, analysis or a column.

These three distinctive features of reviewing inform the fundamental editorial choices in newsrooms and affect the outcome. In their individual practice, reviewers typically employ the strategies of contextualisation, classification, elucidation, interpretation, analysis and evaluation of the object to conduct reviewing (Orlik 2009, p. 8; see also Carroll 2009), among which, as said above, evaluation is regarded as the distinctive feature of the genre (Blank 2007, 7). In early aesthetic theory, the author (artist or originator), artist/artwork (message and medium) and audience (receiver) were the key dimensions of the review (Duncan 1953). By turning to these key dimensions, a review text seeks to "reveal the aesthetic value of an object" (message criticism), to "relate it to the structure that sustains it" (medium criticism), to "relate the object to the traditions to which it belongs" (receiver criticism) and to "define the intention of the artist" (originator criticism) (Orlik 2009, p. 78). In doing this, a review can analyse the object from within its own conditions (reflexive analysis), contextualise it by departing from the object (relational analysis) or insert something new into the object that was not originally there (interventional analysis) (Jaakkola 2022c). In local settings, the originator, receiver, medium and message are attached to local people, traditions and places, and at the level of the textual strategies, reviewers are basically moving in the poles of cultural intermediation (Alexander 2003; Jaakkola 2022c) between the originator (primary production) and receiver (audience) by choosing to seek distance to the art producers or seeking a community-building proximity with the local community.

The Development Project

The development project *Shine on, critique!* (in Finnish *Kritiikki näkyy* and in Swedish *Kritiken syns*, literally "criticism is visible")—a three-year project (2020–2023) funded by the Kone Foundation—was initiated by the Finnish Critics' Association (SARV). Established in 1950, SARV is the major professional society for reviewers in the country, and it had over 800 members in total in mid-2022. The main objective of the criticism project was to develop a review of different forms and make reviewing more accessible to different audiences. The project involved, besides the funding of criticism in newspapers, the development of live forms for showing and discussing criticism and a residence programme supporting critics' exchange in the Nordic and Baltic countries. At its launch, the project was not the only initiative related to the development of reviewing in Finland; in 2019–2022, there was also another foundation-funded project, *Kritikbyrån*, which was run by the association of Finland–Swedish freelance critics. Both of these projects were intended to develop criticism through financial aid, which had been seen as the bottleneck of review production (SARV 2021b; see also Chong 2020). Regarding specialised professional associations and development initiatives, it can be said that Finland hosts a strong professional community of reviewers, which implies a relatively solid professional tradition and professional identity in the country, unlike many countries where reviewers

and critics are blended into cultural workers' and journalists' communities and, as a result, reviewing stands out as less of an articulated professional practice. This makes Finland as a good case to study.

The development project included a subproject on local criticism (*lähikritiikki, närkritik*, the words *lähi-* and *när-* referring to "next") that was dedicated to initiating reviews in local newspapers by providing the coordination and funding of reviews in 2021–2022. The decisions regarding the commissioning and publishing of texts were left to the newsrooms, but the project facilitated the production by putting reviewers and newsrooms into contact with each other and providing those involved with both general and tailored personal advice and coaching. The initial aim of the subproject was to involve 30 local newspapers to publish 150 local reviews within one year. In total, 130 newsrooms were contacted, but the COVID-19 pandemic posed a challenge to the local culture because the site-specific events of the cultural sector were shut down because of restrictions. As of July 2022, 13 local newsrooms (43% of the intended number of participants) had been involved in the project. Thus, the pandemic restrained the intentions to review, and from May 2021 to July 2022, 25–30 texts (about 20% of the intended number of reviews) had been published. All published reviews were collected on the project's website after being published in the original printed newspapers and in their online editions.

The instructions sent to the newsrooms mentioned performances, concerts, exhibitions, film, literature and recordings as possible local cultural objects for review, but the reviewers were also encouraged to "come up with objects for review even creatively" (SARV 2021a). The review was defined as follows:

Review belongs to the genre of opinionated journalism. This means that it is a subjective text that intends to reproduce an identifiable conception of the artwork but assesses the work from within its own conditions. Review also exerts a news function, as it generally focuses on new works of art. Review may also resemble a column to the extent that the reviewer can have a voice of his or her own, and a distinct angle.¹

Each reviewer involved in the project was paid 250 euros for an article, which was considerably higher than the 50–100 euros that the local newspapers could typically afford for a freelancer. In the call for expressions of interest (SARV 2021b), it was said that the aspiring reviewer did not have to be an experienced reviewer but should be interested in entering the field. In practice, many of the reviewers involved in the project one and a half years after its launch were professionals, either in reviewing or at least in cultural journalism and public communication.

The development project aligns itself and can be interpreted against the ongoing public and theoretical debates on the crisis of reviewing and criticism in newspapers, which has been prolific during the past decades in Finland, as in the other Nordic countries (see Jaakkola 2015; Riegert 2021). As the volumes of reviewing have been cut down in journalism, a central argument in the debates has been that art criticism is dying out or being endangered in the public sphere (see also Elkins 2003; McDonald 2007; Elkins and Newman 2008; Frey 2015). Against this background, the development project appears as a radical act with an attempt to improve the conditions of producing reviews in structures that are lacking both resources and forerunners. The objective of initiating production with external funding to introduce criticism to readers who might

otherwise not follow reviews on a regular basis can also be seen as an educational initiative (Jaakkola 2022b). In times of instability, and with regard to the pilot-project character of the development project, it is important to document the case under study as a “potential practice” to explore new ways of developing reviewing and criticism in journalism even in more general, to widen the social imaginery around the elitistic and non-accessible journalistic criticism.

Research Questions

In this case study, I am interested in how the essential constituents of reviewing—the choice of the reviewer, review object and the pertinent choice of the cultural field, and the evaluation—are adjusted when applied in the local or rural newspapers in the development project under study. The general questions for the study read as follows: How was reviewing adjusted to local newspapers in the development project and what are thus the specific features, needs and challenges of criticism produced for communities in rural areas? By looking at the basic prerequisites for reviewing—the reviewership, the review objects that generate the culture concept, and the value production by bridging and distancing strategies we can get an idea of how local criticism potentially differs from the criticism tradition as known from daily newspapers, the normative and established tradition of journalistic reviewing. The questions are answered with the help of both textual analysis and the analysis of experiences of the review producers from data collected with thematic interviews.

Data and Method

The sample of texts studied in the current article ($N = 28$) consists of all reviews that had been published in local newspapers and collected on the project’s website from the start of the local review subproject’s launch in January 2021 (stories published between February 2021 and June 2022). A simple quantitative content analysis of the texts (see Jaakkola 2022a) was conducted with regard to their culture concept (form of culture, elaborated from within the dataset) and functional orientation (aesthetic, originator, medium or receiver criticism). In addition, a qualitative analysis of the textual strategies of creating community (strategies of localization) and putting forward critical arguments (strategies of critique) was conducted.

Additionally, a semistructured theme interview was carried out with both a reviewer and newsroom representative from each newspaper in July 2021 and 2022. The pattern of the questions is shown in Appendix. The interviews, which were conducted on Zoom in Finnish ($n = 12$) and Swedish ($n = 2$), had an average length of 35 minutes and ranged from 22 to 56 minutes (29–56 minutes for reviewers and 22–46 for newsroom representatives). The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Information on the local newspapers ($N = 7$) and their representatives ($N = 14$) is shown in Table 1.

Three of the newspapers included in the sample were nonsubscription city newspapers that were free of charge and four subscribed newspapers of varying size newsrooms and circulation volumes. *Aamuset*, *Epari*, *Länsi-Suomi* and *Nya Åland* were published in relatively densely populated areas compared with the rural areas where *Ilmajoki-lehti*, *Perhönjokilaakso* and *SeutuMajakka* were distributed. Some smaller municipalities had annual

Table 1. Information on the respondents.

#	Newspaper	Type and venue	Frequency of issue	Circulation	Reviewer	Newsroom employee
1	Aamuset	Non-subscribed newspaper, Turku (194,000 inhabitants)	1 × week (Wed)	76,700	Art historian, female (5 texts)	Subeditor, male
2	Epari	Non-subscribed newspaper, Seinäjoki (64,000 inhabitants)	1 × week (Wed)	64,000	Freelance cultural journalist, female (3 texts)	Editor-in-chief, ex-culture editor, male
3	Ilmajoki-lehti	Subscribed newspaper, Ilmajoki (12,300 inhabitants)	1 × week (Wed)	4500	Retired school principal, male (5 texts)	Editor-in-chief, male
4	Länsi-Suomi	Subscribed newspaper, Rauma (39,000 inhabitants)	5 × week (Mon-Fre)	77,000	Art historian, freelance reviewer, female (2 texts)	Culture editor, theatre reviewer, female
5	Nya Åland	Subscribed newspaper, Maarianhamina, Åland Islands (11,800 inhabitants)	5 × week (Mon-Fre)	12,000–40,000	Upper secondary school teacher, freelance music reviewer, male (1 text)	Culture editor, literature reviewer, male
6	Perhonjoki-laakso	Subscribed newspaper, Veteli (3,100 inhabitants)	1 × week (Thurs)	15,000	Cultural journalist, female (5 texts)	Editor-in-chief, female
7	SeutuMajakka	Non-subscribed newspaper, Oulainen (7,300 inhabitants)	1 × week (Wed)	6700–32,000	Teacher in Finnish language, female (5 texts)	Editor-in-chief, male

cultural festivals that dominated the cultural reporting, such as a classical music festival in Ilmajoki and a folk music festival, coupled with a distinct tradition in the area, such as in the outreach area of Veteli. The newsrooms' representatives coordinated and commissioned the review production in the project. All of them showed a strong interest in culture, even if their personal experience from cultural journalism and arts criticism varied. Some of the newsroom respondents had a background of being a culture editor and reviewer, and some of them were active reviewers themselves, but others only showed interest in arts as a cultural consumer, for example, as an avid reader or theatre-goer. In general, it can be assessed that the editors had a good readiness to supervise the reviewers.

Results

Choice of Reviewers

As a reviewer is expected to be representative of what can be assessed as valuable within a cultural field, which is acquired through subjective efforts, the question of who is allowed to act as a reviewer is fundamental to a review. According to the respondents, the reviewer's local connections were regarded as pivotal. The respondents were very unanimous in the viewpoint that the reviewer should preferably, maybe necessarily—even if there was some flexibility in terms of the cultural form because different cultural forms imply very different conditions for review production—come from the local community. This was not only a symbolic choice, implying that the reviewer concretely stood for the local community, but it was also a practical matter. A local was expected to possess detailed knowledge about the local surroundings, history and traditions and

to know the community essentials so that no instruction was needed and risk taken when it came to misunderstandings or misinterpretations from an “outsider”. Additionally, the newsrooms had no resources to cover travel costs for experts coming from outside the community, and they could not expect an expert to come from far away because the very prerequisite of the reviewing process is that the reviewer needs to come into authentic contact with the artwork. Only literature, recordings and online events could make an exception for the requirement of physical proximity, but even in this case, the need for local knowledge outweighed the practical possibilities.

In addition to local knowledge, the respondents emphasised the need for the reviewer to be knowledgeable in the cultural area they were reviewing. Some reviewers described the reviewing process as a potential cultural learning process for the review author, signalling that the reviewer did not need to possess profound knowledge about the field in advance, but, instead, it was the privileged access to cultural products that assigned them the task to put themselves, as learning subjects, in positions where they would serve the community. For this purpose, it was more important that the reviewer could verbalise ideas and experiences.

These competence requirements posed a challenge for newsrooms to find an expert from the newspaper’s circulation area. City newspapers were in a considerably better position in this respect, while small, rural newspapers found the recruitment challenging. Some local newspapers had the practice of employing nonpermanent residents, such as summer cottage owners, for occasional freelancing. Even retired schoolteachers, researchers, artists and cultural workers often constituted freelance resources. Despite these practical challenges, the representatives for the newsrooms found it important to maintain professional standards for the writers. However, one problem here was the fact that small newspapers could not often attract professional experts with their very low fees even if they would be available.

Identifying review expertise in the community makes basically an opposite to the canonic view of national dailies where the background of the reviewer does not play a role. The recruitment can thus be regarded as a strategic choice of localization where knowledge is concretely derived from within the community, similar to the ideas of community journalism.

Choice of Review Object

The texts included in the current study are presented in [Table 2](#) and described regarding the objects chosen for review, the dominant textual strategies and additional strategies identified to accomplish the domestication of the review in textual means.

Objects that were represented in the local reviews included scene art (including theatre, dance and site-specific events), literature (fiction, children’s books, nonfiction and journalistic causerie), visual arts (photography, painting and sculptures), music (classical music, jazz, rock and schlager) and film. Because few of the local newspapers had a coherent culture concept that they could systematically monitor and maintain, as found in the metropolitan dailies with an established organisational differentiation supporting the cultural agenda, the objects were chosen from the cultural offerings that were physically available. In some newsrooms, the staff editors, mainly the editor-in-chief, suggested an object for review for the freelancer reviewer, based on an assumption of

**Table 2.** Review texts produced in the development project.

#	Date	Cultural form	Object of review	Functional orientation ¹	Textual strategies
1	Jun 13, 2022	Scene art (opera)	Professional-led local production	R by consumerization: "a play worth seeing", "to a broad audience"	Inclusivity: "With regard to <i>our</i> island nation's small scale ...", "many of <i>our</i> best singers ...", "I can recommend it to anyone."
2	Apr 27, 2022	Film	Hollywood film on Vikings (<i>The Northman</i>)	M by contextualization with references to action/macho genre category and Finnish filmmakers/Finnishness	Connection to the local area: "Shaman drums can be seen and heard, the origin of which can be found in Jurva in South Ostrobothnia."
3	Jan 31, 2022	Photography	Exhibition by a 20-th-century local-village photographer	O by description of the artwork and work processes—a local artist as a starting point and focus	Descriptive and distanced, no observable strategies for the creation of proximity/domestication
4	Dec 10, 2021	Literature	Collection of newly published books by local authors	O by contextualization with recent literature published in the region, with a number of local names mentioned	City as a frequent topic with a distinct tradition: "more city-specific literature published on the city of Rauma than perhaps any other small town", "this city of seafaring and lace-making has a history behind it that seeks its equal" Inclusivity: "We also get to know the secrets and dark history of Rauma and learn new information about the canal city."
5	Dec 29, 2021	Photography	Photos by a local amateur/autodidact photographer	O by description of the artwork—a local artist as a starting point and focus	A second/add-on article attached to the review: a personal interview with the local autodidact artist
6	Oct 7, 2021	Literature	Debut novel by a local journalist	O by description of the artwork—a local debut novelist as a starting point and focus	No observable strategies for the creation of proximity/domestication
7		Music (jazz)	Concert by a local nationally known professional musician at a festival	R by references to situated audience behaviour, contextualization with the musician's production	Mention of a birthday song dedicated to a 90-year-old lady, which activated the audience; "finally, the audience was rewarded with an encore ..."
8	Nov 14, 2021	Music (opera)	Professional-led local production at a local concert hall	A by focus on the work and artists' performance	Descriptive, distanced, no observable strategies for the creation of proximity/domestication
9	Dec 15, 2021	Literature	Recommendation of a collection of recent non-canonical/less acknowledged books for Christmas present purchase	R by consumerization: focus on consumption/commodification of new books	Consumer advice on where to find the books presented; "the book affects <i>us</i> all who are in the worklife ..."
10	Dec 15, 2021	Visual arts	Professional-led audiowork co-produced with kindergarten children, exhibited at an art hall	O by description of the artwork and contextualization with work processes—thousand locals involved in the work from different villages	Generalization: "every child should be involved in such holistic artistic work"
11	Dec 13, 2021	Visual arts	Annual exhibition by 90 local fine artists' association at the art museum	M by elucidation of the medium, description of artworks by the local artists and the curational choices related to the exhibition	"The curation reflects the curator's will to represent local artists in an equal way ...", mentions of a number of individual names
12	Aug 25, 2021	Multimedia arts	A site-specific multimodal artwork based on a poetry book	M by elucidation of the medium and multimodality	Inclusivity: "the work offers the one who strolls around in it a unique experience"; "the enchanting master work will probably inspire new audiences to art forms that are located in the margins ..."

13	Nov 3, 2021	Music (schlager)	A concert of a nationally known schlager-song artist on tour as part of a local music festival	R by description of the audience behaviour, contextualization with the artist's previous production and merits	Description of situated factors such as audience reactions while still keeping oneself distanced: "The audience memorized the lyrics, and with what an intensity the audience fell silent before the beginning of the new song. There was something heartfelt about it."
14	Oct 27, 2021	Visual arts	Professional exhibition at the city art museum	R by contextualization with history of arts that deals with diversity and equity	Mentions of a number of individual names with local connections
15	Aug 25, 2021	Music (rock)	A concert of a nationally known rock band for the 90th anniversary of the newspaper	R by description of the audience behaviour	Description of situated factors such as audience reactions: "even the audience got a chance to sing along"
16	Jul 22, 2021	Visual arts	Exhibition of three professional photographers depicting Karelia at a local art centre	O by description of the artwork, contextualization with the artists' individual backgrounds	No observable strategies for the creation of proximity/ domestication
17	Aug 11, 2021	Music (classical/ cross-over)	Professional musicians' concert representing different classical and cross-over genres	A by description of the artwork	Description of situated factors such as audience reactions: "at the end, the audience stood up and gave a furious applause"
18	Jul 8, 2021	Visual arts	Exhibition of eight local amateur/semi-professional photographs at a local arts centre	M by elucidation of the medium (photography and its reception)	Mentions of names of local artists
19	Jul 15, 2021	Scene art (theatre)	Site-specific theatre play in a traditional arts and crafts centre	M by elucidation of the medium (immersive theatre)	Description of situated factors such as audience reactions; direct address of readers: "don't be afraid, immersive theatre shall not be mixed up with participatory theatre"
20	Jun 16, 2021	Literature	Children's illustrated book on children's death by a local author	R by description of the artwork and the book's functions in grief work	User advice for the audience as consumers: "this work cannot be explained, it has to be personally experienced"; "I would like to set the book an age limit of K-18 to warn about too strong an emotional experience, but I cannot do that"
21	Jun 11, 2021	Visual arts	Exhibition by an award-winning local DIY artist with tree sculptures	M by elucidation of the medium (DIY art), contextualization with the tradition in international and national contexts	Mention of the artist's origin (which is in the circulation area), connection to international art movements
22	Jun 2, 2021	Scene art (dance)	Dance show related to an academic research project at a trans-artistic and -disciplinary festival	M by interpretation of the societal and theoretical topics arising from the show, elucidation of the central concepts (media/sociological theory)	Connection to Finnishness: "the artists of the work belong to different minorities in Finland"
23	Jun 2, 2021	Literature	A non-fiction book on the local tradition of producing church bells	R by interpretation of the societal topics arising from the book	Appropriation: the local church bells as the "first Finnish brand" regularly shown in the national television

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

#	Date	Cultural form	Object of review	Functional orientation ¹	Textual strategies
24	May 12, 2021	Literature	Autobiographic causerie collection by a local author	R by contextualization with local geography and history	Personification and personal appropriation: focus on history of a local person and her connections as a case from the community
25	May 3, 2021	Scene art (dance)	Dance show at the 40th-anniversary gala of a professional dance theatre group	M by elucidation of the medium (modern and contemporary dance)	Mentions of a number of individual names with local connections
26	Apr 29, 2021	Scene art (musical)	Virtual musical show created by local upper-secondary school students specialized in music	M by elucidation of the medium (online mediation of scene art)	Description of local youth and their experiences during the pandemic Timeliness: "It is easy for those living in small towns to identify with Aino's, Liisa's and Henrik's experiences, even if we no longer live in a patriarchal society. However, the poverty of alternatives is still felt even in this millennium."
27	Apr 17, 2021	Visual arts	Works of a local historical artist as part of an exhibition at the city art museum	R by description of the artwork and consumerization: "a great entity that can be recommended for everyone"	Mentions of local places occurring in paintings
28	Feb 17, 2021	Literature	Debut novel by a local author	R by interpretation of the societal topics arising from the book	Timeliness: "Today's people, who are suffering from corona restrictions and complaining about their boredom, cannot even imagine how difficult the life of the people was in the 1850s and 1860s, the years of hunger and plagues."

Note: ¹ A = aesthetic criticism, O = originator criticism, M = medium criticism, R = receiver criticism.

its relevance to the local community and a potential interest among the audiences, and based on the reviewer's competence profile. In other newsrooms, the freelancer reviewers involved in the project could freely choose the objects for review by themselves. Because there were no established best practices or a fixed strategy for coverage, the objects were mainly chosen because of their local connections; the cultural object was reviewed because it was a manifestation of the local culture.

Basically, the cultural objects chosen for review presented the local culture in two ways. First, the objects were produced by creators from the local community, and second, the culture being reviewed was put on display in the local community. Sometimes, both criteria were fulfilled. In the interviews, the newsroom informants emphasised that they found it important to choose cultural forms that would be shown in the local community for a longer period of time; instead of single-time events, they preferred exhibitions, concert series and tours. Artwork with a longer availability was considered a necessity because the local newspapers that were published only a couple of times a week could not keep up with the events calendar of cultural offerings. The social value of culture was also pinpointed by capturing the culture that the local community *de facto* consumed, such as schlager music concerts—partly, of course, because of pure pragmatism because there was often a lack of professional high culture available. The culture concept that emerged focused on forms other than high culture, which typically stands at the core of the daily newspapers' culture section (see, e.g., Jaakkola 2015; Purhonen et al. 2019). The reviews represented literature in its more customer- and user-focused aspects, stressing the consumer value of purchasing books for Christmas presents or as a form of local citizenship by defining the book as a source of local history and knowledge. The forms of culture that were more prevalent than high arts were arts and crafts, everyday culture and the pedagogical potential of arts, such as in the form of autodidact or child or young creators. However, the reviewed artworks were still more or less institutionalised, whether these forms of art dealt with DIY culture or amateur culture (organised amateurs, kindergarten children's audiowork, etc.).

The objects chosen for review also tended to be led by professionals rather than being sheer amateur productions. Many events, such as an opera production and a couple of fine arts exhibitions involved amateur creators but were designed and driven by professional practitioners. Consequently, the art and culture reviewed were put on display in established institutions, such as municipal theatres, concert halls and arts exhibition centres. Partially, the focus on a professional-led culture was a result of the common reviewing practices arising from the context of the professional reviewer's community to largely follow institutionalised culture and fellow professional reviewers (Janssen 1997). Also, this was a result of the threshold-quality principle that can be said to be a fundamental principle in journalistic reviewing, which here found an articulated manifestation. According to the threshold-quality principle, the objects chosen for review are expected to show some quality—unless they are excluded from the scope of reviewing and other possibilities are considered, such as applying other genres like a personal portrait, column or essay or a feature article. Amateur productions usually fail to live up to this principle, which means that amateur culture is often left out of reviews. As the local reviews show, other approaches can be adopted to address those works with nonprofessional qualities, but this implies a redefinition of the critical function of the review.

The respondents declared that it was problematic to review amateur productions, and when asked to elaborate on the statement, they stated this was mainly because of the structure of power where the professional reviewer was not in the correct position of criticising an amateur. Even if the amateur work could be placed into the amateur category, the reviews tended to become rather descriptive and nonexplicatory, reaching beyond the actual scope of the professional reviewer's competence. Because amateurs' work is often the result of a learning process and the output of learning is not always necessarily readable in the final products, the review was not felt as an adequate means of capturing the pedagogical dimensions, and the professional reviewers felt they were not the right people to judge educational achievements.

The ethical avoidance of amateur-cultural review objects exposes the often unarticulated peerness principle in reviewing: Art can be legitimately reviewed only by someone who is at least equal in terms of qualifications to the creator whose work is being reviewed. In the established form of journalistic criticism, a professional reviewer who is connected to an institutionalised and specialised part of the art world, will typically address a professional artist's creations that either are at the fringe of being institutionalised or are already part of the institutionalised structures. In vernacular criticism, amateurs and semiprofessionals can review professional products, and peers can review peers' output, as in the criticism involved in fanfiction where fans comment on each others' texts, and the peerness principle is even at stake in academic peer reviewing practices, where the reviewer is typically expected to have qualifications that are at least at the level of those being reviewed.

Intended Value Production

The published texts were rather similar to their nonlocal counterparts regarding their form, including the basic elements of criticism described in the previous section. In terms of the critical strategies, as seen in [Table 2](#), most of the texts ($N = 28$) focused on receiver criticism ($n = 11$) and medium criticism ($n = 9$) and sometimes originator criticism ($n = 6$), but very few texts were dedicated to aesthetic criticism ($n = 2$), which rests at the heart of traditional arts criticism. The focus on the constituents of the chain of mediation of arts other than the aesthetic content indicates that the texts were directed towards producing something other than aesthetic value. The added value that criticism seeks to offer was explored in the contingent, ephemeral and unique situational characteristics of localised reception, the genre- or art-typical characteristics that the singular work showed or in the artist's intentions, background and local groundings.

The dominant textual functions of the reviews intermingled with the overall functions assigned to local reviews. In the published texts, it was evident that the review authors clearly avoided difficult and specialised vocabulary from an aesthetic or artistic discourse and attempted to express ideas in an everyday language that was concrete, tangible and understandable to consumers making choices regarding how to invest their money and time. Indeed, every single respondent mentioned a down-to-earth, wider-audience approach as an important principle. The model reader of a local newspaper was a person who felt a strong affinity with the surroundings but did not necessarily have the basic knowledge about the cultural offerings. In terms of facts, this was a strong generalisation because, in some cases, the audiences of the local (including the city newspapers), regional

and national newspapers overlapped. The niche of the local newspaper's cultural coverage was, however, seen to deliver news-like information on cultural events, here in line with the rest of the newspaper. This confirms the local newspaper's identity as a news medium. Many informants stressed that "reviews are read like news", and their function should resemble the news' informative function. In particular, the following functions were identified in the respondents' interviews regarding what a local review should entail:

- *Reviews as news*: Identifying new cultural objects in the local surroundings—review functioning like the news and consumer information.
- *Analysis of culture*: Describing, interpreting and evaluating a cultural object with the aim to understand its relevance in terms of its internal structure, relationship to its aesthetic context of production, as well as time and place.
- *Development of the local art scene*: Attaching art to its local contexts and identifying potential future competences, that is, artists who may become later well-known beyond the community.
- *Development of new audiences*: Educating new audiences, reaching out to less initiated people and conducting audience development for both local arts and culture and local journalism.

In contrast to national reviews, the local reviews were emphasised to have a more community-constructive function: serving the locals with information, analysis and new insights were all thought to make reviewing valuable to the locals. Local reviews were also strongly designed to encounter less experienced and engaged audiences, while at the same time strongly supporting the local scene of culture producers by providing them with the first public support, visibility and feedback in their careers. Thus, the public reception of art was expected to sustain a dual community-supportive function for two very different audiences: inexperienced laypersons and the culturally engaged. What these two extreme groups of readers had in common was the social connectivity that contributed to their local social coherence. Among all the identified functions, the analysis of the artwork was regarded as the key function of the review. However, the local review differed from the archetypical review in that the most important thing was not the assessment of the artistic or aesthetic quality of the artwork but rather its connections to the local community life. This had the consequence that the criticism normally put forward in reviews was downplayed.

Critical expressions were felt as problematic because, by criticising local culture, the respondents said that they felt as if they were criticising the entire community and its tastes, lifestyle and preferences. The critical aspects that occurred were often balanced with positive ones:

As much as I liked the play, it partly appeared to me as still yet incomplete. I was left wondering that I would have wanted to hear more about this, and in this atmosphere, I could have dwelled in a bit longer, now we could move on a bit faster. Partly, one extent of the problems in finding a proper rhythm was because of the fact that it was the first round with the audience. Alternatively, things just did not match with my personal preferences. Indeed, maybe it's me who is incomplete. And this is a way to be. Neither is life complete until one dies. Until then, we need to cope with incompleteness, and staying at Pauanne [the site for the theatre play] can teach you that.

Instead of presenting a direct critique, the reviewers turned to other strategies, such as explaining the fundamental mechanisms of how something typically works and diagnosing the alleviations as idiosyncratic deviations. The clarification strategy could mean, for example, elucidation of the artistic or aesthetic medium, that is, explaining how the specific medium of photography, scene art or art mediated through screen functions can affect the audience's experience. In one review, the author carefully explained the difference between immersive and participatory forms of theatre. Thus, the reviewers took the opportunity to adopt a more educative function, replacing the critique of the artwork with didactic approaches and educative aims. Approaching the educative tone was identified as one textual strategy for avoiding sharp critiques that were felt as impossible to conduct. Pedagogisation can be seen as an attempt to minimise the potential risks and harmful effects of criticism towards the community, but also as a future community investment:

I see that in our area, where the threshold to cultural engagement is low, reviews is a way of supporting people in their hobbies and leisure activities, taking them into the next level by showing possibilities and adding to their knowledge.—Reviews are also a way of raising a hobby community. I have seen that my reviews have played a role in supporting professionals to be. The first review, published in the local newspaper, has opened the door, encouraged to continue towards a professional career.

Referring to the cushioning of critique in local-bound culture articles, one respondent from a larger newsroom commented, "We just tend to be rather kind and that's the way it is". Another respondent suggested that it was easier to put forward critical comments when you have distance from the object, and the closer you are and the more you share with the object of your comments, the more challenging it is to be critical in public. The respondents explained that, in a community "where everyone knows each other", criticising the neighbour's performance is not "hygienic". The medium criticism is often interpreted as criticism towards the community of (amateur) producers, as a reviewer in a small city recalled:

I remember that once a local boy choir's performance was not deemed very successful by my colleague, and parents and friends of that choir got very mad.—The next time the choir performed, they invited my reviewer colleague to re-review the performance. Then she posted content on Facebook asserting that the choir was in better shape. People felt relieved.

Thus, a critical review could polarise, and the community members experienced it as something negative. One dimension that added to negative viewpoints on criticism was the fact that both the Finnish words review (*arvostelu*) and criticism (*kritiikki*) have largely negative connotations: the verb *arvostella* ("to review") refers to judge negatively, inveigh, rebuke or reproach, and the verb *kritisoida* ("to criticise"), as in the English language, has the strong nuance of saying something negative about the object or addressing its shortcomings. Several respondents called for a redefinition of the meanings connected to criticism or the invention of a new term to denote the activity. One respondent said that they preferred to use the term *arvio* ("evaluation"), which sounded slightly more neutral, or *analyysi* ("analysis"), which has also become common in the news reporting vocabulary but goes beyond the scope of the specific genre tradition of the review ("an analysis is no more a review", as a respondent aptly remarked).

Discussion

With the choice of professional reviewers and review objects related to professionally produced arts and culture, the local criticism project to some extent reproduced the social and aesthetic order of newspaper cultural criticism, yet in a smaller-scale context and with local connections. As in contemporary art theory, the respondents showed a flexible relationship with the art form, and a range of different nonconventional forms of art were accepted and chosen for review. However, when it comes to the division between professional and amateur arts or culture, the reviewers preferred professional forms with pertinent assumptions of artistic–aesthetic quality. The focus on institutionalized instead of noninstitutionalized or emerging structures is supported by previous studies in local journalism where, for example, Splendore (2020) found a tendency among Italian local journalists to turn to elite and privileged sources even at the local level. The prioritization of authoritative sources can be found to be safe for journalists and perceived as a quality marker of professionalism. The choices are related to the boundary work of journalism where journalistic professionals need to draw a clear line to nonprofessionals in order to uphold the institution, in this case, the institutionalised genre tradition of reviewing.

In the review ecology, local reviews could occupy a spot that cannot be covered by larger newspapers. The respondents suggested that local reviews could develop their niche in relationship to the daily newspaper and cultural magazine reviews by choosing those objects typically not reviewed elsewhere but that are cultural expressions that citizens encounter and are engaged in their everyday lives: pub quizzes, karaoke, poetry slam, graffiti, advertising, everyday design ranging from customer products to the architecture of public facilities. Indeed, late modernity is characterized by opportunities to create more liquid forms of cultural manifestations (Jaakkola et al. 2015; Bauman 2011) that enable a wider range of positionings and discourses, extending the typical high-cultural scope of journalistic reviewing. The development of novel practices for reviewing, such as an increased use of dialogical or multimedia forms, would have required more time for development, and respondents indicated that no routines existed to integrate independent freelancers into newsroom workflows, which were scarcely resourced and bound to daily news work.

With its critique-avoiding dimensions, local reviewing can be understood as rethinking of the community-developing dimensions of journalism as something that can be understood as *community-conforming criticism*. Community-conforming criticism adopts the following points of departures:

- *community originated* because the reviewers and objects reviewed come from the local community;
- *community conditioned* because the reviews respect and follow the community's taste and try to promote and develop local culture;
- *community didactic* because one central task of the criticism is to develop a community by educating the locals; and
- *community resonant* because the reviewers attempt to be in a dialogue with the community.

The reviewers' community-conscious efforts in criticism can be seen as with the accomplishments of participatory and reciprocal journalism (Lewis, Holton, and Coddington

2014), applied even to local journalism (May 2020), that seek a resonant, affirmative and empowering connection to the community. Community-conforming criticism also resonates with the recent approaches in news journalism intending to prioritise the mediatory intentions of journalism instead of being directed towards problem formulations and the shortcomings of an object: the counterparts of the news tradition, constructive journalism (Haagerup 2017), solutions journalism (McIntyre 2019) and positive news (Gyldensted 2015; Leung and Francis 2015), have intended to develop alternatives to the antagonism of news journalism, advancing more bridging and less polarising approaches to societal phenomena.

As for the future prospects of criticism in local newspapers, the respondents agreed that the continuity of local criticism greatly depends on the economic resources available; as many of the respondents remarked, everything boils down to money. The employment of experts, as well as the integration of their work into the newspapers' stylebook and workflows need long-term financing and investment of time, and the freelancers wanted to be commissioned for longer periods of time than just the single ad-hoc tasks. If published online, the respondents believed that reviews could create more visibility for local culture, even nationwide, beyond the circulation area, because national art scenes could follow local events in more detail; however, many subscribed newspapers had decided to set the reviews behind paywalls. Reviewing could also be conceived of as a seasonal genre that would be present only during the summer or periods when cultural life becomes more active. Some respondents suggested that reviews could open doors to collaborations with local schools and educational institutions because the students in vocational and even basic education could be engaged in reviewing, but doing so would, again, require extra resources, even from the schools, such as willingness to align the tasks with the curricula and knowledgeable supervision. According to the respondents, it would be worth finding out whether the local actors from the private, public and third sectors would be interested in funding reviewing or whether this could be conducted by crowdfunding, commercial partnerships or project-based funding, as in the case of the development project under study, which would also help in guaranteeing the critical integrity of the reviewer.

The development project was initiated by representatives of the aesthetic paradigm of a cultural journalism and outside the newsroom, which made it more difficult to ensure an in-house continuity. Because small newsrooms tend to be occupied with the news reporting tasks with news epistemology orientation and the development of local criticism would require an aesthetic orientation as well as a wide and engaged network of freelancers, that is, resources that the newsrooms typically do not possess, the respondents stressed the fact that local newspapers are unlikely to start with a large systematic production of art reviews. Development projects led by practitioners outside media organisations, such as the one described in the present study, intend to project the existing social order of the normative structures to the new context, which calls for more research-led development based on the reconceptualisations described in the current article. Thus, it would be a valuable next step to establish hands-on workshops for local journalistic and cultural actors—especially in rural areas where the practice of reviewing calls for new thinking to find a local-critical niche—and to elaborate on the practices of community-conforming criticism in the local ecologies. The idea of community-conforming criticism could be applied, for example, to hyperlocal news outlets and developed online in

journalistic contexts that seek local, participatory and dialogical forms, here with the means of critical-analytical genres.

Conclusion

The current case study outlined the elements of local criticism as they appeared in a development project in local newspapers in Finland, subsuming the production generated in newsrooms under the concept of community-conforming criticism. In the study at hand, community criticism was produced by media professionals from the local community, and a strong need was experienced for the review objects to be professionally produced to avoid a nonhygienic power imbalance in reviewing. Furthermore, critique was rounded and even avoided in the favour of community-building proximity strategies.

Reviewing has hardly been studied at the local level so far, which makes the current case study as an appropriate starting point for envisioning alternative ways of remoulding the ideas of criticism in local contexts and claiming the review genre a role in local reporting. When transferred from one production environment to another, the central traits of a genre become exposed, as the tacit but established rules of reviewing what I called threshold-quality and peerness principle. The ingredients of community-conforming criticism may offer a theoretical impetus to conceptualize journalistic reviewing in more diverse forms, which is an important contribution to the further study of arts and cultural journalism. Moreover, it also delivers practical input for revitalising local cultural reporting to develop the local newspapers' audience relationship through arts and culture.

Note

1. All translations from Finnish and Swedish, the official languages of Finland, are made by the author of this article.

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Appendix

Pattern of questions for the theme interview.

Questions to the newsroom representative.

1. Why and from which background did your newsroom get involved in the project?
2. What have you done in the project so far, and what kind of plans do you have for the next reviews?
3. On which grounds did you choose the reviewer? What competencies should a reviewer possess, or what kind of things can you require from an aspiring reviewer?
4. How have the reviews been received? Who or which groups of people have reacted to the reviews published? How would you, yourself, as responsible for the journalistic content and decisions, assess the reviews that have been published so far?
5. What is criticism—how would you define it in your own words?
6. How does criticism fit into local newspapers in terms of (a) content, and (b) newsroom practices? What kind of challenges occur, and what kind of solutions have you found for them?
7. How does local criticism, according to your experiences, differ from the metropolitan dailies' criticism, or how *should* it differ? What are the special characteristics of local criticism?
8. What could local criticism accomplish in local newspapers? What kind of potential does it have, and how does its future look in local newspapers?
9. Is there something else that you would like to address in this interview: your own experiences or observations, questions, or ideas for development, related to local criticism?

Questions to the reviewer.

1. How and why did you get involved in this project?
2. Please tell me about your background: your education, your journalistic and non-journalistic work experience, and your relationship to reviewing/criticism.
3. What have you done so far within the project? What kind of an experience was the first review for you?
4. What is criticism—how would you define it in your own words?
5. What kind of competence is required for a reviewer in a local newspaper, in your opinion?
6. How does local criticism, according to your experiences, differ from the metropolitan dailies' criticism, or how *should* it differ? What are the special characteristics of local criticism?
7. What has been challenging, according to your own experience, in writing reviews for local newspapers? How would you meet these challenges?
8. What kind of feedback and support have you received for your local reviews and reviewing activity?
9. Could reviews become a permanent part of local newspaper coverage? How, and under which conditions?
10. Is there something else that you would like to address in this interview: your own experiences or observations, questions, or ideas for development, related to local criticism?