

Korrika, a Transmedia View

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doi: 10.7358/ijtl-2015-001-aran

ABSTRACT

Korrika is a popular relay race in favor of Euskara that traverses more than 2,500 kilometers of the seven Basque provinces every two years. It is a social and cultural event of the first order and its eighteenth edition was held last year. For this edition of the race, our research group worked on the development of the architecture of Korrika in order to expand its narrative through different media and formats. We defined a number of areas of special interest in this edition, working closely with undergraduate and master's students at the University of the Basque Country with a particular interest in audiovisual production (both fiction and documentary). The use of social networking, web resources and social mobilization elements (massive competitions, flashmobbing, implementation of social participation techniques and new communication technologies, etc.) were another area of focus in this eighteenth edition of the race. Korrika became a research project “in progress”, in which we went beyond the role of mere observers to participate in its daily activities thus contributing to its development. This involved a lot of experimentation, in which the university, the Basque radio and television station and a contemporary culture center worked together, implementing the transmedia view in a real case.

Keywords: transmedia; social participation; Korrika; Basque; race; community; project in progress.

1. INTRODUCTION

For eleven days in March 2013, Korrika passed through a very large number of towns and villages without pause, by day and night. A wooden baton containing a message of support for Euskara was passed from hand to hand. This message was read out in public when the race ended in Baiona (Northern Basque Country).

The people who carry the baton represent organizations, companies, social movements or institutions of every type, which sponsor each of the kilometers of the race and in this way raise funds for teaching Euskara to adults.

Together with its purely sporting and demonstrative character, a large number of cultural acts are organized round Korrika, ranging from concerts to exhibitions and including festivals of improvised poetry or cinematographic projects. As a whole this constitutes a festival that gives concrete expression throughout the territory to the Basque population's support for its identitarian elements, in particular its language.

Korrika has a high presence in the media – on the radio and television, in the daily press and local publications – and it is also becoming increasingly relevant in the new media with each further edition.

The Transmedia work group was formed at the end of 2011. This work group includes researchers from the University of the Basque Country (Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea – UPV/EHU), EITB-Basque Public Radio Television Station and Tabakalera-International Centre of Contemporary Culture, who came together to study the phenomenon of transmedia narrative and production and their potentials.

Besides the analytical perspective on transmedia, the work group has selected a series of events which it seeks to influence directly in order to develop and exploit their transmedia character. Korrika is one of these. Since mid-2012, the Transmedia group has been working with AEK, the body that organizes Korrika, in applying a transmedia perspective to widen the activities that take place before, during and after the sports race. For the 2013 edition, particular attention was paid to exploiting audiovisual creation (with both a fictional and a documentary character), the use of social networks, Internet resources, and the component of social mobilisation and festivity (massive competitions, implementation of techniques of social participation and new communications technologies, amongst other aspects).

In the present article the Transmedia research group presents an outline of the phases of designing and implementing the most novel transmedia resources in the recent edition of Korrika, and the results obtained once the race had concluded.

2. RACE IN FAVOR OF EUSKARA

2.1. Korrika 18: from Andoain to Baiona

The first edition of Korrika was held between the 29 November and 7 December 1980, and the following two editions every year and a half; but from the fourth edition onwards it has had a biannual character and has always been held in the months of March and April.

AEK-Alfabetatze eta Euskalduntze Koordinakundea (Coordinator for Teaching Euskara to Adults) is the organizer of Korrika and through the race it raises funds for teaching the Basque language to adults in all the Basque provinces.

The eighteenth edition set out on 14 March 2015 from Andoain (Gipuzkoa), thus beginning a race that would not stop for eleven days during which the baton was passed from hand to hand, day and night, until the final destination was reached. Step by step, it travelled 2,587 kilometres, going through all the Basque capitals, the different regions, a very significant number of towns and villages of all sizes, and overcoming orographic, climatic and organizational obstacles of every type.

The final event of Korrika 18 took place in Baiona (Northern Basque Country) and consisted of a big festival that attracted tens of thousands of people. The reading out of the text contained inside the baton by its author, the *bertsolari* (verse improviser) Amets Arzallus, was the culminating moment of the celebration.

The slogan chosen for the recent edition was “Eman euskara elkarri” (Share Euskara) and, this time, a tribute was given to the students of Euskara. The official song of Korrika edition number 18 was composed and recorded by “Esne beltza”, a popular music group.

2.2. Much more than a popular race

Thirty-three years have passed since the Korrika was born and in its 18 editions it has won unquestionable support in every sense and at every level. In essence it maintains its physical component as a demonstration of support for Euskara and as a mechanism of raising funds for teaching the language. But besides, through its consecutive editions it has managed to add another type of values such as participation (it is very difficult to calculate the number of people who take part in the race properly speaking, but a figure far in excess of 600,000 people would not be absurd), the sense of belonging, mobilizing capacity,

equality, the public and festive visualization of the support for Euskara in all the different territories where it is spoken, integration and social involvement at all levels – individual, collective and institutional – amongst others (Del Valle 1988).

Korrika is already a ritualized celebration, beyond whoever organizes it and whatever its primary aims might be. The social interweaving it performs, its projection at all levels (educational, media, institutional, political, cultural and social) and its festive component all make it into a reference around which positive experiences, shared individually and collectively, take place. With Korrika, Euskara traverses a territory that belongs to it – beyond geopolitical or administrative frontiers – and gives expression to the social support and public legitimation that would not otherwise crystallize so clearly in everyday life.

2.3. Participation

In the race properly speaking, one can take part as carrier of the baton – in this way financing the kilometres run by each sponsor, one can run behind the banner with the slogan of the edition, or, in a more anonymous fashion, one can form part of the pack of runners taking part in the relay race.

But in addition, as we noted above, AEK and other local support groups for the Korrika organize Korrika Kulturala, a very wide program of activities of every type: these range from events with a purely festive character (musical concerts in all styles, meals/dinners, humorous shows, monologues...) to those with a cultural character (exhibitions and conferences, narrative, photographic, video or painting competitions) or with a sporting character (mountain treks, races, competitions...).

In nearly all the towns and villages of the Basque Country, the public and private educational centres join the celebrations, organizing Korrika Txikiak (local and parallel versions of the general Korrika, in which young children run relay races in the locality, carrying an *ad hoc* baton and celebrating the arrival of Korrika).

Economic support for Korrika is also materialized in very different ways, ranging from bonds, the purchase of stickers or pins, some of the products from the Korrika catalogue (T-shirts, sweatshirts, caps, bags, backpacks, key-rings...) or by funding some of the 2,587 kilometers of the race, either exclusively or jointly. In the latter case, besides support from groups and social movements in favor of Euskara and from companies and private bodies (advertisers, department stores, financial and insurance firms, brands from all productive sectors), Korrika usually receives funding from the local and provincial institutions and from those of the relevant administrative region.

2.4. Korrika in the traditional media

The mass media usually report on the different stages of Korrika and, in particular, those stages that take place in their area of influence. Korrika usually has a greater presence in the Basque-language media or in those whose editorial lines are closer to the defense of Basque identity.

The daily press, which has a high index of penetration in the Basque Country and Navarre, gives very uneven coverage to the events of the race in support of Euskara. In the media belonging to the Vocento group, Korrika was only front page news the day after it finished in the Northern Basque Country – although it did not even receive any prominent mention in *El Correo*. Something similar occurred with *Diario de Navarra*, a newspaper that is ideologically conservative and that denies the Basque character of the Navarre. Conversely, other newspapers like *Noticias de Navarra*, *Deia*, *Gara*, *el Periodico de Alavá* or *Berria*, the latter exclusively in Euskara, gave a lot of coverage to Korrika, on both their front and inside pages on the days between 14 and 25 March 2013.

The local magazines also covered Korrika in an uneven way. Coverage was almost nonexistent in the local media of the Rivera Navarra, but nonetheless it received significant coverage in the local Basque-language media, *Goiena*, *Barren*, *Ttipi-Ttapa* or *Aiurri*, among others.

The autonomous radio stations and television channels also gave Korrika the opportunity to broadcast information about its aims and activities and the social response through special programs, mentions in shows and news programs. Concretely, EITB, the Basque public radio television station, showed the inaugural events, the daily stages and the final festival with prominent programs. Radio stations like *Euskadi Irratia* and *Gaztea* or TV channels like *ETB1* and *ETB3* have a very audience.

The audiovisual media with a local character – radio stations and television channels whose coverage is thus more limited – broadcast special programs for the days when Korrika passed through their areas of coverage (*Goiena*, *Goiberri*, *Xalao*, *Hamaika Bilbo*...) and, more generally, designed series of daily programs to provide a more general follow-up for all eleven stages of Korrika (the case of *Hamaika* or the radio broadcasts integrated in *Arrosa*).

3. TRANSMEDIA PROJECT: RESEARCH-ACTION

When the group of researchers from EITB, Tabakalera and UPV/EHU was formed at the end of 2011, we were well aware that this was not a typical research project.

Transmedia edukien sorrera, ekoizpena eta erabilera (Creation, production and uses of transmedia content) was formed with the idea of bringing together energies proceeding from different professional fields, specializations and even points of view. The presence in the same working group of professionals from a public radio television group, an international centre of contemporary culture and a university was an experiment that represented a significant challenge in itself (Transbideak 2013).

We sketched out three main aims for the project:

- To bring together the dispersed information and documentation existing on the transmedia approach, its production and consumption, and to examine the theoretical foundations of this narrative mode.
- To select and carry out an in-depth analysis of a series of case studies that would additionally serve us in designing a taxonomy of transmedia products and in identifying the most relevant elements present in the most successful of these.
- To lay the foundations for a collaborative and multidisciplinary system of working that would better exploit each of the three bodies involved, and to demolish the sometimes narrow walls of some research groups, thus providing a more outward looking perspective.
- It is thus not a research project that sought to present its conclusions at the end, but a work group that would show its advances along the way and that would be involved in developing concrete transmedia projects. One of the latter is what we are presenting here, the one articulated around Korrika 18. The clearest methodological references for this type of work can be found in so-called “action-research” (Lewis 1946 and Stenhouse 1975) and “participatory observation” (Martinez 2004), which substantially define a working system where researchers take part and interact with the rest of the agents, while carrying out an analytical follow-up of the processes underway.

4. KORRIKA WAS ALREADY A TRANSMEDIA PRODUCT

As we have noted, each edition of Korrika is articulated around a slogan and a person or group that receives a tribute. Each edition has its own visual and publicity treatment, and a song that distinguishes and accompanies it during the days when this popular race is taking place.

The slogans synthesize the aims of each edition, and models and conduct are objectified in the people who receive a tribute. In recent years some of the slogans have been concerned with the process of adult literacy in Euskara and the need to be active, the advantage of opening oneself up to the world

through Euskara, the importance of the spoken language, or the identification of Euskara with its territory.

At the same time, amongst the bodies and people who have received tributes in recent editions, we find writers, musicians, academics of the Basque language, *bertsolaris*, women as transmitters of the language, sculptors...

Around these central elements a participatory design has been constructed for Korrika, both in the physical race itself and in the rest of the activities that form part of it. Communicating the values on which each edition of Korrika is designed is usually done using traditional mass media and platforms, on paper and posters, and using a wide range of merchandising products. Recent editions, moreover, have integrated the new mass media and the different tools of mobile telephony and computers.

In short, Korrika is in essence a popular race that raises funds for teaching Euskara; it is designed around a slogan and a tribute is given to a person, group or institution that project a series of values related to the language, its revitalization and its relevance to the community.

The materialization of that discourse is achieved by physically participating in the race, in the different related activities or through the traditional or new mass media. That is, Korrika has been and is a transmedia project that is realized and channeled through different media, thus making possible its discursive (re)generation and the participation of users in its construction and socialization (Jenkins 2006).

5. LONG BEFORE STARTING TO RUN...

5.1. Laying the foundations

Applying the abovementioned line of “research-action” to Korrika offered every advantage. Not only because it enabled an accumulation of prior experience to be put to good use, but also because it opened up new possibilities and was flexible enough for these to be incorporated in a natural and positive way.

Thus began a process of work and collaboration between the members of the research group and AEK that was consolidated over the ten months from July 2012 to April 2013.

The first meeting of the group with the communications team of AEK took place before the summer of 2012. At this meeting our group explained the convenience of conceiving Korrika as a great transmedia universe, in which organizers and users converged and that involved a very imaginative devel-

opment of traditional and new media, for which purpose previous experiences and new proposals were channeled. This universe, which broad sectors of the Basque population identified with, was optimum for the interaction of different agents and enabled highly open and creative cross-media developments (Scolari 2013).

During the summer we prepared an initial project based on the essential discursive elements of Korrika 18 and the envisaged aims, slogan and person who was to receive a tribute (although all of these were still secret at that time). This project included a series of media and platforms on which to build the narrative discourse of the eighteenth edition of Korrika and the ways in which interaction with users and discursive (re)construction would be possible.

After the summer we took part in the first big meeting of the Korrika Commission (about 20 people) at which the foundations for the working system of the popular race were laid with the participation of the people from AEK responsible for finances, organization, communications and logistics. For us it was a first exploratory meeting at which we were able to gather feedback on the project drawn up in summer. The attitude of AEK was highly receptive and they were more than willing to include our proposals in their work dynamic and to collaborate with members of the research team and with as many students as were prepared to join in. With that idea of adding ideas and people to the project, we thought that it was necessary to open up the viewpoint and gain a deeper understanding of the values that crystalized socially around Korrika and of the perception held by different sectors of the population of how these values should be worked on.

Although not directly related to Korrika, we will briefly mention a transmedia workshop that served us as a type of apprenticeship. This workshop was organized by Tabakalera in September 2012 with the aim of experimenting in the collective creation of fiction. Over the course of ten days, the Tranxlan laboratory developed audiovisual products, a website, used social networks to spread the story, designed a videogame and put into practice gamification techniques during the festival of fantasy and horror films held annually in Donostia-San Sebastián. Our team was present in the workshop and learned from its experiences.

Following the line of what we have mentioned above, we organized the second edition of Tranxmedia in October (Tranxmedia 2012). This was a conference that sought to learn from novel experiences developed in different countries and, moreover, it included an afternoon workshop of transmedia creation applied thematically to Korrika. The first part of the conference, which consisted of presentations involving a great number of basically European examples, was attended by Tishna Molla of Power to the Pixel, one of the most solid references in the study and development of transmedia projects in Europe.

But it was the evening session, which took the form of a workshop, which served for advancing for the design of Korrika from a transmedia perspective.

The aims of that workshop were to identify a series of values on which a narrative world specific to Korrika could be built and to design systems of social participation that would invigorate it. The workshop was attended by about fifty participants who worked in groups of seven people with a moderator for each group. The latter were selected from amongst people from the Basque Country who were well-known because of their experience with audiovisual media, or in literary, artistic or practical creation involving the new information technologies.

The experience was very rewarding and served to provide further ideas for the project that we were to develop with AEK in the approaching Korrika 18. Proposals were made in the workshop that were directed towards:

- Widening the levels of participation by the citizenry through collaborative works (audiovisual follow-up of Korrika as it passed through each town or village), karaoke competitions, versions of the original Korrika 18 song or the collective creation of literary texts, amongst others.
- Making more extensive use of new communications technologies, especially social networks, in this way fomenting citizen participation.
- Utilizing applications for mobiles and tablets that would serve for visualizing the place and situation of Korrika at each point in time, in this way attracting generations of new technology users and young people taking part in the race.

In parallel, and in the framework of the UPV/EHU-EITB Master's Degree in Multimedia Communication and the degree course in Audiovisual Communication of the UPV/EHU, several subjects provided students with activities related to, and in tune with, the general activities of Korrika.

In particular, students on the Master's Degree adopted the initiative as their own and presented a series of models for the development of Korrika, several of which they themselves were to put into practice:

- Fictional and documentary audiovisual products for television.
- Micro-documentaries for the Net.
- A contest amongst educational centres that included the production of videos and tests of knowledge.
- A website that included the history of all the slogan-songs of Korrika and information on the groups that played them.

The start of the year 2013 definitively marked a change of rhythm and brought the pressing need to delimit activities and concentrate efforts on those that were thought to have more potential and that better characterized the transmedia approach required for Korrika 18.

5.2. Aims and development of the project

“Eman euskara elkarri” (Share Euskara) was the *leitmotif* of the Spring 2013 edition of Korrika and the people it paid tribute to were the students of Euskara. These were precisely the two elements on which we were laying the foundations of our transmedia project.

For this purpose, we had an even greater need of the mass media we wanted to work with, and of the synergy relations we wanted to create between them and both the participants of the more physical Korrika and those of the traditional and new media. We were able to count on the *ETB3* television channel, *Gaztea* (EITB’s radio station for young people), and the online resources of *eitb.com*. Moreover, we were by then working with the company that would make the Korrika 18 application and the organizers of the outdoor events, in particular the final stage and the festival that was to be held in Baiona.

One work group concentrated on producing a series with a factual character for the Net titled “Hamaika egun, 11 istorio” (Eleven Days, Eleven Stories) which recounted the testimonies on the experience of learning Euskara of eleven people with different ages, backgrounds and occupations from throughout the Basque Country. These micro-documentaries of 3-5 minutes duration would be presented on the Net on the same day that the Korrika went through the streets of their respective villages or towns. Besides, several of the episodes served as a basis for promotional teasers that were broadcast by Basque television on the days prior to Korrika.

Another group worked with AEK on organizing the official Korrika website. A clock giving a countdown to the day, hour and minute when the rocket marking the start of the race would be fired in Andoain (Gipuzkoa), and an interactive map containing photographs and videos of each of the places the race would go through, were some of the elements added to the renovated website. It is also worth stressing the general idea that the latter was to function as an umbrella for the different written and visual content and that, as a whole, it would transmit the enthusiasm, colour and open character of the more physical part of Korrika.

Simultaneously, EITB set up a website of its own that could be accessed through the website of the *Gaztea* youth radio station and that served as a meeting place for the social networks implemented by EITB, the audiovisual content produced during the race and the videos and photos contributed by the audience.

Another of the stronger initiatives taken in the eighteenth edition of Korrika was on the social networks. On the one hand, the use of social networks was strengthened as a resource for interaction and participation, in particular through a customized version of Twitter called Txioka and another

with a more documentary character. This latter made use of the same individuals as “*Hamaika egun, 11 istorio*” to recreate their experiences on Twitter. This was a way of spreading the webisodes to the social networks and creating communication amongst their users. It was a complex task and a team of community managers wrote and created the timelines of the different tweets, making them coincide with the days and times when these individuals went through their own localities.

Parallel to this, a group of four students became intensively involved in producing a daily 30 minute program that was broadcast by *EITB3* and some local stations. These daily programs had a double component: on the one hand, to make a first person chronicle of what happened during the day and, on the other, to cover all the previous content produced by the work team. Meanwhile, the other two channels of Basque TV, the channel in Euskara and *ETB2* in Spanish, included daily mentions of the activities of *Korrika* in their news programs.

Something similar happened with the radio stations, which in their hourly news programs and their magazines made periodical connections with the popular race and interviewed its protagonists. The latter might be anonymous or, in many cases, representatives of political parties, institutions or well-known figures from the cultural and social life of the Basque Country.

The application for mobiles and tablets launched that year by AEK was another of the novelties worth stressing. This answered to the need for having a direct and rapid information channel and service and for connecting with a youthful (and not so youthful) sector of the population, one that is increasingly broad and that uses new technologies on a daily bases.

Finally, and very briefly, we will mention another of the lines of work promoted in the 2013 edition of *Korrika*: gamification. During that edition, broadening previous experiences, a great qualifying contest was organized by towns and regions that culminated in the final stage of *Korrika* in Baiona, where several teams of finalists had to overcome a series of tests requiring the collaboration of the public that was present. These tests were a combination of trials of physical skill and the use of new technologies. It was both a success in terms of participation and a test bench for later editions.

6. DRAWING UP A BALANCE OF THE RACE

As we have noted, *Korrika* is made up of several interwoven aims. These range from more general ones like promoting the knowledge and use of Euskara, and, consequently, showing the territory it occupies and the uneven support

it receives from the institutions, to raising funds for teaching the language. Moreover, these aims include more transversal ones like the value of collective work, the sense of belonging, solidarity, interiorizing the territory physically and emotionally, transmission of culture inter-generationally and amongst people from very different backgrounds, or participation in public life. But, in addition, the intention was that Korrika, from the perspective of constructing a transmedia discourse, should encompass, widen, give meaning to, and enable a relation amongst very different media and their users. This is a field of work with tremendous potential, both now and in coming editions.

A quick review of the activities developed and the results obtained in this eighteenth edition makes clear its enormous worth and the broad terrain that is still to be consolidated. We will consider some of these:

- Korrika enables cross-media developments that are very interesting for the future. Firstly, because of the strength of a race that mobilizes so many people; secondly, because of the presence it obtains in the traditional mass media; and, finally, and above all, because of the potential it shows for combining new communications technologies, social participation and interaction amongst users.
- The eighteenth edition of Korrika has shown that combining the strengths of the mass media, particularly those with a public character and those that clearly support Euskara, produces extremely interesting results. Besides, articulating the mechanics of citizen participation and, in particular, those open to university students and secondary school children, enables highly enriching developments in terms of content.
- Future editions of Korrika must consolidate its general architecture and make an optimum combination of the media and platforms already used, the new technological equipment of communication and citizen participation in creating content. Such transmedia development will be all the more solid if simple mechanisms and instruments of individual and group participation are created (sending and receiving user generated audiovisual content, presence on social networks, applications that facilitate social visualization, etc.) and if preproduction timelines, realization and synergies amongst media are determined for all of them. Without any doubt, the Net will play a primordial role in future editions.

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