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# Designing Transmedia Worlds: the case of Plot 28 (2013)

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## Abstract

When configuring transmedia universes it is necessary to design a map of contents that complies with a design of platforms and channels with its potential incidence on audience. In order to do this, we need to operate in a parallel manner between narrative displays and production design, which include the aesthetic line, technological devices and the design of potential audiences. In this paper these two broad perspectives converge, the production designer's and the storyteller's, delving into the joint processes that operate when it comes to building an architecture of transmedia contents, an operation that must be hand in hand with the corresponding technological solutions. All this is summarized in the case of [Plot 28](#), a transmedia universe pioneer in Spanish language launched in January 2013 associated to a transmedia format ([Total fiction](#)). The creation experience interacts with the analytical and theoretical approach to offer a rather uncommon enriching perspective of the case of study. This way we will analyze, from a creator praxis, already corroborated but justified by the latest theoretical and hermeneutical approaches, narrative, interaction and gamification strategies, contents management and their scalability, the design of browsing maps, seeking the audience's empathy with the designed diegetic world. All this accompanied by data obtained from direct sources in this production and dissemination experience that may enlighten future projects.

## Keywords:

*transmedia universe, storytelling, map of contents, platforms, narrative strategies, gamification, interaction, scalability, audience, fandom.*

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Translated by **Yuhanny Henares**  
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## 1. Introduction. Methodology

My experience as creator, storyteller and production designer of the transmedia universe *Plot 28* (2013) led me to understand the need for a “transmedia worlds creator’s guide”; in this case I wanted to redirect this urge into a paper from a researcher’s perspective, turning this matter into a case of study subjected to the corresponding methodology requirements. Theoretical reflection, hermeneutics and praxis can be exceptional allies when shedding light about the transmedia journey in the Spanish context which, considering data and results, it more modest by far compared to the Nordic and Anglo-Saxon context. Therefore, I assume a position in an intermediate territory where my creative practice plays a role in that other reflexive and inquiring dimension, specialized for some years now in transmedia storytelling, the theme this article deals with. This frontier-like condition, far from being a handicap, represents a great opportunity to approach a complex issue that demands both a concept and methodological clarifying like the *know how* provided by the creative adventure, as well as the role of designing this type of products and know how to disseminate them towards the audience and the market.

We need a methodology that must be interdisciplinary accordingly to undertake this challenge of theoretical and interpretative reflection about a case of study, where ‘comparative media’ will have an unavoidable leading role -aligned with the two authors familiar with the transmedia expansion such as Sánchez-Mesa and Baetens (2017)-, the narratology projected with intermediality in the transmedia universes (Ryan, 2004, Klastrop and Tosca, 2004), as well as the reception studies equally applied to ‘*transmedia storytelling*’ (Dena, 2009). All these methodological instruments guide the analysis and reflection in the text but, since they were also complemented by the transmedia praxis; my role as co-responsible of the orchestration of contents, channels and platforms of the production to be analyzed, represented mainly the value of a creative experience contrasted continuously with the theoretical reflection and the thorough analysis of other proposals. Thus, we do not present a fieldwork with a specific metric on which we can obtain conclusions, but instead a reflection based on creative experience, a methodology that compares that experience considering the most relevant theoretical contributions today in order to establish to what extent *Plot 28* meets the requirements of a *transmedia storytelling* universe [1]. In addition to its academic-investigative function, the findings of this theoretical and experiential reflection could serve as reference to other narrators and transmedia production designers as well as scholars specialized in the matter.

As we advanced in the *Plot 28* project we, as creative team, thought about this *modus operandi*. We were concerned about gathering that way of doing things, mainly born out of experience, but also out of our shared knowledge and intuitions. From that team interaction there originated the idea of defining a specific work format concretized into Total Fiction, the format that gathers our reflections about ‘*transmedia storytelling*’, creative processes and production and spreading challenges. All these were included in the website [www.ficciontotal.com](http://www.ficciontotal.com) (now inactive), released shortly before the launching of *Plot 28* on January 1, 2013. The main text displayed there, which was like a manifesto of that project’s the transmedia philosophy, has been re-edited in an extended and reviewed manner in Hernández (2018a). This text is also consequence of those early reflections, although incorporating a subsequent work of analysis, interpretation and experiences.

Considering the case of study of this paper, it is relevant to briefly introduce what the transmedia universe of *Plot 28* consists of, which was pioneer in the Spanish language that year 2013 together with other two productions of markedly filmic nature, *El Cosmonauta* and *Panzer chocolate*. In January that year, the paid app for iTunes was launched at the same time many contents in the web

[www.plot28.com](http://www.plot28.com) were available for free. Everything started from a false documentary released on 02.28.2008 in Zaragoza called *La Parcela 28*, that served as seminal text of a transmedia expansion developed through three literary pieces (browsable novel, stories and diary), documentaries, photographs, comics, music, ludic challenges, blogs, theme websites and social networks (see map of contents). A summary of approaches and thematic productions of this proposal is available in Hernández (2015). Precisely, one of the preliminary goals of this text is to confirm to what extent this display meets contemporary transmedia storytelling standards, from a conceptual and applied perspective. In this sense, we will analyze here the different steps in the creation process of transmedia contents, according to models such as the transmedia bible of Hayes (2012), in order to compare it with the study case of *Plot 28* and develop corresponding reflections.

## 2. First action: Designing a *transmedia* map of contents

In the contemporary digital era cultural products interrelate and converge between them in an increasingly complex mediasphere and with greater protagonism of users. That media convergence indicated by Henry Jenkins (2008), was rehearsed early since the burst of postmodernity in the 1970s (*Starwars* is a good example), but it would be early in the XXI century when it gained relevance and spreading power thanks to two essential changes in the mediatic panorama: the generalization of storytelling (Salmon, 2008), another consequence of the postmodern change that impacts all communicational spheres, and the democratization of technologies. We are standing before what Jenkins defined in the title of his most recent book as an era of spreadable media (*Spreadable media*, 2013), although there are already some like Elias (2011) who are even talking about post-convergence.

The terminology debate has been extensive, and its echoes still reverberate in the academic field. It is not the right moment nor place to deal with these disputes about the semantic field, chronicled by Mora (2014). There are terms out there such as multimedia, multiplatform, remediation, intermediation, hypermediation, transfiction... that also were approached from different nuances and perspectives and which definitely account for the debate and evolution of the narrative logics in the digital era. But the most relevant debate is the one focused in the two terms that were the luckiest: crossmedia and transmedia, as Mora's paper indicates. As suggested here, there are authors who consider they are almost synonyms, but we incline instead for terms advocating a differentiation in the narrative space and *modus operandi*; also, because in the design of a transmedia experience users play a role in the framework of a participative culture on the network that equally impacts co-authorship, another feature emphasized by specialists such as Jenkins. The transmedia strategy requires both complex and independent stories as well as a fabric of synergies enriching a shared diegetic universe; we are standing before several storytellings [2] from a core narrative [3] staggering a common macro-story; these fictions are displayed through different interrelated mediatic channels. In the case of *Plot 28*, a seminal narrative, the *fake La parcela 28* is expanded into a panoply of different contents. The main theorists insist on yet another trait: interactivity, the participation of the user when it comes to face those products, up to the point he is willing to build his own experience from that immersion, share it or even re-make it.

But how is the transmedia map represented? What simile can move us closer to this abstract parade of definitions, of assaults to such a complex semantic field? The draft would be something that could work, although at a lower scale, like the human brain, inhabited by millions of interconnected neurons. A transmedia cosmos has a more limited display, but the connection mechanics operate in a similar way. Although we still do not have the perspective as to establish a canonical definition of what is referred to as transmedia storytelling in *lingua franca*, we might still rehearse it already, being quite

aware that we are facing a new and changing phenomenon which semantic field must be mandatorily reformulated over the years and the succession of different transmedia experiences. Let's stop on this and let's establish with flexibility what the identity traits of a transmedia methodology.

Considering the terminology debate will persist in the theoretical and academic field, in the application field a group of defining features characterizing a transmedia universe are revealed. And precisely, as its initial word indicates, the first distinctive trait, as recognized by Jenkins, Dena, Ryan, Scolari or Gómez, is its conformation into a world of fiction (*worldbuilding*) that Li (2009) prefers calling universe; this is not usually as regulated as traditional diegetic contexts, but responds to the entropic dimension instead, namely, a sort of "organized chaos", rather typical of digital fiction. The second identity trait is its narrative condition; therefore, it was called transmedia storyteller. Said universe is shaped through several interrelated and connected stories, usually the origin is a core story that tends to turn into the most relevant storytelling (nodular story) and the one setting the diegetic tone of the macro-story, expanding in synergy across the other stories. Studies about *Plot 28*, such as Amatria's (2017:88) establish to what extent that universe complies with transmedia storytelling classifications [4].

In a parallel manner to contents design, the platforms design also moves forward: analogic or digital platforms that host and transfer the flow of fabled information conveying those fictions. Therefore, the third identity sign of the transmedia universe is precisely that it is broadcasted through multiple channels that, as in the case of stories, must also be connected to each other. This channeling is intrinsically linked to the design of the broadcasting channels -often linked to technological devices-, as well as the different "story modes" (Beddows, 2012) [5] that nurture the fictional veins of transmedia display: literature, fiction and non-fiction cinema, video creation, comics, music, photography, games, events, etc. Each story mode has different storytelling potentialities: 'books can add psychological depth to characters, video games can offer spatial dimensions to the story, and films can provide impressive visual sequences' (Smith, 2009: 58). In *Plot 28*, as can be seen in the graph and as referenced by studies such as Amatria's (2017) and Gómez Díaz *et alia* (2016), it has followed what Mora (2014: 33) proposes in relation to this type of storytellings: 'It is necessary that the narrative approach is previous to its construction, thinking and designing each independent story in a particular way for each media, considering their specific circumstances.'

Once the content maps, platforms and channels are defined, the aforementioned Hayes insists on determining how to enter the universe of fiction; the transmedia storytelling logic establishes, on the one hand, several platforms to host and disseminate those channels, as well as several access gates; and both aspects are often united. The most usual platform -and also the access gate- is the web or a tablet or smartphone application, but perhaps access can be offline, like a book or even an event. In our case of study, the platforms were Internet and iTunes application, although it is true that the publication of the *Bitácora a la deriva* stories in its analogic version in 2015 by the publisher *Esto no es Berlín*, added a new platform for access to the transmedia universe that concerns us through QR codes.

These eligible accesses make room to a user immersion [6] that must be mandatorily variable, scalable and governed by its own self-planning (each one designs its own "user's journey"). From the first digital fictions, in the twentieth century, fictional dirigisme yields in favor opening user possibilities. He will no longer be a mere recipients, but an involved stakeholder, who chooses his own browsing protocols, steering his immersion into fictions. But the goal of a transmedia universe towards its target goes even further; it does not only encourage participation but it also expects that the public becomes

creator of products enriching the panoply of fictions. This is how the User-generated content (UGC) is developed and promoted by members of an audience that has become a prosumer. In the case of *Plot 28* they have been able to provide their contributions in the section specially designed for them: "plotys". To reach this engagement status the user received compensations: 'The validation effect rewards fans not only with additional knowledge, but also with a sense of recognition for their efforts to pursue narrative information through transmedia extensions' (Smith, 2009: 63); but in addition, the user must commit himself with that universe and the transmedia strategy to look for it through a policy of promotion of fan communities. That 'fan culture' will concretize into processes of prescription, evangelism, presumption and activism in favor of the "transuniverse", but this belongs to another chapter where we will deal with it more thoroughly.

### **3. Second action: Designing transmedia architectures**

A transmedia universe demands a conscious and detailed previous planning by a "producer": 'responsible for the transmedia development and the design and execution of the storytelling experience' (Scolari, 2013: 86); in this sense it is closer to the creative projects of great display of media and equipment, such as cinema or architecture. Like them, it is essentially a collective project coordinated by a creator or creators (close to the production designers or the show runners of the television series) who manage an interdisciplinary team of specialized professionals, which varies depending on the nature of the proposal: 'a TV / transmedia producer must build a story that involves not only a timeline to be followed, but also a world to be discovered' (Smith, 2009: 43). The idea of the lonely creator, of the "romantic genius", more typical of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is far behind; in the era of networks and participation, creative processes are also collective and governed by a network intelligence. Remírez (2012) even states that in this genre individual creation is not possible. All these processes will be included in the aforementioned transmedia bible (Hayes, 2012), which is like our project's guideline, along with a reservoir of necessary documentation.

We must not forget that we are building fictional worlds, because, as stated (Scolari, 2008: 114) it is the most appropriate way to develop extrapolating spaces and times in this expansive dynamic from one story mode into another which in turn integrates many characters and stories: 'because many transmedia storytellings are not the story of a character at all, they are the story of a world'. Special attention must be paid to the development of the stage on which multiple arguments may be displayed (often into different types of media), and each story must maintain the consistency of that world (Long, 2007: 48). Complies the analyzed product with these requirements? *Plot 28* has been developed following Smith (2009) recommendations. 'The world introduced is well designed and encourages exploration. Storytelling is composed of hidden and delayed mysteries, which allow the world to expand through other modes of stories that are independent and allow an individual experience. Finally, the fans efforts are rewarded through the validation or acceptance of their creations' (Amatria, 2017: 90-91). The previous statement responds to a conscious transmedia architecture in which the transmedia storytelling, the production design and the technological resources must be worked in a parallel manner, since these three dimensions are not only related, but they also interact with each other. A specific design will require a storytelling and vice versa, in this sense the transmedia storyteller takes part in protocols closer to contemporary television series, where production designers and scriptwriters work side by side, as pointed out by Scolari (2013).

We still do not have enough experience as to delimit a transmedia methodology that configures narrative universes. Each proposal tends to improvise one:

The transmedia strategy was developed in Plot 28 from complex and independent stories involved in a synergy that enriches the shared diegetic universe; from that double narrative matrix several multi-genre storytellings are displayed through different interrelated channels. The narrative core of our case of study sets the tone of the expansion towards the other channels and also the aesthetic outlook of the resulting universe, in this case close to the noir genre, to which the browsable novel also belongs; that same thing is appreciated both in the graphic design and in the final look of the display ... (Hernández, 2015: 223).

Some of these strategies are related to the traditional storytelling, with which the "transnarrator" shares more than a few aspects and a common operational root. Jeff Gómez, producer and transmedia theorist from the United States, appeals to the simple and vital messages that sustain the traditional stories (in Baage 2011) and that are also operational in transmedia; it specifically refers to the hero cycles, present since Homer's era and assimilated by our Western culture. These archetypal references are the cornerstone that sustains the complex and expanded transmedia universe. In fact, our experience in this field has shown us that intentional mixtification does not benefit an already complex device such as transmedia storytelling. And we could confirm that with the macro-story, full of pleats of our case study:

The analysis of the Plot 28 macro-story allows to exhume the teachings of the traditional storytelling about antagonist hero processes, senders-recipients, conflicts, quests, goals, etc. And that core storytelling transversally supports all the devices of transmedia projection, thus granting that unity in diversity (Jenkins alludes to continuity vs. multiplicity) thanks to connections, links or winks in the storytelling. Among the narrative strategies that make this knitting possible in Plot 28 there are the "migratory cues", concept coined by Ruppel (2006) in order to promote the use of visible hints within a text that refer to other contents and serve as hooks or connectors between *the stories transcending the limits of channels or platforms*. (Hernández, 2015: 224).

Following that traditional logic, when building our diegetic world (worldbuilding) and an effective transmedia storytelling we start from a core idea, a spark that generates a fable quite often channeled through a hero. In Plot 28, we already advanced, that the starting point was the strange death of the farmer Damián Forcés who triggered the main plot of the false documentary and then also feeds the main plot of the novel. This seminal story, when becoming the core story, must transversally go through all the devices of the transmedia display, thus granting unity in diversity (Jenkins registered it in the dialectic continuity vs. multiplicity) that we deliberately developed in the transmedia universe of Plot 28. In that sense we follow the indications of Dowd, Fry, Niederman and Steiff (2013: 24): 'To begin the creation of a transmedia property one must either find an existing core narrative property and extend it or develop an original core narrative rich enough to be told across multiple media platforms'. This is the time to consider the narrative resources that will appear in our transmedia bible, considering that transmedia developments tend to overcome traditional linearity in favor of serial, sequential or circular schemes. Here we will delimit a fabled territory with past, present and future, that is scalable, that provides diverse levels of deepness and contributes to story's cohesion: Among the narrative strategies that make possible that knitting in Plot 28 there are the "migratory cues", concept coined by Ruppel (2006) in order to promote the use of visible hints within a text that refer to other content and function as hooks or connectors between the stories transcending the limits of channels or platforms (Hernández, 2015: 224).

Immediately after there is the challenge of molding the characters, as well as molding their profiles, their relationships, their goals, their functions in the story, their arcs of transformation, as well as the

potential transcharacterizations that their "journey" evokes from one mode of story to another. Dena (2009) proposes that when designing transmedia projects it is necessary to better think about characters classes within a fable -in Lord of the rings, elves, orcs or humans- instead of characters as such. In Plot 28 this is concretized in the dialectic between powerful and infanzones. In fact, as Bedows (2012) would say, the so-called "tone of the character" makes them consistent in the migrations between the different story modes. This is how the fictional world becomes "transmodal" and "scalable", allowing the characters to be created by different designers and assumed by multiple players (Dena, 2009: 206). Then also the time comes to define the context, the sociotemporal ecosystem where the action will be performed. This conjunction of coordinates between actors and their scope of action is also essential in this type of complex, scaled and projected storytelling. In order to do this, Jenkins introduced the term "environmental narrative," which allowed the introduction of storytelling in spatial structures, as detailed by Smith (2009: 44-45). Mat Hills proposed the term "hyperdiegesis" in this same line, alluding to the creation of a narrative space that concretizes in texts. Klastrop and Tosca (2004) determine three factors -*mythos*, *topos* and *ethos*- to ensure the diegetic continuity of a transmedia universe in different channels and story modes. Dena (2009: 202) calls them environments, events and characters, arguing through "the theory of transmodal principles" that the fictional worlds operate in a transmodal way. In the universe that concerns us in our case of study these concepts serve, as Amatria (2017: 90) concludes in her study:

The diegetic world introduced contains spaces and times that may extrapolate from one mode of story to another, multiple characters fit, specially 28, and multiple storylines, also 28. The *topos* of the world is adjusted to the current historical and geographical time`. In this sense, also the case that concerns us seems to have followed the Long's recommendations: 'because many transmedia storytellings are not the story of a character at all, instead they are the story of a world. Special attention must be paid to the development of the stage on which multiple arguments can be displayed (often in different types of media), and each story must maintain the consistency of that world (2007: 48).

To clarify in this interaction of the aforementioned coordinates, the timeline recommended by Hayes was quite useful. This method, widely used by television series or complex audio-visual stories scriptwriters, serves here to position the most relevant events in the universe, their links and their potential projection in different areas. We use it systematically in Plot 28, being one of the most operative instruments to move around the jungle of contents of the universe, at the same time it worked as a reference element for team members in their differentiated roles. This is just the beginning of a challenge that has many other basic pillars to build that transmedia narrative architecture. Others propose using a Rhizomatic Circular Algorithmic Map that consists of visually building the potential and necessary pathways and contents and then move to the contents production (Renó, 2013: 7).

#### **4. Third action: Defining connected and emphatic narrative strategies**

A specific narrative universe must have a certain unity based on the interrelation between its parts. In the Western institutional storytelling - the Aristotelian model and its echoes - this is achieved thanks to a conveniently focused causal-teleological chain. This knitting must be broader and more intense in a transmedia storytelling, if only to compensate for its inexorable projected dispersion. A transmedia display has different autonomous fictions / non fictions, "modes of story" in short that are subjected to a narrative synergy enriching the diegetic macro-story. Here the diegesis composing the "core mode of story" (being the "seminal production" or not) plays a pre-eminent role; but at the same time, we have to build connections, links, winks in the storytelling to unite a universe that tends to expand in the other channels and platforms. In order to do this, we use different narrative strategies, such as

"migratory cues", a concept coined by Ruppel (2006) in order to suggest the use of visible hints within a text that refer to other contents from other channels; if they are managed effectively they serve as hooks or connectors between the stories transcending the limits of channels or platforms; namely, pure transmedia storytelling logic. In the case of *Plot 28*, for instance, the harassment and death of Damián Forcés, the gardener who refused to sell his land to the company Expo Agua 2008 of Zaragoza, is a backbone *leit motiv* if the literary, audiovisual and participatory material of the transmedia universe. It is convenient that certain sub-storylines and active questions are intertwined between the different narrative pathways of universe expansion to guarantee precisely that knitting that constitutes one of the hallmarks of its transmedia nature.

To approach any narrative journey, it is necessary to articulate a story or, in other words, an oriented history that has a purpose, an objective and, consequently, a discourse that eventually becomes a narration. Every story responds to a certain point of view, which is called focalization in narratology. Most of the stories have a "focalization 0", that is, they do not refer to an explicit narrator; when it is made present we are facing an internal, homodiegetic focus if the narrator is inside the story as a character or actant, heterodiegetic if it is not inside (someone who finds a book and conveys that story becoming a narrator). To focus means to demonstrate narrative knowledge, knowledge about what is narrated; a functional narrator that only slips a relatively relevant information, does not focus. In *Plot 28* the resulting macro story is covered by a multifocality of shared narrators (with Joana as the main catalyst), in order to unite and give a synergistic meaning -the "textual network" (April, 2007) - to a complex, fragmented and heterogeneous display, like the transmedia. (Hernández, 2015: 225). Joana is the demiurge who catalyzes all the macro-story of *Plot 28* and who displays it in turn on the web or the app, although here she sometimes gives prominence to other narrators. In a parallel manner, the different channels also have their own display as well, as in the case of the browsable novel, where several narrators coexist in a structure that reminds about Chinese boxes. A detailed analysis of the transmedia display of our case study in its entirety is available in Hernández, (2018).

In his aforementioned bible Hayes suggests making these narrative maps excessively complex it is not operational, as there is the risk that users lose interest. In addition to the narrative architecture, it must be considered that the recipient must face different technological displays at the same time. If in a transmedia universe the excess of complexity in topics and stories is not recommended because it usually does not work, the accentuated intellectualization does not work either. Although it was not done deliberately, the final result of the transmedia universe of *Plot 28* is a bit complicated and that has been one of the main limitations for its diffusion, as we can see in the feedbacks [7] we received from users. It is perfectly legal to seek restricted and highly specialized audiences, but if we really aim to a broad impact on the audience, the narratives must combine factors of empathy with broad audiences [8]. And here we find one of the main characteristics of this new genre, which is part of a wider contemporary phenomenon that we could call "participatory narratives". They are, in fact, another sign of a society marked by a revolution caused by the democratization of digital technologies that has inexorably affected the cultural industries. All analysts agree that transmedia storytellings are immersed in the logic of popular culture and have potential audiences as a fundamental ally for their existence.

How to generate an empathic history? This is one of the main challenges to which any transmedia creator is subjected. The choice of topic is important, but also the way of telling it and, as we have advanced, the chosen point of view or focus. To all those springs the receptor will hook to connect with the story, being able to interest what is told, how it is told, where or who relates it ... The characteristics of a transmedia universe imply that this attraction is promoted intensely from the main

platform, but spreading it from there to other platforms and the different channels that, in addition, will play their own tricks of attraction to the user. Well, as indicated by Beddows, (2012), the transmedia audience tends to migration, fragmentation and *fandom*. We have to keep in mind that immersion in a transmediated cosmos is free and staggered <sup>9</sup> but without losing its overall perspective, hence in all those platforms / channels the story designer uses calls, baits, enough active questions aiming the recipients feel challenged. But this is not incompatible with "negative capacity": the art of constructing strategic gaps in a narrative to evoke a sense of uncertainty, mystery, or doubt in the audience (Long 2007).

Narratology has taught us that information management is one of the most important instruments when it comes to success in traditional narrative; many novels, movies or television series fail precisely because this inexcusable fundamental principle has not been carried out. Well, this is accentuated in the transmedia deployment by its own expansive, multichannel and multiplatform condition. Therefore, even more than in the closed models, it is advisable to plan in the transmedia in a very conscious way this ordered transfer of fluctuating information: *it is necessary that the narrative approach be prior to its construction, thinking and designing each autonomous history in a particular way for each medium, in view of their specific circumstances* (Mora, 2014: 33). This has to be dosed here bearing in mind the nature, the benefits and the impact of each platform or channel, as well as the synergies created between them and between the different modes of history; the channel that conveys the nodular history must have a quite powerful capacity to reside storytelling and from there it has to be delegating that flow fabled in the other channels according to their characteristics. There are some that are suitable to house brief subplots, others to disseminate active questions, others to disseminate iconic, sound material, etc. This is an aspect that we develop in a very conscious way in the unfolding of the contents of *Plot 28*, defining with precision the scales of narrativity of each "mode of history".

Another very relevant aspect in an integral transmedia design is everything concerning intermediality transactions, which have been studied with good results recently in an interesting interdisciplinary bet that includes comparative literature, cultural studies and new media studies. In *Plot 28* there are numerous intermedialities between the different modes of story spread over different channels and platforms and, undoubtedly, their analysis can provide some interesting lessons in this field. But that approach is excluded from the aims of this article, as well as the design of potential audiences, a decisive role in the designer of transmedia production. The combining art of transmedia storytelling responds to those potential audiences, a competency that a good production designer and a creator of this new modality of contemporary culture must master. The exploitation experience of *Plot 28* has shown us that we must bear in mind that, unlike other closed products, transmedia strategies are addressed to interactors that will dose and scale the contents according to their interests and desires. Each user designs, in fact, their own journey, although sometimes it is helpful for them to be suggested certain browsing itineraries recommended by the creators (many comments from users of *Plot 28* who contacted us indicated so). And we are standing, therefore, before a process of information management that is at least biunivocal, which could complicate if that interactor decides to become a prosumer, as fortunately happened in the universe that concerns us and that is composed into a genuinely transmedia universe, according to the conclusions of Amatria (2017: 104):

We could consider that the fans who have created productions based on the narrative universe of the project are hard-core and, following the indicators proposed by Beddows (2012) they have a high level of engagement. *Plot 28* allows a content-driven use of media, which according to the author approaches the mode of consumption of transmedia users. In addition, the fact that each element that composes the work is autonomous, allows users to choose the story mode they prefer to delve therein.

## 5. Designing navigation maps from the contents map

We have contents available, we have chosen the distribution channels, we have worked in the management of narrative information in general and also in terms of their platforms. Now was the time to design how the menu should be presented to the recipient. We needed to elaborate the navigation map proposed to the interactor in an online digital platform. This display was generated in such a way that it was clear, concise, appealing and easily browsable. The user seeks optimal accessibility that is not at odds with the rigor nor with the careful aesthetics in the presentation of the contents. The resulting map reflects the spirit and the artistic and communicative intentionality of the proposal on its graphic design, on the typography, on the images or on the gadgets. In order for this to be translated successfully, the content map and its storytelling channeling (including possible focalizations), which have an impact on the final design, must have been very clear. As has happened in the above mentioned processes, now also the narrators work hand in hand with the graphic designers under the watchful eye of the production designer.

The experience of *Plot 28* highlights that a free and open product display, although consistent with the logic of digital literature and art - always open to chance- generates a sense of overwhelm and bewilderment in the user. We must not forget that in a time with bulimia of cultural offers the user has a lot to choose from all kinds of devices and little time to enjoy it. It is, therefore, operational to offer the recipient of our transmedia bet, not a closed display, but several navigation itineraries based on criteria of scalability and immersion, thematic, stylistic, etc. The criteria for elaborating them will obviously depend on the nature of the product and its projection capacity. These itineraries should not be received as closed and obstructive, but rather as opportunities to improve the user's immersion in the transmedia universe and as enhancers of their choice capacities. They also introduced themselves with clarifying, simple and attractive maps as if we were attending a stimulating game from which the interactor obtains as advantages as well as delight.

In all this process, in which we have already commented that narrators and production designers work side by side, the work of graphic designers also becomes fundamental; their ideas, in fact, can change some storytelling decisions, since that aesthetic design in the transmedia area also becomes a narrative resource of the first order. The logic of the story has to be coupled with that of the graphic proposal - always in line with the corporate iconography and identity - and vice versa. And finally, once the convergence of the two mentioned disciplines is assured, we must match them with the technological design; the experience of *Plot 28* confirmed us that computer engineers are a decisive part of the creative team when it comes to elaborating the map and transmedia itineraries, since digital technology can provide solutions that were not imagined initially or, at the same time, limit the proposals, sometimes unfeasible, of the scriptwriters or graphic designers.

One of the challenges imposed on the three professional branches of this unique tripod is how to complete the display and presentation to the public on the first screen that will appear on the web, on a tablet, on a smartphone or wherever. This is where our proposal bets it all - we could confirm this in our case of study-: they are the golden seconds that the user has given us to examine the product and assess whether he involves as an interactor or passes by. Information, messages, appropriate and appealing design, inspiring iconography, operational navigation menu while also stimulating are hand in hand in this short time lapse to achieve the goal of convincing the new visitor.

## 6. Contents, channels and platforms scalability

Walter Benjamin in his famous essay 'The work of art at the time of its technical reproducibility' (1936) declared the death of the "aura" in art, that is, the quasi-totemic singularity of a piece of creation that no longer had meaning in an era where the means of reproduction were lavished. As the twentieth century progressed, that reproduction capacity increased while imposing seriality over singularity; the pop art or the universe of Stars War (George Lucas, 1977), already in the postmodern era, gave good account of it in two of the most representative media of the twentieth century.

The next phase corresponds to the era of participatory digital culture that we are going through, and more specifically to transmedia expansion, where seriality [10] has been fully assimilated in cultural processes, but with some added peculiarities. Scalability is among these singularities, namely, the staggering and modulated introduction of a narrative proposal. This is one of the unique characteristics of any transmedia universe. We are no longer facing a closed diegesis that suddenly appears with all its display, but instead with a macrodiegesis revealed progressively and that is often projected as a permanent 'work in progress'. In fact, scalability must be one of the principles contemplated by production designers and storytellers when developing a transmedia universe. Once the main contents have been defined, we must consider how to dosify them to the audience based on a pre-established strategy. This impacts the content, but also the display of channels and even platforms. In this sense Marie-Laure Ryan (2001) establishes nine ways in which potential users can participate in a text (also transmedia): 'determine the plot, change the perspective, explore the field of the possible, keep the machine running, recover documents, play games or solve problems, evaluate the text, contribute to writing, participate in the dialogue and play roles' (cited by Dena, 2009: 229-30). Most of them can be applied to the *Plot 28* machinery. On the other hand, one of the things that we have learned after the launch is that it is not advisable to deploy all the content at once. In order to strengthen the audience and create community, the option of slipping content, channels and platforms into a coordinated offensive action with social networks works better. The contemporary user is not prone to binges or complexities, he has limited time and likes to enter the proposals little by little. Likewise, the user prioritizes empathic connections, with a great dose of playfulness, fun or challenges and in general is refractory to dense and complex presentations. Scalability operates in that direction and has proven successful in other contemporary transmedia proposals.

The *transmedia* creative team, which we have already said that integrates production designers, screenwriters, graphic designers and IT in an interdisciplinary manner, has the challenge to propose this staggering process on all fronts. To prioritize what content is distributed first and what will come in successive waves, establish which platforms have pre-eminence and which channels will occur ... In this sense the luring strategies, provoked interest or spectacular occurrence should be applied in the first waves in order to allure and retain the audience. As it happens in the traditional storytelling, it is more efficient to throw active questions or challenges than to cram with successive information; and something similar happens with the characters, who should be introduced progressively, depending on their interest, their roles in the narration, etc. It is important that the scalability that the creative team designs does not limit the capacity of the interactor to build his own modular itineraries, the ergodic experience of which Aarseth (1997) talks about; it is about facilitating your immersion in the transmedia universe, not about directing you by some predetermined pathways.

## 7. Game strategies needed

From the beginnings of cybertales, scholars such as the aforementioned Aarseth showed that one of the distinguishing features is its playful dimension. The cybertexts have tended to establish a

negotiation with the recipient based on the game. This has impregnated the contemporary digital culture, partly thanks to the development of videogame storytellings, where the player's experience is a very important value; finally, gamification strategies have become commonplace of the communication language, as well as marketing and other areas. It seems that the contemporary user is more *homo ludens* than ever, therefore fulfilling the intuition of Huizinga (1938). In the field of the transmedia storyteller, these game proposals are beginning to normalize and assimilate as something intrinsic to the genre. A transmedia narrator inherits the powerful currents of the cyberliterature of the late twentieth century and the video game, the latter able to propose a kind of interactive and playful story that recycles in a postmodern logic the epic tradition, the noir genre, the thriller, adventures, terror, science fiction, etc. In fact, Christy Dena (2009) assures that a transmedia story is born to be told and played at the same time.

The gamification dynamics have been studied by the discipline of Games Studies, since 2011 mainly, and they offer us very interesting guidelines to project them in the transmedia storyteller (Hernández, 2017: 227). Where to apply these dynamics? It is obvious that they can be incorporated into a story that informs a product, but the analysis of the transmedia universes highlights that they work best when integrating them into sections that encourage interaction, participation, and challenge. Namely, they can become a fundamental instrument to turn our narrative into participatory. The first presentation of the main diffusion platforms of that universe should already present that "gamified narrative". Our experience in *Plot 28* supports to what extent the user participation is compromised if you offer, for instance, itineraries introduced as a game, challenges to solve enigmas (Where is Jaime Miñana, among others) or participatory calls in the aforementioned section of "plotys", which is mainly nourished by UGC. That makes the user change his perception, of a complex, disproportionate and somewhat overwhelming universe -something transmedia narratives of great display have- into a crossable and entertaining territory. The possibilities of the playful strategies applied to the transmedia diegesis are enormous and overcome the boundaries of the purely fictional into the real world. As Smith (2009: 58) would say, expansions that originate in the fictional and can be explored in the real one. There is the growing relevance of ARG, Augmented Reality Games, a narrative born in the logic of the Internet that is based on the continuous contrast of information by players who never lose their real condition and who can activate the game from of real problems ... Conspiracy for Good (Tim Krim, 2010), self-proclaimed as social benefit storytelling, is a good example of how fertile these interactions between reality, fiction and augmented reality are.

In *Plot 28* there is integrated that participatory storytelling that manifests from its own gestation [11], but also in relation to its potential audience led by challenges, tests, questions -these are the titles of some tabs of the web menu-, where the calls to the interaction, but also for generating content (prosumption) are perfectly integrated into the initial storytelling strategy (Hernández, 2017); this participative condition is, according to Amatria (2017), a fundamental feature when defining this pioneering universe as transmedia. Likewise, the interactions 'that originate in the fictional and can be explored in the real' (Smith, 2009: 58) are channeled into the universe we approach through activist groups (Group 28 and Commando 28), as stated in Hernández (2015: 231).

Another fruitful territory in this crossroads between transmedia universes and game strategies is that of community management; social networks require that kind of ludic and challenging storytellings to activate the participation of users and their classified roles: observational, discursive, creative or playful (Guerrero, 2014). Those responsible for this area have the enormous responsibility of game onset, that narrative dynamic that captivates the user because it touches him, impacts personally; that is a great achievement already, because from that impact that recipient will become an interactor and

will continue activating the mechanisms of another broader game that he has contributed to develop and in which he will possibly involve others. From the engagement and its different levels (Bedows, 2012) the dynamic of the community is born, from an incipient fan culture that crystallizes in the fandom. We must know these users to activate this playful virus and those users have been analyzed by authors like Bartle (1996), who proposes the categorization of killers, winners, explorers and socializers. Perhaps we all have a bit of all of them, maybe the social fabric of our followers is also a set of profiles. How was this suggested in our case of study?:

“In the production design of a transmedia universe, this interaction must be taken into account and in Plot 28 the most common social network devices have been implemented with a very discrete impact. That leads us to think that a good basic plan of community management is not enough, we must propose another specific one that encourages the most active part of the community constituted by fans, prosumers and channelers. The Facebook website of a transmedia universe has to become a dynamic platform, a seeker of challenges, attractive proposals ...; and in this sense the gamification strategies are quite effective. The same goes for Twitter, although assuming its more dynamic nature and the features it offers as a vehicle for slogans, phrases, images or links; we could say something similar about other social networks considering their particular specificities and the objects they convey. This strategy of proposing more than informing, suggesting more than affirming, arousing, appealing, seducing, facilitating is what connects with the potential fan or prosumer. (Hernández, 2015: 230).

## 8. Disposing channels interconnected

Not all projects have a potential transmedia expansion. In this sense, we must consider if our proposal can be spread on more than one platform, if it has several access routes, if it encourages intercommunication and interaction, if it is capable of creating a fan community, etc. In the design of the content map of *Plot 28* we learned that, once the universe with its story modes and its storytelling articulation is defined and at the same time accredited that those can potentially become transmedia, it was time to choose the most opportune expansion channels. We have already advanced that in almost all known cases there is a channel that holds the primacy, which we call core, matrix or main channel; it is generally the one that provides the greatest amount of information as well as the most relevant. In our case of study it is literature, although closely followed by film (mainly non-fiction). This preeminent channel sets the tone of the expansion towards the other channels and also the aesthetic outlook of the universe, mainly in the affiliation genre. Plot 28 has a *noir* atmosphere that is mainly determined because its main products are a *noir* cybernovel and a documentary close to that genre; that also determines the final look of the display and graphic design. We insist, therefore, that it is very important to know in what genre code we are moving and what is the aesthetic we want to convey, because that also helps unravelling the expansion of the different channels. In this way we will know which genres and formats match well together with that expansive wave. Perhaps a soundtrack that contributes to that dimension of the universe of fiction adapted to the genre or thematic focus in question; perhaps photography, since we think about addressing identity issues of real people or characters; perhaps a comic with dystopic science fiction aesthetics because it fits a secondary storyline, a dream or something that comes off the story.

The possibilities for enabling channels are many, but it is not appropriate to expand the universe without an adequate plan; in that way we could be, once again, at risk of exhausting the recipient. We must choose relevant channels, which provide a plus for conveying stories, to clarify that universe of

stories in synergy. And this is all the more true if we consider that users converted into prosumers can increase this panoply of UGC. The experience also tells us that in this expansive map it is necessary to combine the channels with more content weight (usually few and associated with the nodular ones) with a majority of secondary channels and with a low informational density. That favors lightness, one of the qualities of contemporary cultural products and the possibility that users can carry out a scaled consumption that perhaps limits to lurking through the lighter channels ...

Interaction between channels is a storytelling problem, a matter of production design that we have insinuated, and also a question that affects the technological design of the programs that accompany the universe. In the same way that it is necessary to establish the narrative connections between the different formats, it is also favorable to generate a mesh of hyperlinks and hypermedia between the different platforms and channels, in such a way that we can jump from one to another depending on the user's curiosity and ludic spirit. Technology today allows that miracle and we must take full advantage of it to exploit the synergy principle that characterizes transmedia strategies. In fact, Dena (2009) and Bedows (2012: 21) agree that the design of transmedia storytellings must be carried out consciously, since this aforementioned display of content in different channels and platforms is part of the meaning process.

### **9. The great challenge: the election of transmedia platforms**

Once the channels of transmedia expansion have been established, we consider which are the most suitable spreading platforms. This is a very important choice, since it entails, firstly, choosing the navigation field which users will go through; but not only that, since this choice will also determine the characteristics of our universe. As in other areas of communication, most transmedia products find on the Internet, the predominant spreading media; in fact the web serves as a digital placenta where the main channels, formats and contents that constitute a specific transmedia universe gravitate. But there are other complementary platforms, such as applications for tablets or smartphones to pour out the entire universe and where you can also try to monetize them through micro-payments or other revenue initiatives. Certain off-line channels, such as analogue publications or events, could also be considered platforms if they are able of channeling the contents of a transmedia world. For instance, the enhanced books [12] can refer to other modes of story of the digital domain, as we demonstrated with the experience of the analogical publication of *Bitácora a la deriva para una rebelión* (Esto no es Berlín, 2015), where the tweet calls projected the narrative on the web and, above all, the QR codes referred to many ways of the *Plot 28* universe in the cloud (Hernández, 2016). Events can also reach this vehicle condition towards cyberspace, despite being restricted to a very delimited spacetime; QR codes, the augmented realities from photographs or other platforms make up a technological mediation that makes this intermediality possible.

The aforementioned on-line digital platforms are the main operating theater of our universe, being projected complementarily to the users through the social networks derived. These will have a fundamental role in the diffusion, in the creation and mobilization of a fan community, but it is usually the platforms that constitute the main reference of the users and are responsible for channeling the traffic initially. The channels design and their browsable display is of great relevance, insofar as they are the presentation image of the universe and they have to transmit their aesthetics and storytelling. This design must to adapt to the technological peculiarities of each platform, according to the responsive adaptability. From here it will be considered that there are devices that have a usability based on keys or other interfaces (mouse, menus, lasers ...), while the new devices mentioned are based on the touch screen. These aspects, such as those referred to the screen space, should be taken into

account by storytellers and especially by transmedia designers. In *Plot 28*, for instance, we have opted for simple and operational displays that seem to be most demanded by netizens and that the Internet experience has endorsed as the preferred ones; on computers a horizontal display is projected with a moving screen and several tabs that open to give way to other displays with more information and images. The menu that appears in the Apple application is oriented vertically and simpler, subject to each touch on each one of the screens to make way for other, more complex displays. And this can change ostensibly from now on in the future landscape.

Nowadays, however, most of the transmedia proposals opt for the web through a philosophy of simplicity and operability, offering contents in a scalable way, undoubtedly one of the principles that govern any transmedia logic compared to the total and unitary offer of many traditional cultural products. The www is not only that spreading placenta where all kinds of products and formats can float, it also has its own potential as a lever to launch stories. For this purpose, an alliance between storytellers and designers is necessary to make a story with intrinsic web value credible, making the most of some of its graphic and narrative potentialities: navigation maps, diagrams, buttons as information windows, interactive calls ... it is about turning the Internet experience display into a storytelling and contents distribution strategy with full protagonism, beyond its usual condition of media. In this sense, as Amatria (2017: 87-89) points out in the section devoted to the analysis of the *Plot 28* platforms, there must be a well-designed interaction between platforms, channels and "story modes". In any case, it should seek the compatibility between the modes of story, genres and aesthetics, and the resulting creative synergies that help to achieve the cohesion of the text (Bedows 2012: 224).

That same awareness of the environment must be applied to the designs thought for these new platforms such as tablets and smartphones. In both cases, the content and image designers, as well as the programmers, must keep in mind the peculiarities of the representation space and the technical conditions of usability, another consequence of the transmedia philosophy of "thinking on screens". The increasing comparison in dimensions between both devices, to the point that there are hybrids we don't know how to classify, makes and will make a differentiating discourse between two devices that share usability protocols more sterile. Jenkins' convergence is also coming to this technological field; we are facing the empire of the tactile and immediate and any content and browsing design must take into account both variables. Therefore, complicated and confusing visual displays doesn't work in these media that prefer the intuitive and simple, following the logic of the prophet Steve Jobs.

One of the risks there are is the fact of thinking about the immediate transfer of a traditional format into the "tablet / smartphone space" without making the necessary translation to its specific technological conditions but also those aspects that refer to representation and aesthetics. In the same way that a novel or a play that is going to be transferred to the cinema requires an procedure close to translation, as Even-Zohar (2007) suggests, any format of a static nature, that is not audiovisual, must be submitted in the same way to that transformative process. Without going any further, in *Plot 28* mainly literary texts, but also photographs and audiovisuals, have been manipulated to adapt to the peculiarities of an iPad condition through the iBook format. When we designed the first content map that technological device did not exist but we were looking for hypermedia logic solutions with our programmers that were later applied to the features of the Apple tablet. And we did the same when thinking about the possibilities of transferring it to a smartphone. As another example; if we want to adapt a comic to the logic of a tablet; in order to do this we have to change the traditional page setting for another one specific of the new device; we need to give the cartoons a mobility adapted to touch strategies, while we have to think about the enlargement and shrinking of the screens reproducing the initial vignette. In addition, traditional speech bubbles do not work with the same effectiveness in the

space of the tablet and perhaps it is more operative to propose that the text comes out from a touch on a character or a visual call in the frame. So, paraphrasing McLuhan, we could say that the media is the expression.

## 10. Conclusions

All the aspects analyzed in the light of theoretical-analytical knowledge and creative praxis, highlight the need and importance of a comprehensive transmedia design that affects content, narrative architecture, platforms and channels, aesthetic line and graphics, interfaces and programs and, finally, to the audiences and the spreading of the product. This entails the existence of a production designer or "transmedia producer" who interacts in the design of maps and contents, which is the section focused herein. This has also been demonstrated in the case of *Plot 28*, a transmedia universe already recognized in the academic field, but which required a more detailed analysis that highlighted the mechanics of its contents design and its adjustment to the defining framework established by the academic literature about it.

*Plot 28* fits, therefore, the semantic field defined by the main researchers on transmedia storytelling as mentioned herein. In addition, following the most relevant cases of the genre, the philosophy of the project is well defined, that is, its navigation map or what we have defined as transmedia format, concretizing it into total fiction.

The display of channels and platforms responds to the aforementioned format, at the same time it defines possible browsing strategies, whose lack has hindered reading traceability - understood as immersion - but it is also in synergy with expanded contents.

In this content design that makes up a hyperdiegetic macro-narrative, the teachings of the traditional storytelling and the contributions of the cybernetic experiences in this field converge successfully in our case of study, since the balance between tradition and innovation (polyfocality, entropy of the story ) reveals as one of the assets of the proposal.

Likewise, we also endorsed the existence of a constructed diegetic world (worldbuilding) that unfolds in the transmedia universe and that responds to one of the signs of identity theoretically accepted by specialists. Said universe has top-down and down-top contents that point out to the UGC.

The gamification strategies, with the display of user roles and levels of engagement are also considered determinants for the construction of an audience.

Although it had been detected by several studies, we have demonstrated the conscious participatory strategy of *Plot 28*, with the attempt to seek for a fandom (plotys) and prosumers contents.

*Plot 28*, is confirmed, as a reference model when defining strategies and when designing transmedia worlds, with their maps of contents, channels and platforms according to the strategies endorsed by creative praxis and theoretical studies.

## 11. Notes

[1] Previous studies on *Plot 28* will serve as a preliminary guide in this challenge. In this sense we will mention the contributions of Gómez-Díaz et alia (2016) and Amatria (2017).

[2] A development of the term storytelling especially applied to the transmedia strategy, is available in Hernández (2017).

[3] Distinguished by the greatest number of references and relationships with others, both in the diegetic axis and in the paratextual axis, turning into the core of the system (Fernando, Vásquez and Salinas, 2013: 152).

[4] Plot 28 is a chewable narrative, according to the classification suggested by Long (2007), since it became a hard narrative behind a central property (the false documentary). According to multiplatform segmentation formats, this work could be considered a combination of multiplatform series and serials, that is, a multiplatform hybrid. The main texts shaping the universe are autonomous and can be consumed individually. This is the case, for instance, of the Browsable Novel, the *Bitácora a la Deriva* or documentaries (...) Plot 28 is a intercompositional transmedia phenomenon, which also contains intracompositional elements. The world proposed by the storytelling is composed of multiple transmedia and mono-media compositions, and together they constitute an intercompositional phenomenon.

[5] In short, a process that involves the coordinated distribution of a single storytelling through multiple modes of stories established within a single narrative world (Beddows, 2012: 48).

[6] Jenkins (2009) proposes the dialectic immersion and extractability, which alludes to the depth of dive into the content versus the user's ability to extract fictions to apply them to real life (Corona, 2016; Scolari, 2013).

[7] I had the opportunity to exchange some impressions with the researchers of the Germán Sánchez Ruipérez Foundation, a prestigious institution that has chosen Plot 28 as a case of study on the traceability of reading in transmedia literature, and confirm a certain feeling of overwhelming in the user when faced with this complex map of contents, perhaps because in a hypertrophied age of cultural offers the potential interactor has a lot to choose from in all kinds of devices and scarce time to enjoy it. This could be solved in this case by offering potential recipients optional browsing itineraries based on criteria of scalability and immersion, thematic, stylistic, etc. Another problem of the mega-display of our case of study is that it has not respected the scalability, that is, the progressive supply of content recommended by experienced producers such as the aforementioned Jeff Gómez. (Hernández, 2015: 227).

[8] Scolari (2013: 191) warns that the nature of the audience has changed in the contemporary digital ecosystem. Those corresponding to broadcasting were media-centered, and now they have become narrative-centered (Scolari, 2013)

[9] In the sense of modulating the contents over time (not all at once) and also in the sense proposed by Dena (2009): the orientation of each component of the narrative towards a specific public.

[10] Jenkins (2009) opposes the hypertext seriality that characterizes transmedia storytelling to subjectivity which refers to the polyphony of characters and stories.

[11] Plot 28 is explained within this participatory digital culture. Beginning by its gestation process, revealed by the authors in the "Independence" section of the Total Fiction website, as a collective work -Jenkins speaks of "collaborative author" - coordinated by two creators-producers who lead an interdisciplinary team of specialized professionals, attentive also to the guidelines of the technology manager (Alfonso del Barrio). (Hernandez, 2015: 228)

[12] A fairly accurate Spanish approach to this issue available in Gil González (2015).

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