Different Means, Similar Goals, a Long Way to Go

Two Attempts to Reach Grassroots Lifeworlds: ERNO Television Exchange in the Balkans and Democracy Radio in South Africa

When asked about the decline in public trust and participation, Robert D. Putnam said in an interview: “The social fabric is becoming visibly thinner, our connections among one another are becoming visibly thinner. We don’t trust one another as much, and we don’t know one another as much. And, of course, that is behind the deterioration of the political dialogue, the deterioration of the political debate” (Edsall 1995). Putnam seems to suggest that a major factor for the decline of the social fabric is the irrelevant performance of the media, especially television. With this view, Putnam joins the club of prominent media critics such as Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and most recently, John Merrill (2002) who have questioned the accountability of the media in cohesion-building. The Italian researcher Danilo Zolo (1999) has claimed that the television screen has framed citizen activity in such a strong way that it is justified to talk about “telecracy” instead of democracy. Or, as the associate editor of Le Monde, Thomas Ferenczi, has said:

There is a real danger for democracy here: namely, that, journalists and politicians, because they are so closely linked, have their own, narrow, idea of what the media should cover – namely, the ‘political microcosm’ in which ‘hyperambitious people with no conviction /…/ compete with each other – and ignore the interests of the people. ((Ferenczi, 2000-2001.)

The need for strengthening the social fabric and the role of the media in assisting in the process becomes more dramatic when the society concerned is going through a social change. In the following, I am going to exploit the practise which otherwise tends to bother me, namely the loose and non-intellectual use of the fashionable concept “social change”. Its definitions rarely make any distinction of what kind of social change is under discussion. It does not help much, if an element of power is added, announcing that social change always means change in power relations. As John Downing (2001:12-14) points out, a notion of power can nowadays in media research refer to everything from sadistic secret police of dictators and economic oppression to the diffused networks of micropower addressed by Michel Foucault.

Here, however, I am deliberately going to leave social change without an exact definition. In the cases discussed in this paper, social change means simply a shift of power in some form, caused by a change or a chain of changes in political or economic structures, but these changes are reflected in the spheres of culture and social life as well. The paper focuses on these soft changes in society. The aim is to study how the media operate as mediators between the power and citizens. Is there a possibility to strengthen the civic culture – that is, active citizenship, often also called citizen or civic culture (Dahlgren, 1999) – with the support of the media, and do the decisions-makers develop strategies to channel the formation of “new” citizenships deliberately?
In any case, an elaboration on the social fabric under change brings into the discussion the basic functions of media in society, or more specifically, the role of publicity in people’s lifeworlds.

The significance of the role the media have in drawing a borderline between the old and new regimes has been widely accepted in societies under transition. However, implementing a change in media policies is far from simple under political turmoil, with bitterness and prejudices still existing, and external assistance, however well-meaning, often increasing contradictions. This paper discusses two different cases, based on empirical material collected in summer 2001.

In the Balkans, the terrible succession of wars in the 1990s was largely a result of media agitation. Today, the societies in the South-Eastern corner of Europe hope to use the media for an opposite campaign for peace, democracy and stability. But these societies are still highly politicised, and centuries-long prejudices dwell in all levels of society. Foreign assistance money that flooded in the region has been used to establish new private media, because foreign donors have no trust in the existing public broadcasting stations and government newspapers. But media professionals working for the state television companies in the region wanted to try to change the course of broadcasting, and so was ERNO, the South-East regional window of Eurovision television exchange established in December 2000 to increase daily television news and feature material exchange in the Balkans and thus make television work this time for spreading peace and reconciliation instead of hatred and war-mongering. ERNO is an institution in-between domestic and continental, trying to change the news criteria with the authority of the international Eurovision. But how much is ERNO able to change, being a prisoner of compromised Eurovision policies itself?

In South Africa, the power of media policies has remained mainly in domestic hands, though donor funds has been used for the media changes after the political turn toward democracy. A major problem has been the fact that a large proportion of the population is still totally outside the reach of mass media. This is why the system of community radio stations, presently around 80, was established. The idea is to bring simple radio equipment in the middle of marginalized people and to train them to fulfil the information needs of their own communities. But community radio has spread mainly in larger and comparably well-to-do communities, and in most cases it has charmed only the activists in the community – in some communities women and health activists, in some others the unemployed youth. The lack of programmes has been great. This is why various NGO-based production operations have been developed. Some are quite systematic, such as Democracy Radio (Cape Town) which distributes ready-made programmes on the Parliament, on local government and on citizen rights, and it trains personnel of community radio stations. Democracy Radio is a branch of a semi-official organisation IDASA, established to promote democracy and citizen awareness. But many problems remain: Democracy Radio as most of the other similar organisations operates in English and tends to select its items from Cape Town, and many of the themes tend to remain mentally distant to the communities they are due to serve. Right forms to approach marginalized communities are not easily found.

In the following, I am going to present some details of the activities carried out by both of these interesting though problematic media exercises, but the basic problems of the paper are in fact somewhere else than in the daily media activities and performance. The basic question to be elaborated is: how should the grassroots be approached in times of change, from the top or from the bottom? Or are there such simple options in complex societies?

The Framework for ERNO
The background for the ERNO project lies in the tragic sequence of crises in the Balkans during the 1990s. Still, ERNO has quite an exceptional background. The idea grew among professional journalists who were dissatisfied with the present situation and who wanted to improve media performance with relevant material from the immediate surroundings. ERNO also supports the public service function of television in societies which were introduced to private broadcasting with a strong ideological message: the private, commercial foreign-sponsored media – often described as “free” – were claimed to have a better chance to carry out reconciliation in the Balkan societies infected with ethnic differences and bitterness about the past. Hence it could be said that ERNO takes quite an interesting step by putting emphasis on a broadcasting formula which has been successful in western and especially in northern Europe but hardly known in the Balkans. What are the chances for such an exercise to succeed under the given circumstances?

Television domination. The Balkans are societies dominated by television when it concerns news and current affairs and books when it concerns less topical information. No doubt television had a crucial role in the process leading to instability in the 1990s. It depends on the interviewee which television stations are blamed as being the worst in mongering hatred and war. The ones mentioned most frequently are the Serbian and Croatian televisions. Newspapers and journals have traditionally taken sides and carried on debates more than the broadcasting media. In the over-politicised societies in the Balkans today, they continue in the same way. Hence one should buy at least two papers to receive a multiple view on a political issue – and most people in a region with roughly one-third (in Bosnia-Herzegovina almost one-half) of the population unemployed cannot afford a daily investment of one Euro (roughly US$ 1) for just newspapers.

Further, especially newspapers offering a more balanced view – in the case of the print media, this means without exception private papers – are not always easily available, because the printing and distribution of newspapers in the region is not arranged in a way that allows “the other angle” to be received on equal footing. The problem of distribution concerns especially opposition newspapers in Serbia, but the problem is known in the whole region.

Accordingly, television remains as the major source for news, though its credibility is severely shaken by the developments in the past 10 years. This fact has had and still has its consequences, because it means that the informational level of the majority of the population is fairly much based on images and impressions offered by the television, not on background reporting and more exact information, for example offered by the print media. The situation leaves quite much space for political maneuvering, especially if the educational level of the majority is not very high and the general attitude among the population is strongly based on history-bound stereotypes and prejudices.

In most countries in the region, radio has made a considerable development toward a public service function, because radio demands less than television which is tied to heavy technical, financial and source apparatuses. Still, radio remains mainly as a background medium, continuously present in people’s lives but not the primary source for daily information.

Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) formula introduced. In most countries in the region, attempts – at least on the verbal level, but also in the form of legislation changes -- to develop strictly controlled state broadcasting companies toward a public service system have been made in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Serbia and in Montenegro. In each of these areas, new legislation and frequency systems should be soon introduced. Another issue is then, whether or not these new bills really mean a changed status in relation to political decision-makers. The Director General of Serbian
television RTS\(^1\), appointed in spring 2001, promises increased distance from political power, but through slow, thoroughly-thought changes. This kind of cautious approach might be a right policy line in a region where “ordinary people” are simultaneously tired of politics, but still highly politicised, disillusioned of potential improvements in their daily life and hoping for stability, but simultaneously carrying underneath this superficial normality history-bound attitudes and memories of the recent crises.

No doubt governments have really reduced their political pressure, but they have also reduced or totally stopped their support to the television companies. Some companies (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia) have introduced or restarted collecting licence fees, but their collection is irregular. All try to get advertising also, but in this field they meet fierce competition by private stations which often use the label of “free” media as their recommendation. However, the standard of media management is modest on both sides. Companies are not run as enterprises, and though most public television companies are quite new as independent institutions, they suffer of legacies of the “parastatals” during the socialist era. They have huge personnel – Serbian Broadcasting Company 8,500, Croatian 3,500, and even the mini service of Banja Luka has a personnel of 800 – and their operations are heavily structured in such a way that different departments do not know too much of the activities of the others. For example, in many companies the EBU desk hardly knows anything about the domestic programmes beyond news bulletins and breakfast programmes which they serve on a regular basis.

The successive wars have also meant that some basic technical links have been destroyed, the most important ones between Sarajevo and Banja Luka and between Belgrade and Podgorica respectively. Temporary terrestrial arrangements have been made to patch the lacking links. It is simultaneously interesting and tragic that television companies which previously operated under the same national umbrella now have to rebuild their contacts via the EBU which all now are members of. On the other hand, perhaps in the delicate political situation in the Balkans, this is the way to do the rewarming of relations, carefully and regulating the pace according to the needs of individual companies. Economic problems and scarcity of technical resources are there to remain for the coming years. On the other hand, professionals working for such institutions have learned to improvise and make shortcuts, thus making the impossible possible. All this is of course reflected in the quality of work, but the ERNO exchange is able to function on a day-to-day basis despite severe limitations.

**Foreign pressures.** The international community has shown great interest in the local media relations and established with donor funds innumerable media channels, meant to distribute more balanced information. At one stage, the city of Sarajevo had more than 200 radio and television stations, meant to give “voice to the voiceless”. Also international organisations and NGOs have been active. A UNESCO television programme bank project, operating since 1995 in Sarajevo and since 1999 in the whole region of former Yugoslavia has been working for improved distribution of many-sided television material and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN), together with a local NGO, Association of Private Media (APM), has established an independent newspaper printhouse and tried to develop a newspaper distribution system in Belgrade.

Large-scale foreign ownership has so far not emerged in the former Yugoslavia, probably because the Balkans have not appeared as very tempting markets for the international chains. However, the markets have hardly been much more promising in Eastern Europe where large-scale western ownership has become common. Thus this phenomenon might well be in sight in the coming years,

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\(^1\) Alexander Crkvenjakov, June 30, 2001.
if the political climate becomes stable. Big chains want to transfer their profits peacefully out of the country. Satellite activities are there already, of course. Thus the CNN, the BBC and the Sky Television operate in the Balkans already, as do several German companies. Where the funds for running the numerous private media comes from is not quite clear, but the big media moguls are not yet there at least. Foreign invasion might start in the form of joint ventures, which is the safest form of international activity. This might be in sight as soon as the international community reduces its support to the “free media”. Foreign ownership is not considered as a danger by most media professionals, either.

Another way of binding the Balkans to the international media markets are foreign imports. Practically all television companies, public and private, have enormously wide programming volumes, many having 2-4 channels which are filled with re-runs, but still they require material. Own productions are too expensive, hence the companies rely on imports wherever they are able to acquire them cheaply.

Public media institutions are under growing competition pressures, on the one hand with private, strongly entertainment-oriented media with masses of American and Italian films and Latin American telonovelas, and on the other side all the foreign stations available through the satellite. Satellite discs belong to the everyday equipment especially in Bosnia-Herzegovina, but also in Croatia and Serbia. According to journalists, bulletins by foreign media stations are assessed more credible even when evidence of clear misunderstandings can be pinpointed. Perhaps the most demanding long-term effect of satellite programmes is the style of reporting, the CNN journalism offered via the satellite. It is in clear contradiction with the style of journalism exercised by local stations. It can be anticipated that the style of reporting is going to change in the near future in the Balkans, but there is quite a long way to go from 3-4-minute long statements by local heavy-weight politicians to the action oriented “real-time reporting” of the CNN.

Journalism equals to politics. In all of the countries in the Balkans, journalism is still considered as a political more than a professional occupation. Media occupations are not highly appreciated by the ordinary people, not even by journalists themselves. Most media have been institutions with close contacts with political power, and this label is not easy to shake away, especially after the experiences of the 1990s. The “media thrill” prevalent in Europe and the US is not felt here among the young people, either. Youngsters entering departments of journalism have the lowest credits from high schools; the more successful ones apply to medical schools, law schools or institutions teaching new technology skills. The majority of journalists have learned the profession by doing, and opinions that stress a need for professional training or in-service education are rare. Journalism is also a poorly-paid profession. Many journalists have 2-3 side-jobs in order to survive. In this kind of working climate, investigative journalism and civil courage are not favoured qualities.

The journalist corps is also deeply divided in several associations in all the countries concerned, and none of these organisations carry trade union activities. They are rather professional associations, sharing an interest in various sides of journalism. In the fragile situation of the Balkans, also such organisations do carry significance. Further, many journalists express indirectly their own position by statements which indicate that “ordinary people” are masses, easily lead or mislead by politicians and the media. Their perception of their receivers can hardly be defined as very democratic. Obviously they do have recent documentation that supports their views, documentation that is not presented in opinion polls but in political action and conflicts.

Most journalists working for the EBU desks do not have any journalistic training, but many have an academic degree in some other subject, from linguistics to engineering. They have a somewhat
higher education than an average journalist. Their work requires language competence more than journalistic skills, it is said.

**ERNO heritage and prospective.** What all this means from the perspective of democracy, the still existing control mechanisms or regulations of television remain definitely as a problem. *There is a long tradition of political control, and despite the fact that the public broadcasting companies in the region claim to move toward public service, these changes have been slow and here and there also somewhat confusing – there is no clear picture of what public service means even in the minds of media bosses and obviously even less so among politicians.* Further, *in the years to come the political control might operate more through economic constraints.* The future of a television station might be tied to the fact whether or not it is able to gain public advertising.

First, all the television companies participating in the ERNO exchange have many domestic correspondents, though not always on full-time basis. In this respect, the Serbian and Banja Luka televisions with their enormous networks of local correspondents represent an extreme case, but also all others focus clearly on the local audience through local correspondents, although often as soundbites without visual elements. However, what this means is that *the potential for grassroots broadcasting is there, supplying quite unique material for a regional exchange.*

Second, concerning programming, it sounds natural to assume that *television stations in the years to come are going to have fairly much politically oriented programming, but there also seems to be a clear desire to bring politics more down to the grassroots, away from statements by ministers.* Simultaneously, *the present strong domestic orientation in news and current affairs is probably due to continue, while dependence on foreign imports on the side of entertainment probably grows steadily.* The programming volumes of all the stations are large, in fact enormous if the resources are taken into account. For the time being, they tend to send same programmes on several channels or use the “side-channels” for re-runs, but in the long run, these companies might end up being clients for the discount televisions markets of ancient American films, cheap action serials produced in New Zealand or Hong Kong, or *telenovelas* which seem also to have the support of the public in the Balkans in the same way as in most other Mediterranean television cultures. On the other hand, there definitely is space for material from neighbouring countries also, especially because almost every of the companies in the region has established or plans to establish a breakfast television.

Third, there are problems which are unique for ERNO but perhaps not for the companies as a whole. The problem is and is probably going to be so that *the political winds – that is, a quest for reconciliation – are favourable for “opening up”, but professionally there perhaps are not equal chances for expansion, because foreign material is still considered as representing something of secondary importance.* The company probably best prepared for opening up professionally is the Croatian television, but the EBU team there seems to be quite careful in political turns. The most liberated one, relatively speaking, is probably the Bosnian BHT. But, as said before, the situation is quite fragile and sensitive to even minor changes.

In short, *the present situation is filled with contradictions, but there also are clear signs of change in the air.* The main problem is that while the media no longer are a channel for propaganda and war-mongering, they also have lost quite a lot of their political significance. In countries with limited resources and many basic needs to fill, this simply means that the economic and technical scarcity is there to continue. On the other hand, in societies with fresh memories of ethnic arousal and personal insecurity, whatever reconciliation efforts are carried out by the media, they should be predictable, long-lasting and thoroughly-thought through. The credibility of the media is not high for the time being, and people are simply tired of big empty promises and everyday scarcity.
In the Balkan societies, a genuine and natural interest is felt in other parts of the region which used to belong to former Yugoslavia. On the other hand, relations are far from mutual co-existence. Although many remember the old days of Tito’s Yugoslavia with predominantly positive terms, today everybody seems to know precisely where others come from and which ethnic group they represent. Ethnic stereotyping frequents in phrases such as “all Bosniaks feel that way” or “all Croats/Serbs would react to that”.

On the other hand, the sequence of abnormal situations during the 1990s and the isolation that followed the crises, have brought with them a desire to increase contacts with the rest of the world, especially Europe. Still, Europe is either equated with European Union or referred to as “occidental” Europe which the Balkans are not part of. There is definitely an entity named the Balkans in the minds of both the “ordinary people”, the political elites, and media professionals, when they define the spheres of interest in the media. The Balkans are the closest sphere, but also the EU represents an area which is important to follow up keenly, because many anticipate that other Balkan countries will follow the example of Slovenia and seek membership in the EU.

The following sphere of interest includes Romania, Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey, in some situations also Hungary and Italy. That is, there is an interest focussing on roughly the same area which is covered by the ERNO exercise. The Mediterranean region is found closer especially in countries bordering to the Mediterranean. The following “circle of interest” focuses on Austria and Germany where many immigrants from the region work. In Bosnia, the US is continuously assessed high due to the sympathy shown by Americans for the struggle of Bosniaks in the 1990s.

On the other hand, attitudes toward the indefinite “international community” are mixed, far from positive alone, because it has been felt that outsiders came and ordered changes e.g. in the media systems in the name of peace and democracy, but without giving the local community the right to express their opinions about these issues. The view of the international community seemed to be quite simple: only “independent” – that means private, commercial – media were able to exercise genuine freedom of expression. Accordingly, a real merry-go-round of small private media has been created, at its worst in Sarajevo, but also in the other capitals in the region. Today, this chaos prevents weak media institutions from rational policy-making and division of frequencies and funds, both public funds and advertising revenues.

Ideologically, the media position taken by the international community in the Balkans is highly interesting, because it appears as an ideological cocktail, as an attempt to exercise market regulation with a normative flavour. State regulation has been assessed not accountable due to the undemocratic actions taken by the states in the region, but unlike most research in the field (e.g. Blunden, 2001), regulation by the market has been seen capable also to involve ethical choices. Thus the international community operating in Sarajevo and Belgrade has taken another path than Ernest Gellner (1994:82) who stated:

--- side effects of economic operations, if unrestrained, would disrupt everything – the environment, the cultural heritage, human relations. They simply have to be politically restrained, though the control may be – and probably should be – camouflaged, consensual, negotiated and subtle. The economy must be free enough to provide plural institutions with their bases, but not powerful enough to destroy our world.

Another interesting dilemma of parallel tendencies of closing and opening the society is the question of language, relating strongly with the media also. With the exception of native speakers of the Albanian language, all citizens of the former Yugoslavia understand each other, though they meet some problems with the Slovenian and Macedonian languages. All the rest are like dialects of
the same language, though some nations in the region such as the Serbs use Cyril transcription in writing. Still, what is emphasised now are the differences in the languages, obviously a reflection of political nation-building. It seems to be especially strongly felt in Croatia and Croatian media. In the Croatian television, there appears to be an interesting contradiction between emphasis on commerce and trade on the one hand and traditional culture on the other, both running parallel in the programming schedules.

The Banja Luka television (BATRS) was established first in 1992 and its objective was clear: to bring forward Serb interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina. All the others operated before the 1990s as parts of a national Yugoslavian set-up. They had their own channels focusing on their own territories, but they also exchanged whole programmes vigorously especially with neighbour stations. Instead, news and current affairs coverage of other parts of the former Yugoslavia was thinner than in, say, entertainment or sports. One could claim that the xenophobia toward other nations in the former Yugoslavia was rather based on stereotypes formed in the course of history and relative ignorance of each other’s present-day situation than on overwhelming information used for political purposes.

Now television could have a similar chance in processes leading to increased stability and democracy in the region. It is perhaps not justified to claim that now it is time to bring back the media unity that existed, because such unity has never existed and many of the public television companies have been considerably strengthened first during the recent conflicts. They are partly products of the crisis in the Balkans. Accordingly, the professionals working in the companies are used to quite strict political control and steeply hierarchical administration. Political differences do still exist also in practical professional decision-making. For example, Kosovo television (ZZRTK) never contacts Belgrade (YURTS) straight. If it is interested in an item from Belgrade, it files the request to ERNO which then mediates the request to Belgrade, and relations are quite reserved also between Banja Luka and Zagreb, as well as between Podgorica and Belgrade.

The ERNO Project (originally called Seenex, but later renamed as ERNO which fits better in the EBU terminology) relies strongly on the Stability Pact and the Charter for Media Freedom formulated by the states participating in the Pact. Also the participants were selected according to the Stability Pact. This is quite a natural choice for a “back-up” philosophy, because in the Charter, the participant states tie themselves to strengthening of media pluralism and media institutions implementing pluralism; media networks are explicitly mentioned in the Charter.

*The ERNO philosophy*

The basic objective of the ERNO Project is as it is stated somewhat rhetorically in its Project Plan:

>The vision for this project is to pave the way for collaboration between the populations and governments of the entire South East Europe in the process towards a democratic, prosperous and peaceful region integrated into the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, this is exactly the essence of the activity: to strengthen social fabrics, to spread understanding and to increase tolerance throughout the Balkan societies. On the practical level, the project aims at improving the exchange of television material between the countries which belonged to the former Yugoslavia plus to other countries belonging to the Stability Pact. The aim is simply to give the television companies in these countries a chance to exchange programmes on a daily basis and thus to enable their audiences to see how governments operate and what people do in their everyday life in the other countries of the region.
The ideology expressed in the Charter follows closely the libertarian media philosophy which believes that the better informed people are of their “opponent’s” doings and culture, the better are the chances to avoid conflicts or to release tensions if there already is a conflict situation. The division into “us” and “them” becomes less obvious and thus allows more operational space for mutual understanding. However, another theoretical position is also available. Its vulgar modifications have been implemented by countries which hardly can be defined as democracies, but the philosophy as such could be taken more seriously: that in a deeply infected social contradiction, information does not help but perhaps even worsens the situation. The Latin American dependista research tradition (see e.g. Villamil, 1979) has followed this line up to our days, asking for regulation of foreign media material imports. This is also the reasoning behind the legislation in most countries which accept censorship in the state of war. According to such considerations, exposure to even balanced reporting from “the other side” perhaps only strengthens outdated and biased stereotypes and leads to interpretations which increase tension and hostilities. In short, the trust in the ability of the media to reconcile is far less in such a philosophy.

However, the planners of the ERNO exchange chose a classic libertarian approach. The choice of countries to be invited to participate in the exchange was easy and consistent to make on political grounds: the idea was to include in the exchange all public or public service companies from countries which belong to the Stability Pact. They are Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, Turkey, and the protectorate/province of Kosovo. Greece and Turkey have not joined ERNO yet, though discussions on that direction have been carried. Both belong to the EBU Mediterranean exchange and have not shown great interest to join ERNO at this stage. Television companies from all the others have been included in the exchange right from the beginning, although Albania has never sent anything and has otherwise as well been very passive.

Originally the idea was to arrange the ERNO exchange through the EBS satellite system, operated under the European Commission, and the coordination office was planned to be placed in Brussels. However, the running costs would have been considerably higher, because the programmes should have been transmitted to Brussels on unilateral basis and “packaged” first there. It was also assessed important to place the office in the region, and so Sarajevo was selected as the location for the coordination office; thus the exchange would be able to enjoy the legitimacy of an international media organisation, but the contact with the region would still be close and continuous. But the EBU also gave its orders how to run the exchange. The original plan was to have a daily transmission time for 30 minutes, but the EBU did not grant more than 15 minutes, which is the same time allowed for the ERNE (EBU Eastern European) exchange. The timing of the exchange (2.15-2.30 PM central European time) was also an EBU decision, but it fitted well to the needs of the region, because the main news bulletins are broadcast at 7.30 PM.

**ERNO Output**

There have been more quiet periods in the exchange of ERNO – especially around Christmas and New Year, celebrated on slightly different days by the different religions found in the region – but the normal volume of exchange has been 3-4 items per day. The “big” companies in Belgrade, Sarajevo, Zagreb and Ljubljana dominate the inputs quite clearly. Albania has not sent a single story so far. Montenegro had quite long technical problems for uplinking. Accordingly, they were unable to send materials. Thus it can hardly be said that the ERNO exchange has been able to encourage the weak voices in the Balkans to get stronger. Naturally, this is partly also a question of news criteria: according to EBU criteria, Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Zagreb create constantly more news than, say, Podgorica. Still, at least all participants in the former Yugoslavia download
everything that is sent. Because the EBU operations are based on membership fees and not the use of the exchange, the EBU does not do any follow-up of the use of its exchange material, hence it is hard to say how much of the supply is used by the various companies. An estimate given by most EBU desks in the region is that some two-thirds of the materials are used in the Balkans. In general, the use of EBU materials hardly reaches one-third. Hence, the ERNO exchange seems to be found relevant by its members. Of the “outsider” members, Romania has been participating quite evenly, Bulgaria haphazardly and Hungary quite passively. (Kivikuru 2001a.)

Table 1: Outputs of the ERNO exchange, November, 2000-June 2001

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<th>Company</th>
<th>Nov.*</th>
<th>Dec.</th>
<th>January</th>
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* Only 2 days. The activity started on Nov. 29th, 2000
** Cancellations refer to items which have been completed too late and thus missed the transmission. Still, they show willingness to participate.

The selection of ERNO items has gradually become more professional and consistent, and issues related to democracy and human rights have received more space and attention. Simultaneously genuine Balkan issues seem to be fewer now than during the early months of 2001. The selection appears as having quite a strong bias for politics (26%), but the societies in the Balkans are highly political. Hence the bias is perhaps justified.

ERNO’s editorial policy has been cautious but balanced. Its relation to politics has been quite formal. No speculations are allowed, but politics has received a large proportion of the total supply, because every fourth story deals with politics. On the other hand, the selection criteria have also been consistent, maturing gradually to their present line. Indirect support has been given to democratic forces in the society by stressing the role of democratic institutions. On the other hand, that means that the supply is fairly hierarchical and not very much grassroots oriented. The role of the ordinary person is to perform in feature or cultural items, while political commentaries are in the hands of ministers or national opposition leaders. The ERNO exchange tries to offer items with
social relevance, but it could show greater interest in items dealing with culture, education and social policy on the cost of some rhetoric political statements. (Kivikuru 2001a.)

ERNO also reflects the uneven working conditions of the partner companies. It can even be claimed that ERNO strengthens the big companies in the region by allowing them to dominate the supply arena. In a mediated way, ERNO, when exercising editorial independence and applying the EBU quality criteria, perhaps works for increased attention given to production activities. One of the major problems preventing plans for more ambitious productions is the fact that the programming volumes are enormous. Each company has scarce resources and huge numbers of programming hours to fill.

Based on documents, interviews and “dopesheets” (texts attached to the newsfilm material, giving details of stories) analysis, ERNO appears as a typical professionally successful exercise. The personnel working at the EBU desks of the ERNO exchange know well the journalistic climate in the area, and the considerably high usage of ERNO materials provides evidence on the fact that at least the journalistic corps assesses ERNO relevant; it is impossible to measure what viewers think of ERNO materials, because they cannot be distinguished among other television news and current affairs materials. (Kivikuru 2001a.)

However, it is also justified to claim that the participants of ERNO exchange hardly could have started any cooperation for years to come; a “neutral” outside catalyst in the form of the EBU was needed to push the project on the rail. The political climate in the media circles in the Balkans is not yet mature enough to view mutual interests in a balanced way and to make a joint venture – even a modest one, such as ERNO – to operate without outside assistance. ERNO’s support for media freedom in the Balkans cannot be assessed very high. No doubt it is working toward the right direction, but in such unstable political conditions as are found in the Balkans, one single internationally operating media apparatus does not carry greater significance. Perhaps with a training component with a specialisation on public service activities, a somewhat greater impetus could be reached.

The Framework for South African Community Radio

By almost any standard, South Africa’s new political system fully qualifies as a genuine democracy with its national and local democratic institutions, watchdog agencies and commissions plus already two rounds of peaceful national elections behind, assessed by observers as fair and free. According to a recent survey, South Africans also exhibit the greatest awareness of the concept of democracy in Southern Africa, and they have a largely positive understanding of the concept. Democracy is viewed as the realisation of individual rights and civil liberties. However, South Africans are much more likely to emphasise the realisation of socio-economic outcomes as crucial to democracy than key procedural components such as elections, multi-party competition or freedom of speech. South Africans are becoming pessimistic. They put significantly less trust in elected institutions, see them as less responsive to public opinion, and are less satisfied with their performance than in an earlier opinion poll (Mattes & al, 1998).

While the average South African definitely supports democracy, the national level of support (60%) is much lower than in several other countries in the region. Botswana (82%) scores highest,  

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2 Afrobarometer Series, based on a sample of 2,200 South Africans, carried out from July 6th to August 6th, 2000. A similar survey has been carried out in late 1999 and early 2000 in Namibia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia and Lesotho. The results have been reported in Mattes et al., Views of Democracy in South Africa and the Region: Trends and Comparisons. The Southern African Democracy Barometer.
followed by Zambia (74%), Zimbabwe (70%) and Malawi (66%), while the only country resembling South Africa is Namibia (58%). In both low-score countries, the respondents give more positive evaluations to the present democratic system than to *apartheid*, but there are also signs of a certain “nostalgia” of the way the country was governed under *apartheid* especially but not entirely among white, coloured and Indian respondents. While South Africans widely prefer what they have now to what they had before, their optimist hopes of how they would be governed in the future have declined noticeably.

Close to the Grassroots. Community radio is the favourite child of northern European development assistance organisations today: it is grassroots oriented, it is relatively cheap, it is in most cases what is called an “independent” medium, operating outside the sphere of the state. However, as such, the community radio is by no means a child of the 1990s or 2000s. It was on the agenda already in the 1960s, both in Latin America where it was born and somewhat later in Asia and West Africa. At that time, it was strongly linked to rural development projects, but the democracy aspect was already there in the thinking of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire who most often is given the honour of being the father of the community radio, although he described it as “popular radio”. The basic ideology of community radio is well defined by Michael Delorme (1990), the then president of the World Association of Community Broadcasters (AMARC):

> We chose the term because we believe it expresses the democratic spirit, the sense of belonging to a community. Community radio implies a democratic dimension, popular participation in the management of the station as well as the production of its programmes. For us community radio is accessible. It is neither the expression of political power nor the expression of capital. It is the expression of the population. It is the third voice between state radio and private commercial radio. Community radio is an act of participation in the processes of community. It is controlled democratically by the population it serves... based on non-commercial relations with its audiences. Its mission is essentially one of community and group development. It is a local communication service. It informs, motivates discussion and entertains while broadcasting music and poetry that regenerate the collective soul.  

The community radio philosophy. The start of community radio in South Africa follows closely Delorme’s definition. Its basic idea is to give voice to the voiceless in the new South Africa, aiming toward democracy. The oldest of the South African community radio stations, the *Bush Radio* started operating first illegally in 1993. Today it reaches some 32,000 people of the huge community of Cape Town (population over 2 million), and accordingly, the station has in the harsh competition situation ended up using programmes formats of the commercial radio, and its links to the community around are not very strong, though volunteers are queueing to work there. However, the *Bush Radio* still has its status as the “mother” of the some 80 community radio stations in the country. Definitely it is an example of continuity in a sector labelled with insecurity and rapid lay-downs. The *Bush Radio* is a well-established radio station with a newly-established training unit which offers its services around the country. Its schedule includes special programmes for women, children, gays and lesbians, produced by local groups, but *Bush Radio* also sends out every day 2-3 hours of foreign programming from *Voice of America*, *BBC*, *Radio Netherlands* and *RFI*.

The field is labelled with instability, but also enthusiasm. One radio has for years broadcast from a simple shipping container (*Radio Zibonele*, Western Cape). The station had its origin in a health campaign among children and grandchildren of “surplus people” from Ciskei and Transkei turned urban dwellers. *Apartheid* is gone but not its legacy. *Radio Zibonele* functions in a sprawling informal settlement of Khayelitsha, where unemployment rate approaches 80 percent and 90 percent of the population live in shacks made of wood or corrugated iron or plastic. The station still has a social calling. Instead, a similar station with a mission, a well-organised station run by the

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3 For details, see Teer-Tomaselli & de Villiers, 1998.
Rural Women’s Movement (Radio Moutse, Mpumalanga) has at least temporarily closed down. Its “broadcasting policy”, as explained in Sunday Independent (1996) by one of the activists, is quite typical for NGO-based stations: “The aim is to unite and empower women. We had no assets, no land, no cattle. We had no control. The husbands had the control and they were working in Johannesburg”. Radio Moutse is off-air due to financial problems. It is not easy to collect even modest sums to run radio stations in remote and socio-economically depressed communities. Many other community stations have also been forced to close down, definitely or for the time being. This fact complicates any planning or training efforts concerning the field.

In a way, the origin of the stations described above gives a hunch of the different character of South African community radio, when compared with the farm radio in West Africa. Naturally the development aspect is involved in this process also, but the South African community radio has right from the beginning had a strong socio-political advocacy component which definitely belongs to Freire’s thinking but is hardly found in West African equivalents. Without exception, South African geography-based community radio stations are owned by voluntary associations and built upon voluntary work, although some key members might get paid. In most cases, the volunteers form the association, sometimes a trust. Most members do programme work, some organise the music archive, or help in other forms. Some work a few hours per week, some do in fact full work days – many are unemployed and are able to spend their time at the station.

Rooted in the Constitution. Today, South Africa has some 80 community radio stations in operation, and an additional 20-30 are applying for a licence. They form a specific part of the mediascape in the “new” South Africa. The Independent Authority Act (No 153 of 1993) makes provision for three broadcasting systems, public service broadcasting, commercial broadcasting, and community broadcasting. The Act envisages a community broadcasting service as “geographically founded”, or founded on “an ascertainable common interest” in, say, classical music, jazz or religion. A large majority of present-day community radio stations fall into the category of “geographically founded”, and among the dozen or so interest-based radios, various religious groups are dominating. Naturally also they might have a say in the promotion of democracy and especially citizen activity, but they do not represent “broadcasting” but rather specialised “narrowcasting” in their operation. They construct the community on joint beliefs or hobbies in the same manner as some commercial radio stations use the township language lingo to create a feeling of closeness between their audience and the programmes, filled with international popular music. In the geographically founded radio stations, the idea is to offer a variety of themes and programme formats, although scarce resources often set severe limits to that.

Each station has a board composed of members representing various local organisations and projects, due to do fund-raising for the radio station. However, quarrels within and with boards quite often prevent a smooth progress of a station. Personal, community, political, and broadcasting interests might end up into a conflict, especially when the funds are scarce and the running of the station demands endless work. Local fund-raising in a community labelled with a 60-80-percent unemployment is not an easy task for anybody.

Control pressures. No wonder the public sector is, despite the minimal financial power embedded in the community radio, interested in that sector of the mediascape because it has close contacts with “ordinary people”. The stations receive – after a long and bureaucratic procedure – from the

4 “We have been going for six years and stopped at every point from getting a licence – it is so demotivating” says one of the trustees, while another states: “The biggest problem at the moment is lack of licensing… we have talented, self-taught people … the greatest impediment to raising money for the station is lack of continuity – we cannot attract advertising”. For details, see Nell & Shapiro, 2001.
Department of Communication (DoC) a licence that allows them to broadcast either for four years, for one year, or for special events (such as elections) only. The license is given after hearings which try to focus on the sustainability of the station. The conditions also define the profile of geographically founded stations: in their schedule, 60 percent must be devoted to local talk programmes, 40 percent could be covering anything else. That condition is controlled and punished, if not respected. Of the music, officially 70 percent should be local traditional or *kwai*to (local dance music), the rest can be international. That condition is extremely difficult to check, because the stations send a multitude of music. A common belief is that extremely few stations follow the rule; most play far more international music. They pay a lump sum – the scale being around R3.500 per year – for the royalties of the music played. The temptation to play music is great, because it is popular, although it might not be easy to acquire records.

The public sector has a powerful means of control: money. Even a modest community radio station requires equipment, and it needs resources for producing programmes. Concerning the equipment, a station has a choice to make. It either accepts equipment from the government through the DoC, or it links with the Open Societies Foundation (OSF-SA, Cape Town) which leases out equipment. So far, the DoC has handed over equipment to around 30 stations, the rest being dependent on either Open Societies or occasional donors. The government does not give any open conditions for the equipment, but naturally it keeps an eye on the functioning of the station it has helped especially when the government runs some campaigns. In 2001 the DoC launched a huge programme dealing with issues on women, children, HIV/AIDS and health. It hired two producer firms to prepare 400 programmes dealing with these four areas. The DoC no doubt assumes that the stations which have received equipment from it run these programmes.

Community radio stations are rarely mentioned by the conventional media and media professionals. The television infotainment series *Soul City* forms an exception and has, accordingly, received considerable attention just for the fact that it does marketing for this quite “unknown” sector of the media. Still, over 2 million people are reached by the community radio on a regular basis. The figures vary somewhat, but they indicate a steady curve upwards. Stations may come and go – and they do, the field is still very unstable --, but interest in them seems to be growing. Quantitative surveys are carried out regularly for the needs of advertisers, but they do not tell much about the community radio audiences. Producers have a thumb rule saying that mornings and early evenings form the peak hours for listening, but quite much depends on the community. In a township listener behaviour is different from a small town or a rural community.

The OSF-SA has been instrumental for the development of the community radio sector, and it is able to give expertise advice and support to a variety of training activities. However, the OSF-SA seems to be very sensitive for any government activity in the field; similar concerns have been expressed by the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA). The OSF-SA suspects that the government has developed a consistent plan to involve the community radio stations in the promotion of various government activities, because several government branches have launched units which produce radio programmes. As part of its information services, the DoC runs a “news service”, which is in most cases the source for national news in community radio news bulletins.

An issue that both the public regulator, the NCRF and the OSF-SA, as well as the producers of the *Democracy Radio*, agree upon is that more attention should be devoted to local governments and

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5 *First Footprints of the African Renaissance: An evaluation of Training Provision in the Community Radio Sector in South Africa 1997-2001* provides an example of the multiplicity of functions the OSF-SA has – the funds might be coming from a variety of sources, but the OSF-SA is instrumental in the implementation process.

local governance in the future. Community radio stations have a unique possibility to, due to their geographic closeness to local government bodies and fora, to check, to criticise and to analyse the activities of local governments and encourage citizens to participate. So far, the cooperation with community radio stations and local governments has not been very close, although the local government elections in 2000 developed some links. Still, links to various local projects and NGOs seem to be closer than those to political decision-makers.

The OSF-SA is perhaps not alone with its suspicions of state interference, but in fact, the fear of outside influence could be said to apply to any producer of programmes outside the stations. Besides problems of acquiring the basic equipment, the community radio stations have met the problem known by any broadcaster: a radio channel engulfs an enormous amount of programmes to run for 12-18-24 hours per day. A station run by 2-3 professionals and a group of volunteers is fairly much dependent on so-called independent producers. One solution is to make an agreement with international programme providers as a few stations such as the Bush Radio have done. The programme time could not be filled without this material, and it has been found relevant, because it broadens the view of the receivers7. Not too many of the stations have solved the problem in this way. They depend more on the domestic independent producers and perhaps Radio Netherlands which has a special relationship with South African community radios since the anti-apartheid Jabulani! Conference in 1990.

Another problem with the community radio stations is that also they tend to concentrate to urban or semi-urban areas where people have access to other means of media as well, while the areas provided with practically no mass media have not been lucrative for the community radio activists or they have given up the tedious procedure of applying for a licence. However, rural communities could provide a small-scale potential for collecting advertising also, because there is not much competition available8. The situation might even be more stable than in townships, although the situation varies considerably. Despite their other problems, the relatively wealthy townships do have far more purchasing power than rural or semi-rural communities.

It belongs to the character of the South African community radio that despite difficulties, the stations have got organised right from the beginning. In 1993, their loose committee was formalised in Soweto and formed into the National Community Radio Forum (NCRF). Most stations belong to this advocacy organisation, and it represents community radio interests in negotiations with the state, with donor organisations, with training institutions and independent producers. The NCRF has also made an attempt to create a network (South African Community Radio Information Network, SACRIN) of some 30 stations which are due to exchange information, training and programmes, the idea being that a kind of “news agency” could be established in the long run. The network has had its ups and downs, but the exchange has not really taken off.

The Output of Community Radio in South Africa

The majority of community radio stations have a permanent or semi-permanent staff of 2-3 people and a volunteer circle of 30-80 people, offering its services against the coverage of travel costs and occasional fringe benefits. Although the idea of volunteers fits better into the rich northern countries with people who can afford freetime activities without payment, the community radio in South

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8 “I have been losing customers but since I am advertising on Mafisa my clients are coming back to me”, “KCR is accessible, efficient, low cost. We can network through the station and get other projects. All the projects in Kathonus endorse the station. The quality is excellent, the people are motivated and show courage and love for the development of the community”. Excerpts from First Footprints (2001).
Africa gives evidence to the fact that voluntary services are feasible also in a poor country with a high unemployment figure. Poor, unemployed people enjoy working and meeting new challenges such as coping with the computer. They do not ask for compensation, against all northern expectations. They simply enjoy learning new things, a better command of their lives. For young people, there still are benefits available as well, because they receive basic training in radio journalism and can perhaps utilise these skills in the future training in this field.

The programmes offered by the community radio stations are quite haphazard, and they broadcast a lot of reruns. In communities with strong development projects these projects tend to be eager to use this opportunity to market their activities. In many communities with fewer projects, the young people have “taken over” the station, broadcasting a lot of music programmes and music that fits their taste. Instead, older people and especially older women have rarely had their say in the programme choices. The equipment is modest but fit for small-scale productions. Problems lie more on the side of the competence of the personnel than in the equipment. In most cases, some 20-40 members of the cooperative run a station, and the personnel tends to be quite mobile due to the fact that only the wealthiest ones of the stations are able to pay regularly to their personnel. According to the licence regulations, English should be used at least partly in the programming, because this new national language should be promoted, but in practice most programming takes place in the local language. Several national and NGOs have also produced programmes to be sent out by community radio stations, well known for their lack of programming.

Most experts in the field recommend that community radio stations would liaise more with domestic independent producers such as the Democracy Radio. However, this field is not without problems, either. Many domestic independent producers receive funds from either domestic or international donors, willing to promote “good” causes such as health, HIV/AIDS, or refugees. On the other hand, these donors must be accountable in their home base. Accordingly, they put conditions on their support: the programme produced should be broadcast within a particular time frame, or even on a particular date and time. “Packages from an unknown sender”, comprising a CD with a covering letter expressing such demands, is a familiar phenomenon in most community radio stations – and quite often, the stations fulfil the conditions, fearing that if they did not, another “instalment” would never come.

Happily enough, most of these donors are, at least for the time being, well-meaning NGOs, but a cynical analyst could see quite a danger in such a behaviour dealing with an imbalanced situation: a well-meaning but also wealthy advocacy agent sends material to a poor and perhaps also somewhat naive receiver, in great need of material. Embedded into the situation is the fact that these independent producers represent a totally different standard of professionalism than the community radio station, but they still are highly dependent on donor funds. This problem is not going to disappear – especially because some stations have also realised their value and have started to ask payment for broadcasting material produced by independent producers or interest organisations. More clashes might be coming in the future.

However, the otherwise very suitable hands-on training tends to focus more on technical than substance matters. Most responsible trainers do carry out a needs assessment before designing the format of training, and naturally it includes substance matters also. But most volunteers have a very modest educational background, and it takes a while – although it also is rewarding – to teach


10 “The job I am doing is so interesting – each day I learn something new”, “I get nothing but joy from volunteering”. Excepts from First Footprints, 2001.
them the basics of radio programming techniques. In such a situation, the substance part remains quite limited. From a democracy standpoint, this poses a problem: if community radio is interpreted only as a channel for individual expression, it is naturally valid in a society which does not reward its citizens too often – but the channel easily remains uncritical and obedient to those in power in the community, and its advocacy potential remains modest.

IDASA, Institute for a Democratic South Africa is a NGO established in 1993, and distribution of information on democracy has belonged to its activities right from the beginning. In 1998, it established Democracy Radio, meant to provide material for the community radio network in South Africa. It is quite an example of the “independent” producers which assist community radios in their hunger for programmes. Especially during the first year of operation, the programmes were quite information-heavy, but very educational. In the recent years, the shorter Democracy Radio programmes have also become quite lively, having bridges and background sounds. In short, no complaints can be said neither about the volume of production nor about the professional quality of programmes. In fact, they give a good example to follow also to the community radio stations which often represent a very modest level of professionalism. Talk show is their most common programme genre, while the Democracy Radio products are packaged programmes with a consistent structure. Accordingly, it could be said that the programme format of Democracy Radio programmes can stand as an example for the stations which use its CDs. (Kivikuru 2001b.)

Democracy Radio programmes also “stand out” due to their choice of themes. Before the two rounds of national elections, there were very few foreign donors and domestic independent producers who were interested in themes related to political processes and broader socio-economic issues. For the time being, there seems to be no one except Democracy Radio. Most presently active actors in the field focus on political processes and their implementation, or local government are rarely covered by these producers, thus indicating also the capricious mind of the international community which has promised to safeguard democratic processes in South Africa.

As such, the selection of themes presented by Democracy Radio represents quite a conventional perception of representative democracy: the programmes present repeatedly how democratic institutions operate and produce, although they also show how policies are reflected in a common person’s life. Knowing how limited the knowledge of democratic institutions seems to be in the country, it is obviously justified to focus on political institutions and their work. Further, the profile of Democracy Radio was somewhat different in 2000, before and after the local elections, when both local government and the civil society were given considerable attention. As such, the division into rough categories does not tell the difference, it is more embedded in the style of reporting. In year 2000, the programmes were devoted to citizen participation even when talking about, say, policies, health issues and union matters. This tone seems to be muffled down somewhat in 2001.

Table 2: Democracy Themes in Democracy Radio programmes, 1998-2001

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<td>9(38%)</td>
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<td>17(42%)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11(28%)</td>
<td>3(10%)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Thus every second programme has every year been devoted to political programmes, while the other half has focussed on other themes. Attempts have been made to follow also foreign matters: Rwanda, Zimbabwe, democracy in other African countries and globalisation. True democracy
naturally means that one follows also what is happening nearby, but not too much can be said about democracy in Africa or about globalization — as such, such programmes are heroic attempts to cover huge and problematic themes — in 15 minutes. It is true that the foreign issues are extremely rarely discussed in the limited media selection available for the poor communities in South Africa. Still, one becomes hesitant of the usefulness of such exercises. Producers at some stations also gave these programmes as examples of those which they have liked least.

A field that Democracy Radio seems to have increased its interest on recently is health issues, especially HIV/AIDS, and the response from both community stations and focus groups seems to give support to this. However, there are quite a few other producers operating in the sector of health and especially HIV/AIDS. In order to avoid overlapping, it could be wise if the Democracy Radio would focus on the policy side of all health issues rather than starting to float with the mainstream, however relevant and popular it might be. Instead, the role of the Democracy Radio could be that of an eye-opener and catalyst. For example, many health experts fear that the due attention given to HIV/AIDS might divert attention from other, also burning issues in the health sector, such as the fight against TB and diarrhea. Further, as stated by a focus group, the HIV/AIDS issue should be changed from an individual tragedy to a social issue demanding the support and coordination of the community and the local government. (Kivikuru 2001b.)

This brings up another somewhat more general issue, mentioned by some focus group respondents (in township Soshanguve). So far, the Democracy Radio programmes have predominantly had a “sector” approach. If they deal with water, land, health or HIV/AIDS, they focus on that particular issue. Instead, connections with other sectors remain vague — links between health and poverty, between water and health, between labour and land, etc. Some respondents pointed out that poverty and unemployment are not pointed out as causes for problems enough strongly, the idea being to overcome their influence and to strengthen empowerment. Of course, the 15-minute format sets its limitations, but the local stations could then “continue” the series with their own contributions. A focus group (in former homeland Qwa-Qwa) also stressed that continuous cooperation with educational authorities would be useful, acknowledging the fact that the youth is an important but also a difficult group to reach. (Kivikuru 2001b.)

There is no Shortcut Solution

What is meant by “good citizenship” in a society under turmoil or a turmoil just passed? I give roughly the same meaning to the civic culture as Peter Dahlgren (1999, 140-144), who views it as being composed of four dimensions:

- relevant knowledge, competence and engagement. People must have access to credible and rich information, describing and giving meaning to formations constructing the world around them; they must have access to analysis, interpretation, reflection and debate on social activity;
- loyalty to democratic values and processes. Without such virtues as tolerance and the will to follow the democratic rules of the game, democracy does not operate. There must be confidence between people and between people and social institutions.
- practice, routine, tradition. It is important that democracy does not remain as an element of rhetoric only, but embodies itself in the everyday activities of the public sphere and in the lifeworlds of citizens. These processes comprise small and wide scale activities, with strong symbolic components, such as in election campaigns and through daily routines such as in decision-making in meetings. Michael Billig calls such phenomena "banal nationalism" (Billig 1995).
- people's identity as citizens. This includes people's subjective perception of themselves as members and potential participants in democratic communities. Perhaps Gellner's idea of a
"modular man" (1994) can assist here. Gellner claims that a man creates multiple identities without any of these developing into a totality or excluding the others. A citizen identity can simultaneously be reflected as civic or political togetherness on the international, national, or local level. A citizen identity does not follow formal political structures, though citizenship always includes juridical rights and responsibilities. Citizenship also has its cultural side (e.g. Mouffe 1993), and people can "be" citizens in a variety of modes and levels, the nation state representing just one among these, though it is most frequently equated with the concept of citizenship.

The first two qualities are the ones both of the media exercises described here have deliberately put emphasis on. No doubt the publics both in the Balkans and in South African backwoods have received more information than before on relevant issues via the two new media outlets. ERNO does this addition in a far more sophisticated way than the community radio stations, but on the other hand, several community radio stations have a far stronger position among their listeners than ERNO with its audiences – a vast majority of the media contents in the Balkans is composed of other materials than those transmitted by ERNO. Another issue is then, whether or not community radios are able to fulfil their mandate effectively. They should be responsible to the citizens within the ‘community’ they have identified, whether that is defined along geographic ‘community of interest’ lines (Teer-Tomaselli, 2002:249-250); first then there is a chance for a civic culture to develop, and even then obviously mostly among the activists in the community. Unfortunately, even the most grassroots oriented media seem to belong to the luxuries of life, which only the – relatively, of course – well-to-do in these communities can afford or feel interested in.

Another interesting issue is then, how such media for deliberate promotion of democratic values as ERNO and the South African community radio implement this task, taking into consideration both limited resources and tensions in the society. The third component of democratic practices is of course partly covered by bureaucracy news, parliament reports and statements by institution heads. Such news belongs to less favoured type of journalism in stable societies, but such reports have a greater role to play in societies under change. On the other hand, these reports rarely have a citizen linkage; they remain on national or regional level.

The citizen identity dimension is the weak point in both exercises – but not only in these. The relation to the popular is one of the sore points in any form of mass communication. “Audiences, as a term, implies something rather static, typically wrapped cosily around a TV set at home. Social movements, as a term, implies something active and on the streets”, says John Downing (2001:9). Empowering citizenship should be understood as a social movement, activation of the public. Another thing is, whether members of the public in a society filled with tensions and frustrations are eager to become activated. Another difficulty which the two media experiments discussed here is the role of emotions and feelings in broadcasting. Edward Thompson (1978:352) has stated:

[People] also experience their own experience as feeling and they handle their feelings within their culture, as norms, familial and kinship obligations and reciprocity, as values, or (through more elaborate forms) within art or religious beliefs. This half of culture (and it is a full one-half) may be described as affective and moral consciousness.

In a society which has gone through a strong and painful reorientation, it is quite natural that the media rather muffle the role of feelings than work through them to get into contact with the public. Also journalistic professionalism favours such an exercise – the credibility of the content is easily at stake, if a medium deliberately invests in emotions. But is the natural contact to the public then also endangered? South African community radio has experienced this dilemma in relation to music. For the middle-age audience the music originating from the past apartheid period (“music that made us strong”, Miriam Makeba as a symbol) still has a role to play in people’s minds. However, as pointed
out by a focus group in Naledi (village, extremely high unemployment figures), for the youth the role of such music is minimal. “Music that entertains us” is supposed to provide a route to the hearts of young members of the public. The acquiring of records means an investment also: what kind of music to choose with the scarce resources available?

Empowerment for citizenship – where should the media impulses come from, from above or from below? Is it better that a government decides the policy and provides the basics for a new, democracy-oriented mode of communication to emerge as in the case of South African community radio, or would it be better to allow the decision-making about a new practice brew among media professionals as in the case of ERNO, at least on the level of principles somewhat closer to the civil society? In practice, the difference is not that dramatic, in fact the picture is quite blurred. First, in the Balkans ERNO operates inside public media organisations, and it is strictly framed by an international body of public service broadcasting, EBU. The spontaneity of professional thinking has remained quite limited. Thus the big thumbs of the government and the so-called international community are felt in both exercises. In the case of ERNO, the introduction of the “politically correct” although bureaucratic EBU has in fact been a way to avoid greater government involvement in the plans to introduce a daily regional television exchange. The EBU is legitimate enough to be accepted by all the national broadcasting companies which have been participating in the exercise.

As Slavko Splichal (2002) states, assessment on media functions are observer-relative, depending on values which are culturally bound. Further, the notion of function refers to the existence of a system and defined purposes, goals and values for it. The relative relevance of specific functions becomes clear when “unintended” functions are introduced in contrast to manifest ones. Further, it is not at all easy to distinguish between “above” and “below”, if this distinction is interpreted as an attempt to keep the state and the civil society apart from each other:

The relationship between civil society and the state is dialectically contradictory, as it represents dialectical interaction between the opposing tendencies of integration (the state) and differentiation (civil society), /.../ in the information age this interaction is becoming "paradoxical": the state itself, in some senses the "worst enemy" of civil society, has become, in the capitalist, parliamentarian countries, one of its safeguards /.../. Although the state attempts to dominate civil society, it cannot avoid protecting some of the fundamental dimensions of civil society by providing the overall legal framework of social relations not directly regulated by the state. This paradox is the basis for any possible process of democratisation. (Splichal, 1994:73-74.)

On the other hand, the image of citizenship in media closely attached to public institutions carry an “overdose” of rationality, a kind of idealised picture of citizenship. Public institutions easily develop fine definitions and reformulations of citizenship, but citizenship is a concept that is firmly located in the assumptions and practices of the citizens themselves and their social and religious organisations (Hutchison, 1999: 70-76). Both of the studies media exercises have a stronghold in local issues through their networks of correspondents (ERNO) or through the very fact that they are located in the middle of the community (SA community radio). But the “hidden agenda” of public institutions is smuggled in via media professionalism – established practices taught and cherished as symbols “standard of journalism” or “professional broadcasting”. For ERNO, the channel for professional regulations is the link to the European Broadcasting Union, for the community radio the main route are training institutions and NGOs providing ready-made programmes. In both, one can also find professional legends which both the journalists involved and the publics assess high. Ruth and Keyan Tomaselli (2002, 140-143) talk of three different myths in a society under change, providing material for any mass media in the society:

- a myth of the golden age; that is how we became great and heroic;
- a myth of decline; that is, how we decayed and were conquered/exiled;
News and current affairs material is probably not the best place to search for such legends. Still, the three myths can quite easily be recognized in the material exchanged by ERNO, especially in the avoidance to publicize the doings of politicians belonging to the decline phase and to emphasize the role of “new” political faces, suggesting a better future. Also one of the repeated themes in ERNO exchange are stories about the recluse life of people who have escaped from conflicts to mountings or isolated villages and gradually return home. The myth of the golden past could be linked to the popularity of folk culture, dance and traditions – perhaps also to a popular feature story of an old man from Banja Luka, married for 165 times. In fact, the exchange does not tell much about everyday life in the Balkans as the original idea was but rather about politics, oddities and folklore.

In South African community radio, the myth of rebirth is strongest, although also elements of the decline are dealt with fairly regularly. The golden age is rarely brought up. The scope of programming is far greater depending on what kind of radio is under study. Township stations around Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town and Durban are relatively wealthier, but the competition is harsh and accordingly, many apply programming formats typical to commercial broadcasting: short news bulletins, lots of popular music, disc jockeys and chatting contact programmes, little attention to politics and education. Instead, in more traditional villages the community radio exercises – at a very modest level – conventional broadcasting modes with news, education, discussions and music. Live discussions are the most common mode, and the themes quite often are either sought from the happenings of the community or are adopted from national media with an aim to add a local dimension to the discourse. This is the ideal form for using also programmes produced by NGOs such as Democracy Radio. The music belongs more often to the Miriam Makeba line than latest hits, though both are used. What is interesting is that it is not at all easy to find local politicians to participate in the discussions. Hence, local problems are often discussed without a direct connection to local decision-making. Many producers claim that local politicians are afraid of publicity – exactly the same quality in broadcasting that fascinates the ordinary people involved in community radio activities.

Tickle the public, make them grin
The more you tickle, the more you’ll win
Teach the public, you’ll never get rich
You’ll live like a beggar and die in a ditch. (Matthew Engel ref. Ferenczi, 2000-2001)

The rhyme, referred to by the elite paper journalist Thomas Ferenczi, brings into discussion still one essential element making citizen-oriented media exercises so complicated. It is media professionalism. However sophisticated is Ferenczi’s argumentation, it still reveals the hidden top-down attitude embedded in the routines of professional journalism. Training of professional practices is an essential part of such projects like ERNO and the community radio. They are needed, because otherwise the projects cannot be run – and professionalism also brings in relative distance from the decision-making apparatus. Journalists command the making of publicity, what the politicians do not know much about. But simultaneously superficial professionalism easily distances broadcasters from the audience, bringing in a “we know better” attitude. True professionalism is naturally only a tool enabling a best way to package the content, but it easily becomes the rule. Then citizen empowerment turns into a “white man’s burden”.

- a myth of rebirth; that is, how we shall be restored to our former glory.
Literature: