ABSTRACT  Diasporic media have developed rapidly in the last few years with consequences for ethnic minorities' communication among themselves and with Others in local, national and transnational contexts. ICTs have been of central significance in the development of diasporic media produced and consumed in local and global spaces; these media are increasingly interactive, decentralised and depend more and more on minority communities' own input. As these diasporic media develop and become increasingly available among ethnic minorities, important questions about the changes in the content and the qualities of diasporic communication are raised:
- Have diasporic media opened up new possibilities for communication among dispersed groups sharing the same ethnicity?
- Do diasporic media enable minorities' participation in multiethnic publics or do they actually obstruct their participation?
- Do diasporic media have a role in shaping public, diverse and participatory communication within multiethnic societies?

These are some of the key questions addressed in the research project 'Diasporic Minorities and their Media - A Mapping'. For this presentation, I draw from the empirical data of this project. This data indicates the diversity characterising minority communication: parallel and alternative publics develop next to, in dialogue and in competition with the mainstream. Thus, I argue, alternative publics in multiethnic societies are partly sustained in diasporic media cultures; these cultures become increasingly interactive and participatory.

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Introduction

*Resistances are no longer marginal but active in the centre of a society that opens up in networks (Hardt and Negri, 2000: 25)*

When Muslim communities across Europe protested against the war in Afghanistan and resented the so-called war against terrorism, a lot was said about a breach of loyalty to the states they are part of, about the clash between the Muslim culture and the European, western project of democracy. Yet, while mainstream western media were rushing into various theories about the clash of civilisations, much more complex political and cultural processes were taking place across Europe and across the globe. While European Muslim communities found themselves in the heart of debates about cultural binary oppositions, they themselves experienced their implications, but in much more dynamic forms than those broadly acknowledged. The resistance of most European Muslim communities to mainstream politics reminded us all of the fragmentations and diversity within Europe. None the less, the divisions within the Muslim communities, coming out of their internal generational, regional, religious and class diversities – just to name a few - reconfirmed that alternative, minority public spheres are no less divided than the mainstream ones. Against the discourses of a natural divide between the western and the Muslim culture, formal and informal political and cultural processes that took place in post-September 11 Europe revealed a dynamic map of multiethnic and multicultural Europe, with its rough edges and its complex diversity.

The Muslim media produced and/or consumed in Europe got directly engaged in these processes, when they reflected divisions and diversities within and across European ethnic communities and when they participated in national and transnational political debates. Most importantly, in their presence, Muslim media challenged the stereotypical divide between the democratic west and the backward east, voiced alternative ideologies and became visible players in terrains which until now were controlled by the west and western media conglomerates. The satellite news network Al Jazeera became known as the Arabic CNN overnight, Arabic news agencies became key providers of international news and in smaller, less visible – but no less influential – scale, local Muslim media across Europe offered alternative images and sounds of the Muslim world vis-à-vis the
mainstream media. In their presence and in their content, in their symbolic role as providers of alternative information, images and sounds, minority media challenged the cultural and information exclusion of Muslims from the European public spheres; in parallel, they actively participated in sustaining and expanding alternative public spheres in local, national and transnational spaces. The Muslims across Europe were not just the receivers of the mediated imagining of the Muslim stereotype; in their media production and consumption, they could imagine themselves, their communities and Europe in alternative to the mainstream ways; they could participate in constructing public images and shared imagination of themselves for themselves.

This recent and on-going experience of European Muslim minorities and their media, briefly introduced here, can only highlight how minority media, in their production and consumption, can challenge boundaries set by mainstream political and media discourse; how they can challenge exclusion by sustaining alternative publics; how they can feed imaginings of communities in maintaining flows of communication across spaces and beyond boundaries. Minority media do not always provide a fairer content than mainstream media. Minority media can lead to polarisation. They can reproduce repressive discourses within a minority group. If minority media are addressed here as potential dynamic poles against exclusion, it is not because they are considered a priori as progressive. The focus here surpasses the content of specific negative minority media experiences. It is, more than anything, upon the potential role of minority media in constructing alternative communication and alternative media cultures. It is upon their presence in minorities’ everyday life and their symbolic power for shaping self-representations of a community. I argue that their existence and presence as cultural references in everyday life can have significant implications for minorities’ public participation and for the construction of alternative public spheres. These issues I want to address here, by, first contextualising minorities’ experience in Europe and then, by addressing the particular importance of media cultures for processes of public participation. I refer to some examples which (i.) indicate how minority media can become poles of alternative political and cultural reference, challenging exclusion from
the mainstream, and (ii.) how they have a community role in sustaining relations and belonging within those minority communities.

This paper draws from the ongoing EC-funded research project ‘Minorities and their Media in the EU: A Mapping’. In an ambitious attempt to understand the multiple realities and the complex conditions in the relations between identity, community and the media in the case of ethnic, diasporic minorities in Europe, Prof. Roger Silverstone and myself got involved in a research project mapping diasporic minorities and their media in the European Union. This research project, based at the London School of Economics, aims at drawing a comprehensive map of the minority media cultures across the EU and at examining how minority media cultures relate to issues of exclusion, participation and community. Particularly important for this project is the role of new technologies and of digitalisation in the development of minority media cultures and their creating of new possibilities for communication and/or new exclusions.

**Multiethnic Europe – The Struggles for Multiculturalism**

*European identity is becoming increasingly identified with a capacity to tolerate considerable cultural diversity – at least of those values that European citizens consider to be most worth preserving (K.Reif quoted in Wintle, 1996: 5).*

In the context of the European celebration of pluralism and cultural richness, ethnic communities have been projected as a European advantage (Gatling, 1989). This discourse of diversity however, has usually been discussed in the context of unity, assuming minorities’ acceptance of key dominant European values. The idea of Europeanism, which has lately been very fashionable, is supposed to focus on the characteristics that are shared all over Europe. Usually though, these characteristics are mainstream culture’s characteristics and the minorities can hardly identify with them (ibid.). The heterogeneity that characterises all multicultural societies causes tension; this tension, according to Hobsbawm and Ranger, relates to the invention of tradition as an integral task in the nation-state’s reproduction of its continuity. “There is then an inherent tension between the invented “heritage” which roots national identity in history, and the change and heterogeneity that characterises the contemporary western Europe nation-
state’ (in Husband, 1994: 67). The invented ‘heritage’ and the myth of the inherited culture characterising the ideology of the nation-state has largely influenced the way Europe has been imagined. Pieterse (1991) argues that there is a myth about European culture as characterised by the inherited civilisation based on the Judaeo-Christian religion, the Greek ideas of government, philosophy, art and science and the Roman views concerning law. ‘The problem is that, in addition to being chauvinistic, elitist, pernicious and alienating, it is wrong. This myth undermines regional cultures and subcultures; it represents elite culture as tout court, it denies popular culture, it defines culture in relation to the past and it ignores Europe’s multicultural realities (ibid.: 3).

This ideology of Europeanism has made it difficult to address the real complexities of the multicultural experience in public and academic debates. The project of multiculturalism, based on democratic participation, respect of diversity and negotiation of co-existence is a difficult task. Disputes and conflicts of interests continuously take place within multiethnic states (Kymlicka, 1995b); cultural membership usually implies exclusions; integration and participation of minorities in the mainstream often assumes a one-way process of minorities accepting dominant norms and values and not a two-way process of dialogue and accommodation (Parekh, 1995).

**What Multiculturalism?**

Taking the conflicts of power and the disputes that come out of cultural and political differences in European societies, the question of what kind of multiculturalism can guarantee equality, participation and reflect the real cultural richness of Europe is crucial. There are two different conceptions of recognition and ‘equality’, Modood *et al.* argue (1997): the first is the right to assimilate to the majority culture in the public sphere, while allowing toleration of ‘difference’ in the private sphere; the second is the right to have one’s ‘difference’ recognised and supported in both the public and the private spheres. Modood *et al.* go beyond this division, proposing a third option; one that recognises the importance of the meeting of different populations in cultural and physical spaces: ‘It seems to us that equality and social cohesion cannot be built upon emphasising
‘difference’ in a one-side way. Also required is a recognition of shared experiences’ (ibid.: 359).

This meeting is very central in our understanding. It is a meeting that does not necessarily mean merging or melting of cultures into something new; the idea of an emergent new and singular culture that overcomes the conflicts and the dead-ends of the old ones is as romantic as it is homogenising. ‘Not forms of cultural merger, but forms of multiplicity…should be multi-culturalism’s (or multi-culturalisms’) goal’ argues Vertovec (1996: 395). For policies to be meaningful, they have to be open to the multiplicity of multicultural societies – recognising that this multiplicity involves conflicts, struggles of power and often uneasy relations between different groups (ibid.). Only openness (ibid.) and reflexivity can allow the development of the democratic debates that correspond to the dynamics of a rich, multicultural society and can indeed lead to the thick multiculturalism where difference and diversity go as much in the depth of the European culture, as they do in width.

**Multiculturalism and the Media**

The openness and reflexivity that allows the emergence of dialogue and mutual understanding is achieved in contact, in communication and information – in the possibility to imagine Others in their complexities. In the European cultures, which are increasingly mediated, the imagining of the Others is also more and more mediated. Media cultures imply increased privatisation; the public is dissolved (Hardt and Negri, op. cit.) but as public communication takes places more and more through ‘communication and social networks, interactive services, and common languages’ (ibid.: 302) unprecedented communicative commonalities can be shaped. The sharing of the media and of mediated cultures leads to a profound commonality (ibid.) that can become the basis for understanding and dialogue in multicultural societies. And information and communication technologies can have a central role in a changing communication map. In Morley and Robins’ (1995) debate about the need to re-imagine
Europe, ICTs become significant tools for dialogue against the project of European homogenisation:

The danger is that an oppressive European tradition and history will re-establish itself, and that Europe will remain fixed in a ‘geographical disposition’ that has historically governed the relation between its sovereign identity and the world of the Other. The danger is that empire will reassert itself in new ways. It is in this context that we must consider the significance of new information and communication technologies. In what way might they contribute to the new geographical dialogue between communities of common interest and communities of difference (ibid.:5).

Media and ICTs have been creating new potentials for dialogue, for constructing understandings of difference, for building bridges of communication within Europe, across the globe, within different sections of the communities that share the European societies. In the era of digitalisation, the space for alternative media is broader than ever – though so is the competition for audiences’ attention; the cost for developing and sustaining alternative minority media has decreased substantially and the spatial specificity and boundedness of the media – in terms of possibilities for broadcasting and circulation and of regulatory limitations – are presently much more flexible than in the past.

Minority and diasporic media open up possibilities for communication between populations in local, national and transnational spaces and they shape community spaces that are not restricted by geography. The vivid diasporic media spaces, the development of diasporic networks and the increasing, yet diverse use of minority media by different communities indicate that information and communication technologies have not only eased diasporic local and global communication, but they have actually changed it. When grandparents living in Trinidad learn how to use the Internet in order to send emails to their granddaughter in London (Miller and Slater, 2000) their understanding of communication, as well as the intensity of family relations change. When every third Cypriot household in London invests on a huge satellite dish in order to watch the news from their country of origin, the distance between Britain and Cyprus diminishes; everyday Cyprus news become common references in London and the sense of being Cypriot is being reinvented in every evening shared viewing (Georgiou, 2001).
It has already been highlighted that participation and inclusion are not only enabled or obstructed through binary relations of opposition between minorities and majorities. Restrictions and divisions are vertical and horizontal and have to do with processes in and between ethnic communities. For minority populations that have multiple spatial and cultural associations – with their local community, the state they live in, the country of origin and the broader diaspora – media can become the intermediator that translates the difference within the ethnic community, the diasporic community and the multiethnic society. Media ‘images can connect local experiences with each other and hence provide powerful sources of hermeneutic interpretation to make sense of what would otherwise be disparate and apparently unconnected events and phenomena’ (Urry, 2000: 180). Minority media can help the development of imagined presences (ibid.), of ‘[nonnational] communities of sentiment and interpretation’ (Gilroy, 1995: 17); they shape scenarios of identity and diasporic consciousness (Iordanova, 2001). If we accept the importance of having access to self-representations, we have to recognise the media as key elements in constructing identity and community. Minority media construct representations of the diasporic self, the community, the homeland; they do so in the eyes of the ethnic community and in the eyes of the broader society; this can challenge dominant boundaries.

**Minority Media – The Alternative Pole in Mediated Cultures?**

Kolar-Panov (1997) talks about ethnic audiences as the ‘(in)visible audiences’ (ibid.: 17). This contradictory concept is useful for understanding the experience of audiences experiencing social exclusion. On one hand, people belonging to ethnic communities (or other marginalized groups, like, for example, the disabled) are invisible as audiences. They are often overlooked by mainstream media as they are too small, localised or dispersed to count in terms of viewing and listening ratings or advertising. On the other hand, there audiences are visible as they increasingly develop specialised, niche and particular media of their own. Minority media and audiences partly gain their visibility because of their difference and particularity vis-à-vis the mainstream.
Minority media projects have been developing rapidly in the last few years. ICTs have been of key relevance to the way these media establish and sustain themselves in local, national and transnational spaces. As already argued, ICTs have allowed easier, cheaper and more autonomous development of minority media projects – especially in the Internet and in the use of other digital technologies. These media projects often propose alternative to the mainstream content and initiate the development of alternative mediated communication spaces. In offering information about local, national and transnational events, in allowing people to communicate in their first language and in feeding their everyday repertoires with diasporic cultural products, it can be argued that minority media offer their users knowledge and power to participate as more equal players in local, national and transnational communities; in ethnic and multiethnic public spheres.

How are these processes shaped? On one hand, the information presented in minority media allow these populations to develop the informal knowledge which eases their entry in social and economic systems. Information about social services, employment, the local political and social life are very often part of minority media agenda. On the other hand, and because many of these media are small and amateur projects they imply an active participation – or at least – easiest access of the consumers to media production. In that way, many of these projects are empowering in representing a community’s own cultural production and in bringing a community’s concerns about politics, the economy and the society into the public sphere. Nevertheless, we do not intend to idealize these media for their contribution to empowerment and participation. Many – especially satellite channels – develop their agendas and content without the participation of the dispersed transnational communities; some of these projects represent powerful actors within diasporic communities and exclude different and diverse voices within those communities; others are too self-indulgent ignoring the multiple cultural, social and economic concerns of the community they supposedly represent. While taking all these dimensions into consideration, I argue that minority media have the potential to take part in projects of participation and empowerment; but this potential is not a taken-for-granted achievement. Overall, however, and as the following examples will show, minority media have a powerful symbolic impact in sustaining minorities’ visibility and in reminding
both minority communities and the mainstream of the existence of alternative political and cultural discourses and publics across Europe.

A Struggle around the Right to Difference? – Some Media Experiences Across Europe

Al Jazeera and Al-Ansaar – New technologies Altering Mediascapes

In introducing the complexity of the multicultural experience, I mentioned the tension that the post-September 11 events; these events have also brought minority media in the foreground. Al Jazeera, an Arabic satellite television station extensively consumed by transnational Arabic audiences, but unknown until recently to the west, has suddenly entered the mainstream mediascapes and everyday political discourse as a powerful player. After September 11, Al Jazeera, which is based in Qatar, broadcasted a series of exclusive monologues of Bin Laden and other exclusive reports from Afghanistan when no other medium had access in the country. Overnight, Al Jazeera (means ‘island’ in Arabic) became one of the most broadly quoted media, visibly altering communication mapping. The US Secretary of State Colin Powell demanded of the Emir of Qatar that the station stopped the broadcasts of the Bin Laden videos, while the station’s European Brussels-based editor Ahmad Kamel found himself detained and deported by the Swiss authorities on October 14 (Journalist, op. cit.).

The power of Al Jazeera that brought it in the centre of global publicity is directly connected to its ability to cross boundaries and surpass the broadcasting restrictions of nation-states. Al Jazeera’s content and access to its content are difficult to be controlled though such attempts have not only been expressed by the US, but also in the Arab world (ibid.). But Al Jazeera’s popularity is increasing fast: it now has 50 million viewers around the world. Many of these viewers are in Europe. Al Jazeera is a station that addresses an Arabic transnational community, a diaspora that receives information beyond the restrictions that the homelands’ governments impose and beyond the restrictions of their country of settlement. Al Jazeera reflects a changing media setting; it reflects the importance of the ICTs that alter communication patterns and bring minority media in the heart of the mainstream communication and politics agenda.
Al-Ansaar

*Al Jazeera* has entered the mainstream and became a powerful reminder of the Muslim and Arabic minorities’ presence in the west. Another Muslim media initiative – the Birmingham-based news agency *Al Ansaar* that claims to be the only Islamic agency in Europe (*Journalist*, ibid.) – has got into direct conflict with the British state in its attempt to express an alternative Muslim voice in the UK and Europe. Its British-born Pakistani editor, who decided to change his name into the very common Imran Khan after a series of MI5\(^1\) regular visits and interrogations, insisted on broadcasting and distributing Taliban leaders’ interviews. The editor of *Al Ansaar* (translates as ‘the helpers’), which has seven journalist employees, has been accused of promoting terrorism by a range of mainstream newspapers – notably the Sunday Telegraph (ibid.). In an interview with the *Journalist* though, he refuses to see the point of such accusations:

> I don’t know whether it is a case of professional jealousy as time and time again we have exclusives. We have sources in the area and between us we speak all the languages. We get the bin Laden videos, they arrive on CDs from Pakistan and the whole world wants the footage…Is it because we are Pakistani British Muslims that we are not treated seriously and that everybody can lie about us? Why is it that if a white journalist visits Kashmir, Pakistan or Afghanistan and does a story he is a brave and true journalist, while if we do this we are terrorists and open to accusations and abuse? (ibid.: 17)

Though we do not know all the dimensions around the specific case of *Al Ansaar*, Imran Khan’s comment raises important questions. Are minorities and their media stigmatised according to certain stereotypes? Are minority media considered a priori as biased, unprofessional and militant? Can minority media and their staff become victims of discrimination when they oppose the mainstream culture and politics?

*A Greek Example: Polarisation and Communication*

Mainstream and minority media, as part of mediated European cultures, are involved in struggles of power and processes of subordination of minority subgroups in different

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\(^1\) MI5 is the British intelligence service
ways. In the case of Greece, a country with brief history of immigration and extensive xenophobia, the dominant political and media representations have an impact on both the way the mainstream reproduces exclusion, but also on the ways migrant communities themselves reproduce relations of inequality and restricted participation. Migrant minorities in Greece are very marginalized, while they are still struggling with primary problems of social and economic integration, often facing extensive xenophobia and very restrictive for their integration legislative frameworks. Marvakis, Parsanoglou and Pavlou (2001) argue that minorities’ absence from the public sphere and the reproduction of discourses that undermine the autonomous and diverse expressions of experience and identity by minority leaders reproduces relations of subordination. This is a very central point to emphasise in the context of the present research. On one hand, the marginalization and the exclusion of the minorities from the mainstream public sphere, the mainstream media and culture polarise communication (or lack of communication) between different parts of the society. In Greece, like in many other countries, minorities are forced to deal with basic issues of employment, housing and standards of living and as a result issues of identity, multiculturalism and cultural participation are undermined in their narrative and action. On the other hand, because of their disempowerment and because of their everyday struggles for achieving basic standards of living, minority organisations are often non-representative of the groups’ diverse cultures and politics. This means that a certain understanding of minority politics predominates, reproducing a vicious circle of exclusion: the majority of the groups’ members stay away from their institutions and the communities reproduce their own exclusion and marginalization because they fail to shape a strong, representative public discourse.

In this context, ethnic media increasingly become a significant pole challenging present dynamics and relations of power. Probably more than any other community institutions, media can reach across the migrant communities. Ethnic media, like all media consumption is integrated in everyday life; media are part of everyday banality and their consumption does not require active commitment to community projects or politics. Thus, ethnic media achieve the community role that many minority organisations fail to. In their mediated experience, members of migrant groups become more actively involved
in the public life than the restrictions within and beyond their ethnic community would otherwise imply. Even if minority media are involved in power relations within ethnic communities – indeed often reproducing dominant discourses of ethnicity and excluding subgroups within ethnic communities – their presence alone challenges dominant ideologies within and beyond the ethnic groups. Furthermore, and while studying some of the most successful migrant media projects in Greece, it became obvious that the presence of minority media initiates more democratic dialogue and participation:

- Minority media usually reflect the agenda that predominates in the communities they address. This happens for two reasons: the obvious marketing strategies is the one and the second is that minority media are usually small projects from within that have the reflexivity coming out of the everyday experience of their producers in/with the group. This reflexivity is immediately apparent in the minority press. For example, in many newspapers information and popularised explanations of migration and labour law, legalisation processes and social security take a predominant role

- The contribution of ICTs to the development of minority communication and community building is very diverse. On one hand, satellite television has opened up possibilities for immediate and simultaneous reception of television and radio from the countries of origin. On the other hand, and as most of the migrant communities are still very poor, computer technologies and the Internet still have a very marginal presence. Though this is less and less the case with the younger generations – especially computer literate children – the Internet has not become a broadly used platform of expression, information and communication. In this case, the digital divide is very visible in the low computer literacy and lack of access to computers by migrants.

Do Minority Media Matter?

*New figures of struggle and new subjectivities are produced in the conjuncture of events, in the universal nomadism, in the general mixture and miscegenation of individuals and populations, and in the technological metamorphoses of the imperial biopolitical machine* (Hardt and Negri, op. cit.: 61).
Mobility, cultural and population meetings and mixings and the symbolic and real experience of nomadism enabled by communication and transportation technologies open up new terrains for communication and dialogue, challenging boundaries and exclusions. Relevant research on ethnic minorities (e.g. Iordanova, op. cit.) and the experience within migrant communities (Goro, 2001; Giannopoulos, 2001) indicate that ICTs and the media have been of central importance in developing mediated networks and in sustaining community links within the ethnic groups in local, national and transnational scale, as well as links with their country of origin. These links develop from the early days of migration (Iordanova, op. cit.); in that way, migrants’ settlement and integration is rather faster compared to migrants in earlier historical times. In Greece for example, where the polity’s resistance in promoting long-term minority integration and the population’s xenophobia have a counter-effect on projects of inclusion, participation and community building, minority media have a particularly interesting role of resistance to subordination.

All this is particularly important, especially in countries where minority representations in mainstream media are extremely negative – this unfortunately being increasingly the case with the reproduction of stereotypes and expressions of indirect racism and xenophobia. In Greece, the mainstream media have played a very central role in the development of xenophobia and stereotypes against minorities – especially against some migrant groups – during the last 15 years (Marvakis, Parsanoglou and Pavlou, op. cit.). Populism characterising Greek reporting, especially in television crime reports that involve migrants, has literally led to public reactions of moral panic. In the first half of the 1990’s especially, the word Albanian became a synonym to criminal in the Greek commercial television and in a large fraction of the – conservative especially – press.

Minority media can become the counter-pole of mainstream media and political discourses of exclusion. The construction of alternative representations and even more of self-representations by the minorities for themselves can have multiple consequences: (i.) for minorities’ identities, as people can consume multidimensional and diverse representations of their community; (ii.) for minorities’ symbolic participation and
inclusion, as cultural production can make the community as a whole feel more empowered; (iii.) for minority’s active inclusion and participation as ethnic media can mediate information that concern them and become a bridge between the mainstream and the minority culture in its different expressions, and (iv.) for the majority population that can be reminded of the positive presence of minorities in the society through such media projects.

But more than anything, media cultures, as integrated in everyday life, relate to informal acts and tactics of resistance and empowerment. In minority communication spaces ethnic visibility is celebrated; it is positive rather than negative and defensive. For example, in Greece, the representation of Albanians in the ethnic press – in complete contradiction to the mainstream media representations – as hard working, as literary people and as a community proposes a self-identity that is denied by the majority of the population and the Greek polity. The existence of ethnic media alone is an act of resistance to the ideologies of minority exclusion; the potentials for self-representation, construction of images and sounds of communities that are not part of the problem or of the negative Other of Europe are by themselves a starting point for more powerful, active and participatory presence of minorities across Europe.

Even if the actual media content does not always help minorities develop knowledge and awareness about the social, economic and political system, the existence of alternative media alone:

(i.) can allow minorities to express and bring to the public domain alternative suggestions about employment, education and quality of life (e.g. they can show that different kinds of skills and different forms of economic activity can be valuably productive or indicate alternative mechanisms for successful forms of community life)

(ii.) can bring a sense of symbolic empowerment within minority groups; as cultures become increasingly mediated, the access and control of their own media can be compared to developing skills and having control of valuable resources
can potentially open up spaces for dialogue and for minority participation in setting agendas in local, national and transnational public spheres; it might be a long-term and difficult process with struggles both within a minority and between the minority community and the mainstream but this is a process of democratisation.

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