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The Seduction to be Connected: Globalization of the Media Industry and the Power of Local/Non-commercial Media

Abstract

This article argues that economic factors are critical to understanding the function and power of local non-commercial media. Other classifications such as those based on geographic area served (e. g., national, regional, local) and on the notion of community (e. g., community communication) are inadequate in explaining the differences between commercial and non- commercial local media. Drawing from Foucault's (1977) conception of power, the author develops a two-step model, called the transformation process from the information dispositive to a communication dispositive. This model and the accompanying figures help explain why local media initiatives operate within the information dispositive. Further, limitation of concern to the local arena is seen as an inadequate strategy which fails to acknowledge the importance of the global arena and potential for development of counter-power non-commercial local media.

Two great movements are currently dominating media development on both the national and international level. On the one hand, we can observe an increasing internationalization and networking of large media groups. This leads to a standardization and levelling of media content, as well as to a simplification and reduction of the dialogue and symbolic structure of media content in order to achieve international comprehension and provide a guaranteedquality. On the other hand, we find a differentiation of local media, which coincides with an individual need for clarity, self-determination and political participation, and which generally seems to accommodate a trend towards a revaluation of the local community.

However, studies of local media show that local needs and the need for participation in the local media are seldome taken seriously or, if they are, only to a limited extent (Langenbucher 1989, Jankowski, Prehn & Stappers, 1992; Meier, 1995; Jarren, 1995). Rather, a type of local radio, often called 'format radio', has prevailed – in Germany as well as elsewhere. A certain type of music defines the station with a very rigid and limited time frame for

talk, leaving much programming space for advertising. The target group consists primarily of young adults which the advertising industry considers to have high purchasing power (Widlok, 1994: 240).

This development does not come as a surprise inasmuch as the localization of broadcasting developed parallel to its privatization in all European countries, with the exception of countries in Scandinavia (Kleinsteuber, 1991; Dorer, 1995c) Today, the entire media market, including the local and regional markets, is characterized by media and capital concentration and by a conglomerate media structure in which priority is given to achieving synergy effects (Dorer, 1995a: 107 ff). National and international media corporations have largely divided the local and regional broadcasting markets between themselves.

Given a classification into national, regional and local media is of limited use when considering content or station financing, I suggest in this article a division into two components which does allow for differences in content and economy to be highlighted. These components are the commercial media market, and the 'alternative' or non-commercial media market.

Apart from the mainstream of commercial media markets, a media culture and thus a media segment has developed since the early 1970s in the context of new social movements and the constitution of new forms of protest movements. This media segment is usually summarized under the concept 'alternative media'. It includes newspapers and magazines, video initiatives, free radios, news agencies, as well as computer networks. Despite technological differences, common characteristics which distinguish these media from commercial media can be identified. A meaningful distinction, however, can only be made after a closer look at the whole of the alternative media and their contextuality, as well as the introduction of the "artificial concept of the non-commercial" (Kleinsteuber, 1991: 21). The existence of a commercial media sector has to be assumed, on the one hand, and an alternative or non-commercial one, on the other. With regard to broadcasting, the public broadcasting sector must be incorporated into these two media types.

The distinction between a commercial and a non-commercial media market implies fundamentally different structures (organizational, economic, content and ideological) of these markets, but includes their individually specific differentiation within the respective media system.

Characteristics of non-commercial media

To draw a line between commercial and non-commercial media, the concepts counter-public and new social movements remain of central importance (Beywl & Brombach, 1982; Stamm, 1988; Dorer, 1992a; 1992b). Other approaches, for example, through use of concepts such as 'local communication' or 'community communication' as occasionally attempted, do not really explain the difference.

Non-commercial media are directly linked with the emergence of protest movements and new social movements, and their action potential is primarily

related to the social movements which constitute them, so that a weakening of the movement has immediate effects on the scope of action of non-commercial media. The aim was and is to create a counter-public, which means communication and information apart from commercial media production. Which media technology is chosen – alternative magazine, free radio, program network or Internet – is secondary.

This is related to the fact that 'alternative media' are a product of social discourse which constantly distinguishes between 'true' and 'false' and thus integrates, marginalizes and even criminalizes. Progressive social movements and subcultures[1] and their media are the negation of the status quo and are always confronted with the social mechanisms of exclusion or inclusion so that their existence is one of precarious balance. The mechanism of exclusion and inclusion makes an essential contribution to the constant fluctuation and mobility of the non-commercial media sector. Rolf Schwendter (1992: 17) describes this phenomenon using Gilles Deleuze's concept of 'rhizomatics' or 'rhizomatization' (rhizomes are underground roots which branch out and reconnect) and means the natural growth and ramification of the movement, which constantly produces new media as soon as other non-commercial media have dissolved or have been integrated into commercial or consumer industry.

Non-commercial media differ from commercial media in terms of conceptualization, the premises of which are creation of a counter-public, maintenance of authenticity and autonomy in reporting, and rejection of an economic purposive rationality. In the literature (Weichler, 1987; Beywl & Brombach, 1982) this self-image is subsumed under the title 'relation of economy and purpose'. What is meant here is the fundamental difference from commercial media where the main interest is economic success. The crucial criterion of economic success is the circulation or range, which determines the market value for commercial media (both in terms of advertising and audience). Unlike commercial media, non-commercial media adhere primarily to stated objectives and ideologies such as counter-public, solidarity, participation and doing away with the separation of politics and everyday practice, even at the expense of self-exploitation. The freedom of the content and organizational structure are to be granted by economic autonomy (independence of advertising revenue and government subsidies). The contradiction between the priority of content and economic priority can generally not be resolved and only leads to changes or discontinuation of a medium once economic considerations have become a priority. Often the economic conditions of the media market are completely ignored. Another part of the self-image of non-commercial media is the idea of a self-determined working process, which is substantially different from that of commercial media.

The reverse side of a working process based on grassroots and participation principles is, however, that it involves high decision costs and hierarchical structures which often are concealed from view. The gap between the utopias of those who make non-commercial media and the actual power and

market conditions has by no means become smaller, but people who work in this area see it more clearly. Especially the rapid incorporation of new technologies shows that old paradigms have been replaced by new ones, and that the ability to learn from new social movements should not be underestimated.

Apart from these differentiation characteristics, the following factors must be taken into consideration for a scientific examination of non-commercial media in order to avoid an over- or underestimation of the non-commercial media system.

- Although subcultures and their media are usually anchored in a local context, their social concerns go beyond local interests, and can be understood in the sense of 'think global, act local'. In non-commercial media work and networks, the concepts globalization and localization refer equally to one another.

- On the one hand, non-commercial media production must be considered with a view to the whole non-commercial media system because different methods only reflect differentiated forms of a common communication structure. On the other hand, we must always think of non-commercial media in relation to the commercial media system because separation and exchange processes bring about mutual influences.

- The contextuality of non-commercial media production should be taken into account to a greater extent. The economic, political and media-political, and technological context influence the volume and form of non-commercial media production. It is found, for instance, especially in times of economic crises that new social movements become more active (Schwendter, 1992: 12).

- If the process of non-commercial media production is neglected, it leads to a change of norms and target values not being perceived and the learning ability and flexibility of subcultures being questioned.

- The contradiction between utopia and economy, visionary claims and economic conditions cannot be resolved, so that an isolated examination of one of the two quickly leads to a wrong judgement of the non-commercial media system. Studies on the economy of non-commercial media, for instance, have shown that, according to the logic of economic rules and the practice of financing models of commercial media businesses, non-commercial media could not even exist (Dorer, 1995b: 336 ff; Dorer & Busch, 1995: 236 ff). Although uncertain financing is one of the central problems of non-commercial media, it is not a crucial criterion for their existence or non-existence.

On the local orientation of non-commercial media

Non-commercial media, for instance non-commercial radio stations or the alternative press, are usually locally-based. Regarding the examination of alternative newspapers, communication scholars (Dorsch-Jungsberger, 1982; Jarren, 1992; Beywl, 1982) have paid increasing attention to the question

whether the non-commercial press could compensate for the journalistic deficiencies in one-newspaper areas. No empirical evidence was found, probably also because the reconstruction of journalistic variety at the regional level has never been the actual objective of alternative papers. Because of the fact that the non-commercial press is mainly locally based, research has overlooked the fact that creation of a counter-public is related to social topics, not necessarily to geographic regions.

The same is true for broadcasting. The concept community radio, as used by the World Association of Community Broadcasting (AMARC) blurs the line between the commercial and the non-commercial sector (see also differentiation made by Prehn, 1992: 260). The important aspects are not primarily locality, community or creating a feeling of community, but the articulation of counter-positions and the formation of a counter-power, which is more closely related to the concept of creating a counter-public than that of locality.

The locality of community stations is only a result of technological restrictions and political calculation. Community radio is not necessarily designed as such by its programmers. The locality is usually a result of a scarceness of frequencies and the reluctance of legislators to allocate regional and national frequencies to non-commercial stations.

This circumstance is done away with through the new technology of the Internet. With the Internet the borders of space and time have been broken down, giving counter-power and counter-public the chance to propagate via international networks beyond currently existing networks such as those constructed through organizations like AMARC and the Federation of Local Radio Stations (FERL).

Functions of non-commercial media from a democratic point of view

From this point of view, non-commercial media have more significance as providers of ideas and topics. Using individual topics, which are brought into public discourse by non-commercial media, their function of selecting topics to be discussed and their influence in the agenda-building process can also be demonstrated empirically.

Referring to the democratic function of non-commercial media, Mathes and Pfetsch (1991) examined the potential influence of the alternative press (*tageszeitung-taz, Hamburger Rundschau*) on commercial dailies and weeklies in an empirical study. Analyzing the discussion of the topic 'Census 1983' they concluded that the alternative press is capable of influencing the selection of subjects discussed in commercial print media to a great extent. It is interesting to see that not every topic is suitable for this transfer process. Topics such as the environment and transport can 'spill over' from an alternative magazine to commercial media within a few weeks. The condition for such 'spill-over' effect is, however, that the topic is also supported by a sufficiently broad social movement. The topic then spreads in waves from the alternative magazines to the established media and goes through the typical stages of a

topic career: latency, upswing, climax, decline. In certain cases not only the topics but also points of view for discussion can be transferred from the alternative press. Extreme positions are rarely carried over, differing opinions are usually levelled by the commercial press, so that the influence of alternative magazines on the interpretation of topics is very limited.

Thus the question about the agenda-building process not only includes the mutual perception of commercial and non-commercial media, but should also take into account that even with non-commercial media there are some products which can be considered 'established' (such as the *tageszeitung-taz*) and those which can be classified as 'radical' or 'extreme'.

From a democratic point of view, non-commercial media are an important complement and a necessary corrective force for an unified, fully commercialized media landscape, as they take on a function of articulation for relevant topics of subcultures. As the 'conscience of society', they perform educational and mobilization work which can directly initiate a social learning process, but this happens more often via the commercial mass communication system. Thus the non-commercial media are, from this point of view, an 'early warning system' of the media on which a complex risk society depends, if the stability of the whole system is to be granted. Considerations on the theories of democracy and systems produce analogous results. From the point of view of system theory, a society needs those sensors which make risks and conflict lines visible in order to be able to adequately react to them to maintain the system.

In summary this means that non-commercial media and their criticism of society are important for the social process of change.The embedding of media systems in democratic theory and system theory is one way to analyze the connection between mainstream media and alternative media. Another way to look more closely at this interaction is to take into account postmodern media theories, which become more and more important for social science and communication theories. One representative of postmodern media theory is Jean Baudrillard (1983). His theoretical approach to our information and communication societies is that the information overflow leads to an postmodern society in which information only destroys sense and meaning. In this way, the form of counter-control, as practiced by the new social movements, has integrated itself into the system. For, after all, counter-information is subject to the same mechanisms as information itself. This argument is based on the thesis that it is only a myth which makes us believe that there is such a thing as liberation or emancipation of the self. Rather, the aim of the system is the imperative to speak, which is responsible for an overproduction of information. The adequate counter-control would thus be a refusal of words and meaning, rather than the production of words and meaning in the form of alternative media production and networking. Ulrich Beck (1988: 19) argues the same way saying that "in the long term the most convincing opponent of the nuclear industry... is nuclear industry itself."

Power of the media

These two theoretical contexts of the non-commercial media system lead to the question of power of non-commercial media and the possibilities of resistance within an increasing internationalization and commercialization of the media system. Defining power according to Foucault (1977: 114), power is a complex strategic situation, which occurs in an interaction of unequal and mobile relationships, but which can never emanate from an individual person or institution. With regard to the media system, this means that it is not important to ask what power the media have (e. g., Böckelmann, 1988), but rather, how individual communication instances (such as journalism, public relations, advertising, opinion research, audience research, communication technology, development of the media market) are intertwined with other discourses (such as those of politics, the economy, science and culture), so that the media can fully develop their influence. It is only when all communication instances interact that discourse of public communication gains its power of attraction and control (Dorer & Marschik, 1993).

In this, resistance as counter-power is not outside of power; it is integrated into the system of power techniques. The counter-power is integrated into public discourse with the promise of a comprehensive democratization. 'Truth' is constituted by public communication, its production, circulation and influence is realized primarily through media channels. And resistance or counter-power are relevant for power only insofar as they confirm the 'truth', that is to say those rules, which separate 'true' from 'false'.

The transformation of power technique goes hand in hand with change in public discourse. Since the last century public discourse has evolved in roughly three stages. The struggle for freedom of the press until World War II should be considered a fight between censorship and the prohibition of censorship. It was only in the 1950s that the era of freedom of the media began, which then quickly changed to become an imperative of permanent speech and counter-speech, an obligation to confess and to communicate. All communication instances are involved in the change of the power technique within public discourse. The promise of democratization of society by democratizing public communication coincides also with development of the technical requirements for mass production of newspapers, which at the same time is the first historical step towards mass communication. The following chart shows the historical development of the public discourse and the way from an oppressed public opinion to an 'obligation to confess' which includes every social institution.[2] The change of public discourse goes hand in hand with a change of the legal framework, media technologies and communication techniques such as journalism, advertising or public relations.

The fight against censorship is one of the main issues of the new social movement, the working class movement, of the last century. But the right to communicate has been quickly transformed into an obligation to confess, and every social institution which does not express itself is considered non-existent in public discourse.

	Before 1848	After 1848	WW II	1950/60	1970/80
Legal frame-work	censorship	prohibi-tion of censorship	censorship	freedom of the media	freedom of communication
Purpose	uniform contents	diversity of the media	uniformity of con-tents and media	increase in contents and media	explosion of channels and norming of contents
Media	authoritar-ian	party media	propagan-da media	mass media	advertising media as free papers target group media, in-teractive media
Journal-ism	court reports	party and research journalism	propagan-da	announcing journalism	investigative journalism
Informa-tion sys-tems	differen-tiation of journalism	differen-tiation of journalism and adver-tising	differen-tiation of propagan-da and persuasion research	differentia-tion of opin-ion research	differentiation of public rela-tions, promo-tion, CC and sponsoring and interactive communication
Strategies of disci-plining	repression / criminalize	obligation to parti-sanship freedom / solidarity	repression indoctrina-tion edu-cation / criminalize	socialization integration knowledge and creating sciences / ethics	participation democratiza-tion and indi-vidualization seizing time / esthetics
Control of public opinion	censorship authorities	partisan journalism	censorship and de-nouncia-tion	advertising, market and opinion research, public relations and jour-nalism, communication technol-ogy etc., attraction and knowledge	
Business		creation of share-holding companies		economic boom, cor-poratism, identity of interests	affluence prod. new poverty, participatory and grass-roots claims
Society	corpora-tive state	class society	totalitarian society	information society	communication society

Figure 1: Genealogy of the Communication Dispositive

The abstraction of the historical model of the change of the public discourse suggests a two-step model called a transformation process from the information dispositive to a communication dispositive.[3] The interaction of polymorphous power techniques leads to a gradual replacement of the 'information dispositive' with the evolution of a 'communication dispositive'. According to Michel Foucault (1978: 119 ff) a dispositive is the plan of a strategic network, which, out of the knowledge and practice, forms a technical and strategic whole of controlling and regulating instances and influences the body and its desires.

The practice of suppressing public opinion by censorship turns into a categorical imperative of speech or, in the words of Foucault, to an "obligation to confess", which is a constant talking in the public in the media. "We are no longer experiencing the drama of alienation, we are experiencing the ecstasy of communication" (Baudrillard, 1987: 18). The explosion of channels and the differentiation of media technology segment the audience into consuming lifestyle types. Without the multiplication of space and time by technological 'armament', a worldwide overproduction of information and communication is unthinkable. The medium itself makes the event: "The implosion of the medium in reality deletes the meaning and the social at once. Thus the age of simulation and hyperreality begins" (Bolz, 1990: 132).

The power of the media is therefore not to be considered a power of oppression, a power of censorship or concealing, but rather a power of attraction and knowledge. The other side of the power of attraction is the obligation to confess and the constant increase in the production of 'truth'. With the desire of knowledge, the willingness to present reality authentically, a continual flow of information, pictures, texts, advertising and public relations is produced and in turn creates more communication specialists, who in turn produce more information, pictures, texts, advertisements and public relations.

This constant production leads to a stimulation of the public to consume, which makes the strategy of desire the prime mover of media consumption. In this way, the connection of publics to a complex media system constitutes the main function of the media: gaining time. It works by stimulation and attraction, not by repression and manipulation. Along with this disciplining of looking and listening, the self and behavior are administrated in databases and their availability as 'range' or 'circulation figures'. The disciplining and standardizing of publics is accomplished by connecting or disconnecting the self to the information network of the media.

While the order of the information dispositive is predominantly constituted by law, the norm replaces the law in the communication dispositive. The power of law and punishment is replaced by disciplining the look and listening, brought about by the norm.

As the information dispositive is becoming less and less credible and cannot meet the ideal of a democratic society, the communication dispositive appears and promises comprehensive democratization. Nothing less than the ful-

fillment of the century-old ideal of an equal exchange of speech and counter-speech is propagated (e. g., Habermas). The imaginary instance is communication, which is called upon to find the truth. The fulfillment of the communication model is suggested by the possibilities to articulate counter-opinions. The

	INFORMATION DISPOSITIVE	COMMUNICATION DISPOSITIVE
Characteristics:	Repression Oppression	Categorical imperative to constant multi- dimensional speech 'Constant speaking in public'
	Silence Concealing	Obligation to confess
	Prevention of information	Information overflow Explosion of channels Concellation of space and time (CNN 24 h news programme, Internet, etc.)
	Idea of enlightenment	Idea of freedom Communication ideal of equal rights in speech as the key of liberating the individual
Instances to control public opinion:	Censorship authorities Denounciation	Interaction of all communicative instances
Order of dispositive:	The law	The norm; what is valid as a norm (norm of contents, of form, of ways of reception, etc.)
Objective (Function):	Marginalization Exclusion	Disciplining the body (looks and listening) Normalization of contents/form Connection to the communication network (global and local, e. g. by watchman, walkman, Internet, etc.) Seizing time Administration in databases and constant availability via range and circulation
Type of power:	Power of punishment Power of repression	Power of attraction Power of knowledge Power of control

Figure 2: From the Information Dispositive to the Communication Dispositive

communication dispositive appears to be the most reasonable instrument in the constitution of a global, participatory world society. But the media, in their endless space and time expansion have taken over the role, and at the same time the prevention, of social communication.

Conclusion

Within the information dispositive, counter-power has a very limited potential because the integration of counter-power is dictated by a democratic imperative. The strategies which limit resistance and counter-power, and thus the potential influence of their media, have changed. Not the freedom of media is the basic value for expressing counter-opinion, but the obligation to confess. And it is in this power-play which determines the norm. The democratic imperative has replaced exclusion and prohibition. The norm determines according to which rules 'truth' is publicly constituted.

Confining resistance to locality, for instance, as happens when local radio frequencies are allocated by governments, is used as a strategy to contain the potential of protest. In the area of ecological and gene-technological risks, social conflicts are dealt with which fundamentally and basically cannot be negotiated. The objectives of potential resistance are not to achieve a little less depletion of the ozone layer, a little less nuclear waste, half a 'surrogate mother', but total change. To reduce social problems, which result from rapid development of global risk technologies, to communication problems in the local area, means to perpetuate the prevailing distribution of power because in this way a global threat is segmented into local confrontations and the problems are not solved. The segmentation of confrontation is probably one of the most crucial functions of the stabilization of power. Non-commercial media are thus a part of the local media system, although their spectrum of topics deals largely with global concerns. As local media they can be integrated into the whole media system more easily, which confines resistance and confrontation to the local area. It is easier to control resistance on the local level than on the global or international level. Allocating non-commercial media to the local area, the local public, thus encourages a potential shift of power.

From what has been said, an obligation of resistance and thus of non-commercial media to connect is based on a need to act more effectively, be it in the form of an international association such as AMARC or in a network via the Internet. This obligation can be interpreted as a seduction of power to be connected in order to be able to maintain the ideal of democratic communication and participation.

Notes

1. According to Rolf Schwendter, progressive subcultures, as opposed to regressive subcultures, are those subcultures which consciously integrate the working out of a new future in terms of their own norms, rather than using past ideas and ideologies as a basis (as for instance done by right-wing extremists); see Schwendter (1978; 1992).

2. I am using the term 'obligation to confess' in the meaning given by Michel Foucault (1977) as employed in his book *History of Sexuality*. For further explantation and detail see Chart 1 in Dorer & Marschik (1993).
3. The conception of the information dispositive and communication dispositive is an application of Foucault's (1977) description of the change of the sexuality dispositive. For further explanation see Dorer & Marschik (1993).

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