

# Koccc

**Centre for Critical Studies in Communication and Culture**

<http://homepages.vub.ac.be/~jteurlin/Koccc.html>

Session 'Social theory and discourse'

The international Social Theory Consortium

Second annual conference

Brighton, 5-8 July 2001



## ***Community media – Muting the democratic media discourse?***

Nico Carpentier, Rico Lie & Jan Servaes

### **Contact: Nico Carpentier**

Faculty of Political and Social Sciences

University of Antwerp - UIA

Universiteitsplein 1

B-2610 Wilrijk Antwerp

Belgium

☎: ++ 32 3 820 28 59

📠: ++ 32 3 820 28 82

💻: [carpent@uia.ua.ac.be](mailto:carpent@uia.ua.ac.be)

## ***Community media – muting the democratic media discourse?***

Nico Carpentier, Rico Lie & Jan Servaes

### Abstract

When Community media (CM) emerged in the seventies and eighties, their discourse on the democratisation of the airwaves offered a promising alternative to the rather paternalistic state media discourse, in a period that state media could be described by what Williams called 'an authoritarian system with a conscience'.

During the deregulation period most state broadcasting monopolies in Western Europe ended, opening the road for the commercialisation of the airwaves. Community media found themselves in a position of no longer being articulated as an alternative to the mainstream media discourse, but were reduced to the marginal. The attempts to articulate the CM as the 'third way' - explicit parts of civil society and as such independent from state and market - also largely failed. Their democratic media discourse, articulating the audience as active (both in production and reception) and the media organisation as open and participatory, was muted.

This paper investigates how the antagonistic relation of the CM towards the identity of state and commercial media, contributed to the failure to hegemonise their democratic media discourse, within the general framework of Laclau and Mouffe's political identity theory. The Deleuzian approach of CM as rhizome allows to incorporate aspects of contingency, fluidity and elusiveness in the analysis of CM, thus creating room for the mutual constitution and destabilising/deterritorialising of these identities and for a more agonistic approach based on (media) pluralism.

## 1. Introduction

The concept of 'community media' (CM) has shown to be, in its long theoretical and empirical tradition<sup>1</sup>, highly elusive. The multiplicity of media organisations that carry this name has caused most mono-theoretical approaches to focus on certain characteristics, while ignoring other aspects of the identity of community media. This theoretical problem necessitates the use of different approaches towards the definition of community media, which will allow for a complementary emphasis on different aspects of the identity of 'community media'. This paper firstly aims to combine four theoretical approaches in order to capture both the diversity and specificity of these community media and to show their importance.

This paper also claims that antagonism - used within the frame of the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) - plays a crucial role in the identity of community media. From the discourse-theoretical viewpoint, community media can be seen as the condensation of the attempt to offer an alternative for a wide range of hegemonic discourses on communication, media, economics, organisational structures, politics and democracy. Again, the four approaches will be used to analyse this broad range of alternative and hegemonic discourses. It is subsequently claimed that this antagonism towards state and market and the resistance against a multitude of hegemonic discourses has left the community media movement in a position of discursive isolation. The lack of strategic alliances has created the conditions of possibility for the muting of the democratic media discourse that is disseminated by these community media. The (organisational) bodies - in a Foucauldian sense - through which these discourses could function, disappeared.

Putting the fourth (rhizomatic) approach to the forefront nevertheless offers the opportunity of a rearticulation from an antagonistic position towards an agonistic position - as Mouffe (1999: 755) calls it - where the notion of pluralism enables the recognition of both the diversity of the media landscape and specificity of the different media organisations within this media landscape. This rearticulation based on a more fluid community media identity would enable these media to actively establish different types of linkages with (segments of) the state and/or the market - within loosing their proper identity - using the renewed (political) interest for revitalising the public sphere to their benefit. In this part of the paper a case study is presented on the attempts to revitalise these democratic discourses at the very local level of a project in a Belgian city. The conclusion of this paper will return to the fourth (rhizomatic) approach, again emphasising the importance of the agonistic position it supports.

## 2. Defining the identity of Community Media

Trying to capture the specificity and diversity of community media necessitates a multi-theoretical approach as a theoretical point of departure. Although this paper uses Laclau and Mouffe's political identity theory (1985) as an overarching theoretical framework, more essentialist approaches are incorporated (together with more relationist approaches) in order to give an overview of the components that construct the identity of community media.

---

<sup>1</sup> See for instance Janowitz work on the community press, which was first published in 1952.

Despite this incorporation of the more essentialist approaches, identities are still - following Laclau and Mouffe - basically seen as relational, contingent and the result of articulatory practices within a discursive framework. Special attention is given to the concept of antagonism, which is seen by Laclau and Mouffe as *'the limits of every objectivity'* or *'the impossibility of fully constituting [society]'* (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125). While social antagonisms are traditionally seen as a confrontation between actors with fully constituted identities, Laclau and Mouffe argue that social antagonisms both threat and constitute identities. In the case of antagonism *'the presence of the 'Other' prevents me from being totally myself'*, which means that within an antagonistic situation *'I cannot be a full presence for myself'* (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985: 125). At the same time the antagonism has a constitutive effect on identity (and society), as the 'other' becomes a purely negative point of identification or a constitutive outside. Howarth (2000: 106) for instance writes that the role of antagonisms *'is thus constitutive of social objectivity, as social formations depend upon the construction of antagonistic relations between social agents 'inside' and 'outside' a social formation.'*

In this paper it is contended that these antagonisms play an important role in defining the identity of community media, even in the traditional media-centred models. Although the first approach uses a more essentialist theoretical framework, stressing the importance of the community the medium is serving, others focus on the relationship between alternative and mainstream media, putting more emphasis on the relation of interdependency between two antagonistic sets of identities.

These traditional models for theorising the identity of community media are complemented with two more society-centred approaches. The third approach defines community media as part of civil society. Despite the basic assumption that these civil organisations differ fundamentally from market and state organisations, ample emphasis is put on the interdependency of these identities. In this approach the autonomy of the identity of civil society organisations remains an important theoretical assumption. For this reason a fourth approach is added, based on the Deleuzian metaphor of community media as rhizome. This approach allows (even more) to incorporate aspects of contingency, fluidity and elusiveness in the analysis of community media, thus radicalising the relationist alternative media approach and the relationist aspects of the civil society approach.

These four approaches can be summarised in Table 1:

**Table 1: Positioning the four theoretical approaches**

	<b>Media-centred</b>	<b>Society-centred</b>
<b>Autonomous identity of CM (Essentialist)</b>	<u>Approach I:</u> Serving the community	
<b>Identity of CM in relation to other identities (Relationist)</b>	<u>Approach II:</u> An alternative to mainstream	<u>Approach III:</u> Part of civil society <u>Approach IV:</u> Rhizome

### 3. Multi-theoretical approaches

A promising starting point for the analysis is given by the 'working definition' of community radio adopted by AMARC-Europe, the European branch of the World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters<sup>2</sup>; an organisation that encompasses a wide range of radio practices in the different continents. In Latin America, the AMARC constituents are termed popular radio, educational radio, miners' radio, or peasants' radio. In Africa, they refer to local rural radio, while in Europe it is often called associative radio, free radio, neighbourhood radio, or community radio. Asians speak of radio for development, and of community radio, in Oceania of aboriginal radio, public radio and of community radio (Servaes, 1999: 259). Attempting to avoid a prescriptive definition, AMARC-Europe (1994: 4) labels a community radio station as '*a "non-profit" station, currently broadcasting, which offers a service to the community in which it is located, or to which it broadcasts, while promoting the participation of this community in the radio*'.

#### 3.1 Approach one: Serving a community

In AMARC's working definition, it is nevertheless clear that there is a strong emphasis on the concept of 'community.' Moreover, the geographical aspect is explicitly highlighted ('*in which it is located*'), although other types of relationships between medium and community are often mentioned ('*to which it broadcasts*').

Within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, the concept of 'community' has a long history. Already in the previous century, Tönnies (translation 1963) theorised a distinction between community and society: where 'community' is defined by the presence of close and concrete human ties and by a collective identity, the prevalent feature of 'society' is the absence of identifying group relations (Martin-Barbero, 1993: 29). Morris and Morten (1998: 12-13) exemplify Tönnies' distinction by using the concepts 'communion' and 'association'; community thus refers to the '*notion of a big family*', while society '*represents a colder, unattached and more fragmented way of living devoid of co-operation and social cohesion. Instead of a sense of neighbourliness, people are isolated.*'

As Leunissen (1986) argues, conceptualisations of community refer predominantly to geography and ethnicity as structuring notions of the collective identity or the group relations. These structural conceptualisations of community are put firstly into perspective by introducing the concept of the 'community of interest', which emphasises the importance of other factors in structuring a community. Although one cannot explicitly assume that a group of people has common interests<sup>3</sup> (see, Clark 1973: 411 a. f.), the communality of interest can form the conditions of possibility for the emergence or existence of a community. Especially the analysis of the impact of information and communication technologies (ICT) on everyday life has shown that communities are not only formed in geographically defined spaces, but also in cyberspace, such as so-called 'usergroups'.

---

<sup>2</sup> The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters is usually referred to by its French acronym AMARC, or the 'Association Mondiale des Radio diffuseurs Communautaires'. The AMARC website can be found at: <http://www.amarc.org>.

<sup>3</sup> In sociology, a group of people that is formed based on common interests is usually referred to as a 'collectivity' (Merton, 1968:353). A collectivity does not always have direct interaction, but is often only based on a common goal or interest. The people who belong to a collectivity do not need to know each other, and one cannot always identify direct interaction between them.

Jones (1995) has shown that such 'virtual' or 'on-line' communities have similar characteristics as the geography-based communities<sup>4</sup>. The 'new' communities have further altered the rather fixed idea about space, clearly showing that geographical nearness is not in all cases a necessary condition for, or quality of, 'community.' As Lewis (1993: 13) remarks, a 'community of interest' can extend '*across conurbations, nations and continents*'. What is a defining feature for 'community' is the direct and frequent contact between the members and the feeling of 'belonging' and 'sharing'.

A second type of re-conceptualisation is based upon the emphasis of the subjective construction of community, where Lindlof's (1988) concept of 'interpretative community' and Cohen's (1989) 'community of meaning' are relevant. Although Lindlof's re-conceptualisation is specifically aimed at redefining the audience as a community, both re-conceptualisations approach the concept of 'community' from within. Cohen pleads for, in line with the above, '*a shift away from the structure of community towards a symbolic construction of community and in order to do so, takes culture, rather than structure as point of departure*' (Cohen, 1989: 70). Community is not something that is imposed on people from the outside and that, like a machine, punches structure in big metal plates. A community is actively constructed by its members and those members derive an identity from this construction. People extract a 'community identity' from their own constructed social communication structure. These different conceptualisations are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2: Defining community**

<i>Community as close and concrete human ties, as 'communion', as a collective identity, with identifying group relations.</i>		
<b><u>Traditional:</u></b>	<b><u>Re-conceptualisation 1:</u></b>	<b><u>Re-conceptualisation 2:</u></b>
	Supplementing the geographical with the non-geographical	Supplementing the structural/material with the cultural
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• Ethnicity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• community of interest</li> <li>• virtual or on-line community</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• interpretative community</li> <li>• community of meaning</li> </ul>

Community media are thus oriented towards a community, regardless of the exact nature of this community (defined geographically/spatially or otherwise), but the relationship between the community medium and the actual community transcends 'ordinary' one-way communication, where '*topics are chosen in the same way, by professional communicators, and targeted towards the apparent needs and interests of the audience.*' (Berrigan, 1979: 7) As is illustrated in AMARC's working definition (especially by the segment stating that community media should be '*promoting the participation of this community*'), relationships between broadcaster and community are defined by the concept of two-way communication. Access by the community and participation of the community are to be considered key defining factors, as Berrigan eloquently summarises: '*[Community media] are media to which members of the community have access, for information, education, entertainment, when they want access. They are media in which the community participates, as planners, producers, performers. They are the means of expression of the community, rather than for the community.*' (Berrigan, 1979: 8) Referring to the 1977 meeting in Belgrade, Berrigan (1979:18) (partially) links access to the reception of information, education, and entertainment considered relevant by/for the community: '*[Access] may be defined in terms of the*

<sup>4</sup> Hollander (2000: 372) correctly argues that geographically based communities can also use digital technologies, which implies that a clear dichotomy between 'virtual' and 'real life' communities is not tenable.



### 3.2 Approach two: Community media as an alternative to mainstream media

A second approach to defining community media is based on the concept of alternative media. This concept introduces a distinction between mainstream and alternative media, where alternative media are seen as a supplement to mainstream media. As alternative media are sometimes defined in a negative relationship towards mainstream media, the contingency of this concept should be emphasised: what is considered 'alternative' at a certain point in time could be defined as mainstream at another point in time. The societal context in which alternative media function is inseparable from the concept of 'alternative media' and can serve as a starting point for the definition of alternative media. Present day mainstream media are usually considered to be:

- Large-scaled and geared towards large, homogeneous (segments of) audiences
- State-owned organisations or commercial companies
- Vertically structured organisations staffed by professionals
- Carriers of dominant discourses and representations

Alternative media can take a (or several) opposite position(s) on these matters:

- Small-scaled and oriented towards specific communities, possibly disadvantaged groups, respecting their diversity
- Independent from state and market
- Horizontally structured, allowing for the facilitation of audience access and participation within the frame of democratisation and multiplicity
- Carriers of non-dominant (possibly counter-hegemonic) discourses and representations, stressing the importance of self-representation

A more elaborate description of these different domains is given by Lewis (1993: 12), as seen in Table 4:

**Table 4: Defining alternative media<sup>6</sup>**

Domain	Examples of the domain
Motive or purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection of commercial motives</li> <li>• Assertion of human, cultural, educational ends</li> </ul>
Sources of funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rejection of state or municipal grants</li> <li>• Rejection of advertising revenue</li> </ul>
Regulatory dispensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervised by distinct institutions</li> <li>• Independent / 'free'</li> </ul>
Organisational structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horizontal organisation</li> <li>• Allowing 'full' participation</li> <li>• Democratisation of communication</li> </ul>
Criticising professional practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging voluntary engagement</li> <li>• Access and participation for non-professionals</li> <li>• Different criteria for news selection</li> </ul>
Message content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supplementing or contradicting dominant discourses or representations</li> </ul>

<sup>6</sup> Table 4 is a reprint of the list Lewis (1993: 12) mentions. Some of the examples in table 4 were added by us.

Relationship with audience and/or consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Degree of user/consumer control</li> <li>• Allowing the needs and goals to be articulated by the audience/ consumers themselves</li> <li>• Democratisation of communication</li> </ul>
Composition of the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young people, women, rural populations</li> <li>• Diversity and multiplicity</li> </ul>
Range of diffusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local rather than regional or national</li> </ul>
Nature of research methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Qualitative, ethnographical and long term research</li> </ul>

Source: Lewis, 1993: 12

This second approach of community media defines these media as an alternative to mainstream media, supplementing mainstream media both on the organisational as on the content level. At the organisational level, the existence of community media shows that media can exist independently from state and market. As the pressure on large-scale mainstream media in order to become more market-oriented tends to be considerable, community media show that 'the third way' is still open for media organisations. The same argument can be applied for the (internal) structure of the media organisation, as large-scale mainstream media organisations have a tendency towards a more vertical structure. Again, the more horizontally structured community media show that alternative ways of organisation, and more balanced and/or horizontal structures, remain actual possibilities.

On the content level, community media can offer representations and discourses that vary from those originating from the mainstream media. The main reason for this difference can be found at the higher level of participation of different societal groups and communities and the aim to provide 'air space to local cultural manifestations, to ethnic minority groups, to the hot political issues in the neighbourhood or locality.' (Jankowski, 1994: 3) Mainstream media tend to be oriented towards different types of elites, as is the case, for instance, in mainstream news broadcasts favouring government sources, often resulting in what is often called structural bias (see McNair, 1998: 75 a. f.). The orientation of community media towards giving voice to various (older and newer) social movements, minorities, and sub/counter-cultures and the emphasis on self-representation, can result in a more diverse content, signifying the multiplicity of societal voices.

At the same time, the critical stance towards the production values of the 'professional' working in mainstream media leads to a diversity of formats and genres and creates room for experimentation with content and form. In this fashion, community media can be rightfully seen as a breeding ground for innovation, later often recuperated by mainstream media.

### **3.3 Approach three: Linking community media to the civil society**

The explicit positioning of community media as independent from state and market supports the articulation of community media as part of civil society. Civil society is deemed important for a variety of reasons, summarised here by Keane (1998: xviii):

- 'Civil society gives preferential treatment to individuals' daily freedom from violence;
- the importance of enabling groups and individuals freely within the law to define and express their various social identities;

- *the impossibility, especially in the era of computerised networks of communication media, of nurturing 'freedom of communication' without a plurality of variously seized non-state communications media;*
- *the superiority of politically regulated and socially constrained markets as devices for eliminating all those factors of production that fail to perform according to current standards of efficiency.*
- *But of special interest [...] is the subject of democracy or, more precisely, the intellectual and political need to revive the democratic imagination.'*

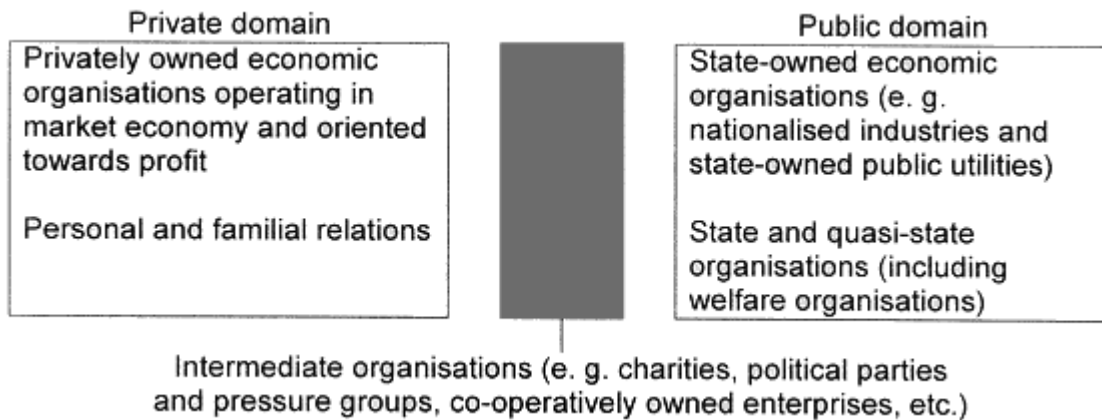
By defining community media as part of civil society, these media can be considered the 'third voice' (Servaes, 1999: 260) between state media and private commercial media. One of the clearest examples of this articulation can be found in the introduction of Girard's 'a passion for radio', where he formulates the following answer to the question of 'a passion for [community] radio?': 'The answer to that question can be found in a third type of radio – an alternative to commercial and state radio. Often referred to as community radio, its most distinguishing characteristic is its commitment to community participation at all levels. While listeners of commercial radio are able to participate in the programming in limited ways – via open line telephone shows or by requesting a favourite song, for example – community radio listeners are the producers, managers, directors and even owners of the stations.' (Girard, 1992: 2)

A starting point for defining community media as (part of) civil society can be found in Thompson's model describing the public and private domains in contemporary Western societies, where organisations related to the state are seen as constituting the public domain. Privately owned economic organisations geared towards profit, and personal and family relations are considered to be part of the private domain. Based on this distinction, civil society can be defined as a group of intermediate organisations, separate from the privately owned economic organisations operating in the market economy, personal and family relations<sup>7</sup> and from the state and quasi-state organisations. Table 5 shows the positioning of civil society in between the private and public domain.

---

<sup>7</sup> When defining civil society, Cohen and Arrato (1992: ix) explicitly include what they call the intimate sphere. The exact nature of civil society, and the question which spheres to include is beyond the objectives of this text.

**Table 5: Private and public domains in contemporary Western societies<sup>8</sup>**



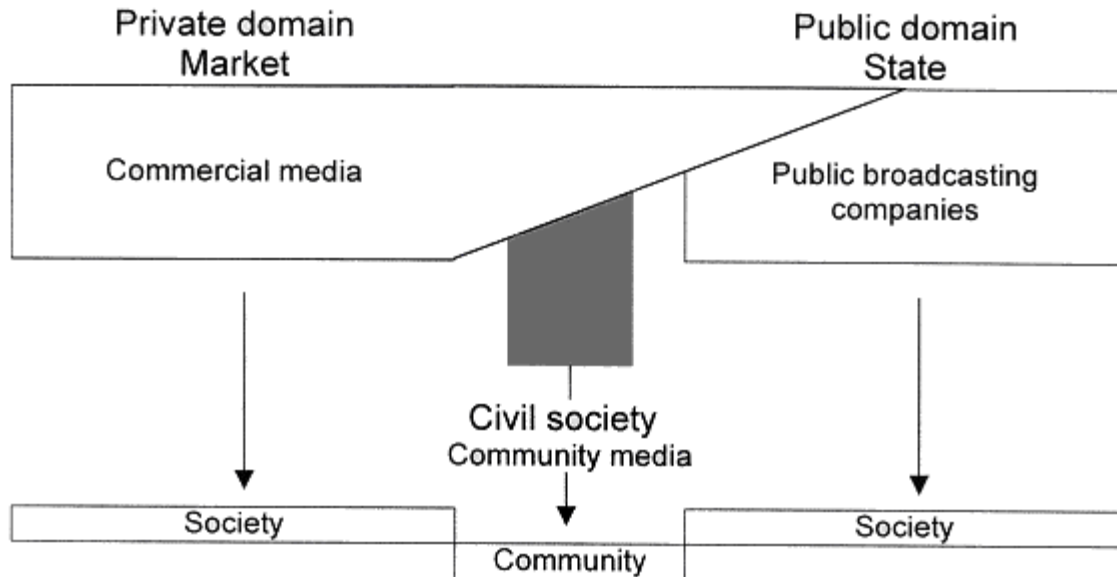
Source: Thompson, 1995: 122

Although the nature and structure of civil society varies across regions and continents, this Western-inspired model tends to be applicable in most continents, as the neo-liberal market economy has become the predominant form of organising society. Even in societies where the public domain is to be considered repressive towards civil society, different forms of what Lewis (1993: 127) named '*pockets of resistance*' emerge, as could well be illustrated by the existence of the Samizdat in the former USSR.

When reworking Thompson's model for the specificity of media organisations, a series of changes should be implemented to the model. Media deregulation, or more generally, the impact of the neo-liberal discourse on media policies, has prompted public broadcasting organisations (in some continents) to adopt more market- and efficiency-driven approaches. This includes an increased emphasis on audience maximisation (see e.g., Ang, 1991), thus orienting these broadcasting companies' efforts (even) more towards the societal level, and less to the community level. The reworked model in Table 6 also shows how this reorientation has allowed the market-driven approach to penetrate the public domain.

<sup>8</sup> Table 5 is a replica of Thompson's (1995: 122) model on public and private domains. Table 6 on the next page is based on the table 5, but has been thoroughly reworked.

**Table 6: Media, market and state**



Based upon: Thompson, 1995: 122

The third approach defines community media as part of civil society, a societal segment considered crucial for the viability of democracy. Although the nature of civil society can vary extensively across nations and continents, it is argued here that, following Cohen and Arrato (1992: vii-viii), this concept is relevant to most types of contemporary societies and can be seen as an important locus for the expansion or deepening of democracy by means of increasing the level of participation (see Held, 1987).

Community media can firstly be seen as an 'ordinary' part of civil society, as one of the many types of organisations that is active in the field of civil society. The democratisation of media, as Wasko and Mosco (1992: 7) call this, allows citizens to be active in one of many (micro-)spheres relevant to daily life and to exert their rights to communicate. Secondly, as different political philosophers (from Rousseau, J.S. Mill and Wollstonecraft onwards) have pointed out, these forms of micro-participation are to be considered important, because they allow people to learn and adopt democratic and/or civic attitudes, thus strengthening (the possible forms) of macro-participation. Verba and Nie (1987: 3) summarise this as follows: '*a participatory polity may rest on a participatory society*'. Held (1987: 280) uses another catchy phrase to exemplify this: '*we learn to participate by participating*.'

When the specificity of broadcasters and their potential role as (one of the) major public sphere(s) is brought into focus and community media are not defined as just 'ordinary' parts of civil society, these media become important because they contribute to what Wasko and Mosco (1992: 13) call the democratisation *through* media. Community media can overcome the absolutist interpretation of media neutrality and impartiality, and offer different societal groups and communities the opportunity for extensive participation in public debate and for self-representation in the (or a) public sphere, thus entering the realm of enabling and facilitating macro-participation.

### 3.4 Approach four: Community media as rhizome

Although the civil society approach defines community media in (a negative) relation to the state and market, this theoretical position is still based on the autonomous identity of the different actors and tends to ignore the contingency and interdependency of these identities. For this reason the civil society approach is radicalised building on Deleuze and Guattari's theory of the rhizome (1987) and combined with the relationist approach of community media as alternative media.

The metaphor of the rhizome is based on the juxtaposition of rhizomatic and arbolescent thinking<sup>9</sup>. The arbolescent is linear, hierarchic and sedentary, and could be represented as *'the tree-like structure of genealogy, branches that continue to subdivide into smaller and lesser categories'* (Wray, 1998: 3). It is, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the philosophy of the State. On the other hand, the rhizomatic is non-linear, anarchic and nomadic. *'Unlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point ...'* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 19).

Not only will this metaphor further highlight the role of community media as the crossroads of organisations and movements linked with civil society, it will also allow incorporating the high level of contingency that characterises community media. Both their embeddedness in a fluid civil society (as part of a larger network) and their antagonistic relationship towards the state and the market (as 'alternative' to mainstream public and commercial media) make the identity of community media highly elusive. In this approach it is argued that this elusiveness and contingency, as is the case for a rhizome, forms its main defining element.

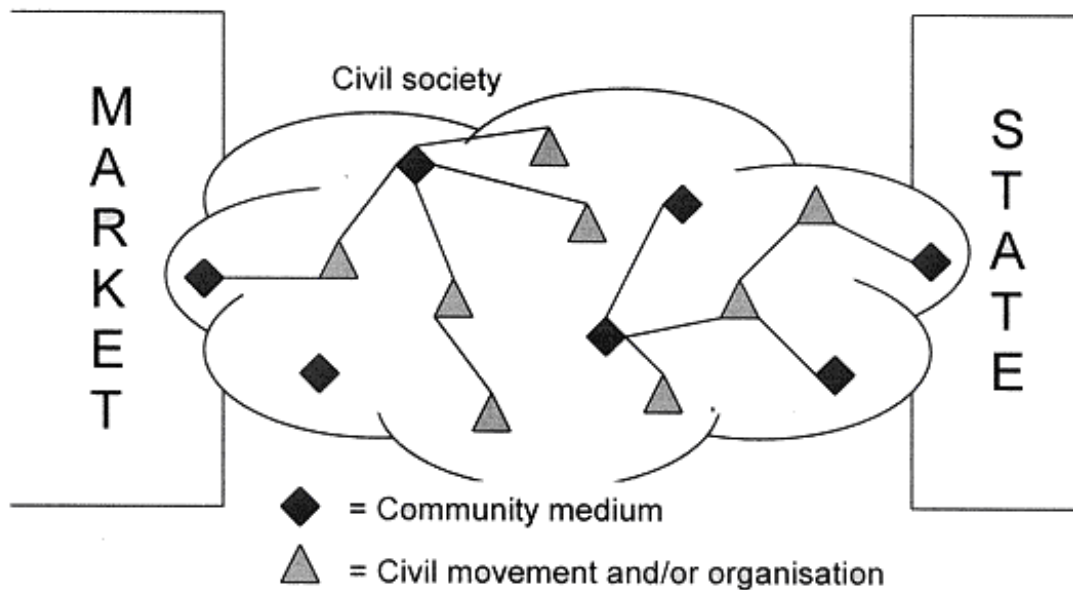
As rhizomes, community media tend to cut across borders and build linkages between pre-existing gaps: *'a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organisations of power and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles'* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 7). In the case of community media, these connections apply not only to the pivotal role community media (can) play in civil society, but also to the linkages community media (and other civil organisations) can establish with (segments of) the state and the market, without losing their proper identity. In this sense, community media do not operate completely outside the market and/or the state, thus softening the antagonistic relationship (as being an alternative to the mainstream) towards the market and the state. Community media establish different types of relationships with the market and/or the state, often for reasons of survival, and in this fashion they can still be seen as potentially destabilising or deterritorialising - as it is called in Deleuze and Guattari's theory - the rigidities and certainties of public and commercial media organisations.

The visualisation of both the elusiveness of the rhizomatic network, and its deterritorialising potential towards the more rigid media organisations in the public and private domain can be found in Table 7. It should of course be noted that even the vertically structured market and state organisations can show a high degree of fluidity when analysed separately. Their rigidity becomes clearer when they are compared to civil society organisations.

---

<sup>9</sup> Deleuze and Guattari have developed a theory that is situated within the field of epistemology. Here we focus more on organisational structures that are seen as the sedimentation of the arbolescent and/or rhizomatic ways of thinking.

**Table 7: Civil society and community media as rhizome**



This fourth approach builds further onto the importance that is attributed to civil society and (in relation to) democracy. In contrast to the third approach, the main emphasis for describing the importance of community media is not their role as part of the public sphere, but the catalysing role they can play by functioning as the crossroads where people from different types of movements and struggles meet and collaborate, such as people from different women's, peasants', students', and/or anti-racist movements. In this fashion community media not only function as an instrument giving voice to a group of people related to a specific issue and/or, but also can function as a catalyzator, re-articulating impartiality and neutrality and grouping people and organisations active in different types of struggle for equality (or other issues).

Especially in the field of radical democratic theory, ample emphasis is attributed to the necessity for linking diverse democratic struggles in order to allow the '*common articulation of, for example, antiracism, antisexism and anticapitalism*', as one of the proponents puts it (Mouffe, 1997: 18). She continues by stressing the need to establish an equivalence between these different struggles, as it is not considered sufficient to establish '*a mere alliance*' (Mouffe, 1997: 19) but deemed necessary to modify '*the very identity of these struggles ... in order that the defence of workers' interests is not pursued at the cost of the rights of women, immigrants or consumers.*' (Mouffe, 1997: 19)

The approach of community media as rhizomatic also makes it possible to highlight the fluidity and contingency of (community) media organisations, in contrast to the rigid ways mainstream public and commercial media often (have to) function. Because of the elusive identity of community media, they can – by their mere existence and functioning – question and destabilise the rigidities and certainties of public and commercial media organisations. At the same time, this elusiveness makes community media (as a whole) hard to control and to encapsulate in legislation, thus guaranteeing their independence.

#### 4. The failure to hegemonise the democratic media discourse

Despite the importance that is attributed to community media in all four theoretical approaches, the situation for many of these media organisations in most European countries can be described as problematic. When turning to the Belgium community radio stations as an example, only two of the four original ORCA<sup>10</sup>-members are currently still broadcasting in North-Belgium, although two new community radio stations recently been established (Fmbssl in Brussels and Urgent in Ghent). Compared to an estimated number of 300 commercial local radio stations (broadcasting independently or part of a network or chain) and the five public radio stations operating in North-Belgium, this number of community radio stations is rather limited. In South-Belgium the situation of the Walloon community radio stations is less grim: ALO has for instance about 10 members, including OSR, Radio Panik and Radio Air Libre. Still, community radio stations are still largely outnumbered by the commercial and public radio stations.

When trying to explain the current problematic situation of these (Belgian) community media and the reasons why their attempts to be articulated as the 'third way' - as explicit parts of civil society and as such independent from state and market - failed, the emphasis is placed on the identity of these community media and on their antagonistic relation towards the identity of state and commercial media. This part of the paper tries to argue that the muting of this democratic media discourse, articulating the audience as active (both in production and reception) and the media organisation as open and participatory, is related to the multitude of the discourses whose hegemony community media have tried to resist. Their war of position - to use one of Gramsci's metaphors - on a series of fronts has justly earned them the label of 'radical media' Downing (1984) has attributed to them. Community media tend to share remarkably little nodal points with mainstream media or other organisations operating within dominant discourses.

Again, we return to the four theoretical approaches that not only offer the possibility to analyse the importance of community media, but also allow to chart the different dominant discourses on communication, media, economics, organisational structures, politics and democracy.

The first approach puts emphasis on serving the community by offering them a horizontal channel of communication. While the dominant discourse on media is based on one-way communication, raising the community's interest to go beyond this limited form of communication does not speak for itself, due to what can be called the lack of two-way communication skills and interest. This problem is strengthened because of the impact of this dominant discourse on technological developments. This impact had led to an abundance of specific technologies oriented towards one-way communication and a lack of technologies facilitating two-way communication.

Moreover, the concept of 'community' – central to the identity of community media – has often been reduced to its geographical articulation. When community media emerged in the seventies and eighties they choose to orient their ambitions towards small-scale communities and local activities, partially also as an alternative to a rather paternalistic state media discourse, based on creating national (political) unity. In that period state media could be described by what Williams (1976: 117) called '*an authoritarian system with a conscience*', oriented towards the public as a whole. As

---

<sup>10</sup> The original members of the '*Organisation of Radio stations for a more Creative use of the Acoustics*' are Radio Centraal, Radio Katanga, Radio Progres and Radio Scorpio. The first two radio stations are still broadcasting.

Williams puts it: *'The paternal system transmits values, habits, and tastes, which are its own justification as a ruling minority, and which it wishes to extend to the public as a whole.'* While the state media aspired national unity, community media defended diversity and locality. This discourse of locality and diversity has trapped community media in the position of small-scale local media, gradually de-emphasising their role towards serving the community and eventually luring them into copying commercial media formats in their efforts to survive.

When pursuing the second approach even further - articulating community media as an alternative to mainstream media - the antagonistic relationship with mainstream media has not only led to a critical stance towards serving the unified and large-scaled public. The identity of community media was also in antagonistic relationship towards the liberal media discourse that gained its momentum during the deregulation and privatisation period, ending most state broadcasting monopolies in Western Europe. This deregulation has of course also affected general media policies and the public broadcasting companies, who took a strong interest in audience maximisation and other concerns derived from the competitive commercial system: *'to better serve the audience, in a time when their authority, so taken for granted in the past, has been eroded by the growth of commercial competition'* (Ang, 1991: 31). This further strengthening of the liberal media discourse has placed community media even in a less advantageous position. Being small-scale, independent, and horizontally structured organisations that carry non-dominant discourses and representations - thus re-articulating media impartiality and neutrality - hardly guarantees financial and organisational stability. The rejection of advertising as a prime source of income by community media places them in a financially hazardous situation, sometimes making them limp from one financial crisis to another.

Especially when the antagonistic relationship between and with public and commercial media is placed in the context of competition and these media try to hegemonise their identities at the expense of community media, the latter usually pay the price. Community media are then articulated as unprofessional, inefficient, limited in their capacity to reach large audiences and as marginal as some of the societal groups to whom they try to give voice. In this fashion, the need for an alternative is denied, as mainstream media are deemed to cover all functions considered relevant to society.

One of the main consequences of marginalising the alternative (or articulating it negatively, for instance as naïve, irrelevant or superfluous) is the low political priority given to what is considered to be 'marginal', causing a downward spiral for community media. The approach of community media as rhizome uncovers a related threat to the existence of community media. These media may signify the fluidity and contingency of media organisations, in contrast to the rigidities and certainties of public and commercial media organisations. At the same time this elusiveness might prevent the existence of a 'common ground' on which policy may act. This lack of a clear 'common ground', unifying and structuring community media as such, also complicates the functioning of the organisations representing community media (such as, for instance, AMARC) and has prevented in the past the emergence of a well-defined community media movement.

The third approach adds a new problem to the complex relationship between community media as part of civil society, and state and market (organisations). Except from distancing itself from the orientation towards (economical) efficiency that characterises both state and market, community media also resist the current political and democratic discourses that still stress the representative

role of a political elite and (other) vertical types of organisation. When focussing on the internal functioning of community media, it should firstly be mentioned that they carry organisational discourses that stress a horizontal organisation in stead of a vertical or hierarchical type of organisation. These different articulations of authority and leadership support a more dialogical and/or deliberative form of decision-making and a more participatory democracy. As such do community media draw on a concept of democracy that acknowledges the political more than it does politics. While '*politics*' is defined as: '*conceived as constituting a separate system, the political system, and is expected to stay within the boundaries of this system*' (Stavrakasis 1999: 71), '*the political cannot*' - according to Mouffe (1997: 3) - '*be restricted to a certain type of institution, or envisaged as constituting a specific sphere or level of society. It must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition*'.

At the same time should it be emphasised that '*making participatory democracy work*', to rephrase the title of one of Putnam's (1993) main publications, is a very difficult task that needs constant attention. Organisations that are horizontally structured and oriented towards community participation have to deal with a certain degree of inefficiency, sometimes making their functioning and the realisation of their objectives impossible or in other instances perverting these objectives. As Held (1987: 281) puts it: '*it is at least questionable whether participation per se leads to consistent and desirable political outcomes*'.

## **5. Attempts to revitalise the democratic media discourse: a case study of Kijk de Wijk – Look my neighbourhood**

Community media have been shown to be unable to reverse all hegemonic discourses discussed above, but despite their grim situation some of these media have managed to exist and broadcast for more than 20 years. Although their democratic (media) discourse has been effectively muted, the impact of (neo-)liberal thought on the organisation and functioning of mainstream media has prompted a renewed interest in community media.

The approach of community media as rhizome offers sufficient possibilities to theorise the re-articulation of the identity of community media, both respecting the role mainstream media still have to play as a constitutive outside for the community media identity and the linkages community media can establish with (segments of) the state and the market, without losing their proper identity. Replacing the antagonistic relationship towards mainstream media by an agonistic relationship '*presupposes that the "other" is no longer seen as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an "adversary," i. e., somebody with whose ideas we are going to struggle but whose right to defend those ideas we will not put into question*' (Mouffe, 1999: 755). This will also allow community media to continue deterritorialising the rigidities and certainties of different types of organisations and structures, including the public and commercial media organisations.

In this part of the paper the combination of theoretical approaches to community media is illustrated by a case study on a Belgian project called 'Kijk de Wijk'<sup>11</sup>. The rhizomatic approach allows to value the support that is given to the community, by functioning as the crossroads for different types of organisations and groups, stimulating democratic (local) culture. Despite their critical stance

---

<sup>11</sup> 'Kijk de Wijk' can be translated as 'Look my neighbourhood' and will be abbreviated as KdW.

towards state and market, these organisations - including the radio station involved in the project - have engaged themselves in a strategic alliance with (mainly) government bodies, thus collaborating with different segments of the state and market and creating a more agonistic position towards them, which eventually ensured the success of the KdW-project.

### **5.1 Societal Context of the KdW-project**

The KdW-project is situated in an area of Antwerp called Seefhoek, which is part of the North Belgian city's 19<sup>th</sup> Century industrial belt. Though Antwerp is considered to be one of the centres of gravity of the Belgian economy - because of its large harbour and key role in the trade of diamonds, to name but two - different areas of this town with 500.000 inhabitants are considered to be deprived. A complex set of societal problems, complemented with a very high number of votes for the extreme right party 'Vlaams Blok'<sup>12</sup> have prompted policy makers at different levels to invest in these deprived areas, in order to improve living conditions and the social and economic texture. These funding opportunities included the use of the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and the North Belgian Social Impulse Fund (SIF), with the Cultural Projects Fund (CPF) as one of its programmes.

### **5.2 A brief sketch of KdW**

A group of social organisations<sup>13</sup> - with among them one of the few community radio stations left in North Belgium (Radio Centraal in Antwerp) - applied for a CPF-funding for the KdW-project. The project has two main objectives: to give media training to people living in the Seefhoek-area, and to improve the image of that area. In order to achieve these objectives a series of activities is planned, including audio and video training workshops, radio broadcasts on Radio Centraal, photo exhibitions, making (and distribution) of a neighbourhood newspaper and the development of a web-site giving an overview of the produced content, and a virtual impression of a neighbourhood in the making.

At this point in time 11 media training workshops have been organised:

- Three workshops for 8 members of 'Brandpunt 23' (a local working group for 'social photography'), discussing technical and content related aspects of social photography with two professional photographers.
- Three workshops for a group of 12 young asylum seekers, introducing them to the relevant techniques and allowing them to make a series of video and audio documentaries related to the topic of travel.
- One workshop for a group of 6 children, in collaboration with a Gynaika-project. Gynaika uses a bus to organise a series of multimedia and art workshops located at different squares in Antwerp. The collaboration enabled a small group of children to interview bystanders.

---

<sup>12</sup> At the most recent election of the Community Council (on 8 October 2000), 33% of the Antwerp population (inhabitants that were entitled to vote) voted for the 'Vlaams Blok'.

<sup>13</sup> These organisations are: Het oude Badhuis ('the Old Bathing House' – a social centre), Brandpunt 23 ('Focus 23' – a local working group for 'social photography'), Kzinix (an organisation working on audio-visual projects), Het Noordelijk halfrond ('The Northern Hemisphere' - an organisation placing cultural activities in a social change framework), PSC ('Protestant Social Centre'), AMAS ('Antwerp Minor Asylum Seekers' - an organisation giving support to minor asylum seekers) and Grote Goesting ('Great Desire' – a theatre production in collaboration with local residents)

- One workshop ('How to be famous I') for the (regular and occasional) visitors of the 'Oude Badhuis', allowing about 25 local youngsters to use a basement television studio (specifically constructed for the occasion) after a short training. Images were made at a neighbouring square the day before and used as a 'teaser' to attract the attention of potential participants. The day of the actual workshop, when the site (the 'Oude Badhuis') was an open house, the participants registered and interviewed the other visitors. They also edited the material themselves, which was broadcast using an internal television circuit
- Three workshops ('How to be famous II') for 10 (regular) visitors of the PCS, training them in the use of audio and video equipment, after which they were allowed to take the equipment home. The collected material was then edited, resulting in a 30-minute news broadcast about the neighbourhood.

These workshops were complemented with the exhibition 'Great people' and three neighbourhood newspapers. In the 'Great people'-exhibition 12 'local heroes' were photographed and interviewed. These pictures were enlarged to a 5x3 metres format and put on display on different locations, where the interviews could be heard through speakers hidden in a cellar window, a tree, a letter box, or through an open window in a nearby house. During the opening of the exhibition artists who were born in the Seefhoek performed and several hundred inhabitants<sup>14</sup> paraded – accompanied by local brass bands – from picture to picture. In the three newspapers (printed on 15000 copies and distributed in the neighbourhood<sup>15</sup>) residents told their life- and living-stories. These residents were also portrayed in the newspapers by one of the teachers of the 'social photography'-workshop.

Other activities, such as a new series of workshops, two 'ordinary' radio broadcasts, one live low-power radio broadcast in the neighbourhood itself<sup>16</sup>, a subproject with the collaboration of the residents of an estate in the Seefhoek, the virtual neighbourhood web-site, one new neighbourhood newspaper and the closing exhibition, still have to take place.

### **5.3 More on the objectives of KdW**

As mentioned before the two main objectives of this project are giving media training to people who live in the Seefhoek-area, and improving the image of that area. Both objectives are interrelated, as the residents are trained in the use of media technology, in order to control themselves the image of their area being (re-)created. As is mentioned in the application text: *'the aim is to allow the participants to function in complete autonomy when registering and interpreting the events deemed important by him/herself in their immediate neighbourhood.'* In one of the letters to the residents, one of the trainers writes: *'We would like to record the changes, on photo, film, though radio and a newspaper. But we would like to be able to choose the changes. We would like to see the neighbourhood change the way the inhabitants think the neighbourhood should change.'* The

---

<sup>14</sup> Other inhabitants showed their dissatisfaction with the presence of non-white 'local heroes'.

<sup>15</sup> Especially the third newspaper met with resistance from one of the other local newspapers (the 'Wijkgazet'). The 'Wijkgazet' is also funded by the SIF and uses a more traditional approach, combining semi-political communication and the distribution of local information by a professional redaction. It was feared that the 'populist' approach of the KdW-newspaper would increase the support for the Vlaams Blok, instead of diminishing it.

<sup>16</sup> This can consequently be considered as a form of neighbourhood radio.

combination of both objectives will result in a virtual image of a new Seefhoek, (partially) based on the content produced by the residents, that will serve as a '*plan, project and programme for the future*'.

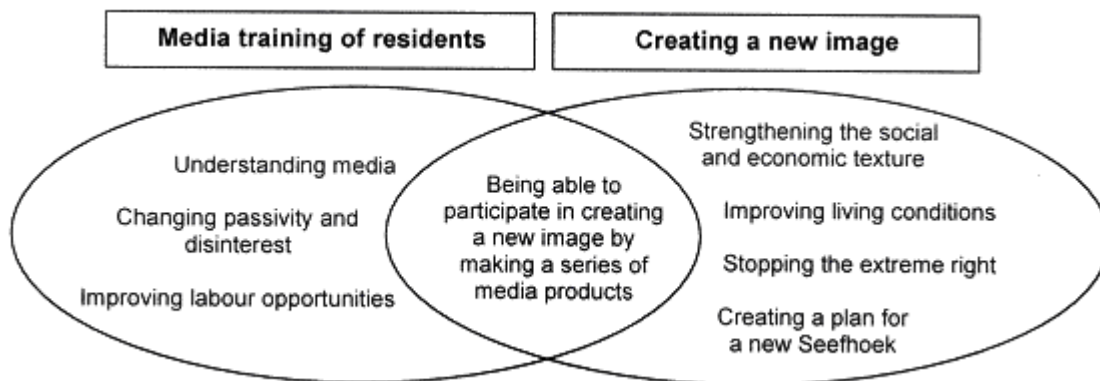
At the same time the training workshops and the learning process that lies behind the creation of the different media products, serves a series of more independent objectives:

- Helping the participants understand the functioning of the mass media, mainly through an analysis of media power (based on a combination of a political economy approach and a more culturally inspired critique on media representation). In the letter mentioned above, the trainer writes: '*We think it is important that people gain more power over the media. Television for instance is often made for financial reasons and not for the pleasure of the viewers. It is important that we really experience how media work. That way we can all become little journalists.*'
- Changing the perceived participants' cultural and political passivity and disinterest. This objective is summarised in the application dossier as follows: '*The democratic level of our society will increase when citizens have a more nuanced view on different problems and when they function less as a individual and more as a community.*'
- Improving the participants' opportunities on the labour market. As the Seefhoek is characterised by a level of unemployment that lies well above the town's average and the educational level lies well below average, it is claimed that this project will increase (to a certain extent) the educational level of the participants and hence their labour opportunities.

The so-called creation of a new image of the Seefhoek also serves a number of purposes that can be seen as independent from the media training of the residents. As mentioned above, the project is financed by the Social Impulse Fund, which aims at strengthening the social and economic texture of the city, at improving living conditions and indirectly at decreasing support for the extreme-right. The KdW-project ambitiously aims at creating a new plan for the Seefhoek and the realisation of this ambition is the responsibility of the co-ordinating organisations - and not of the participants - as the concept of participation is strongly oriented to the creation of a series of (mutually independent) media products.

Both objectives are included in the figure below:

**Table 8: Objectives of the KdW-project**



Within the articulation of these objectives, main structuring components of the KdW-project are firstly 'participation and empowerment oriented towards social change', and secondly 'media synergy without media centrality'. The project explicitly aims to empower 'ordinary people' by learning them the tools of the trade and offering them the opportunity to get acquainted with semi-professional audio and video equipment. This allows the participants to become '*little journalists*', or in other words, to break the barrier between the professional media elite and the 'ordinary people'. By taking hold of some of the basic communicative tools, they are placed in a position that they can tell and record their live- and living-stories, with the clear intention to promote social change. This intention is not only realised by denouncing local problems, but also by showing that 'ordinary people' are capable of using the technology and journalistic conventions for analysing these local problems and for telling their own stories. In the case of the three PSC-workshops, the news broadcast contained items on refugees/asylum seekers and dilapidation on the one hand, but also featured a local writer and a local photographer talking about their work.

The second structuring component - media synergy without media centrality – refers to the use of mixed media as carriers of compatible meanings. The pictures and interviews used in the 'Great people'-exhibition were for instance also used in one of the KdW-newspapers, and will feature on the project's web-site. The interviews will also be used for a radio broadcast. The emphasis on mixed media prevents that the media organisations involved become the focal point of the project. The community radio station 'Radio Centraal' is one of the partners of the project, but is not considered to be central to the project. Based on its expertise related to media technology and its knowledge of the functioning of alternative and mainstream media, it can adequately contribute to the project, without dominating and/or monopolising it (and the participants).

#### **5.4 Analysis & synthesis of the KdW-project**

When analysing the KdW-project, the discussion above shows that they have managed to keep a series of constituting elements of the community media identity intact. The KdW-project is firstly to a very high degree based on a discourse of locality. The project aims to give voice to the inhabitants of one of the most deprived areas of Antwerp in drafting a new (still virtual) neighbourhood, thus using a geographical approach to the concept of community. Access and

participation of the members of the community in the use of different media are facilitated by training-workshops, where the participants are not only offered an opportunity to get acquainted with media technology, but also stimulated to discuss the problems they consider relevant to the community's wellbeing. At the same time the logic of project funding, combined with the lack of financial resources and time to invest in large training-workshops limits the degree of participation of the inhabitants. For reasons of efficiency and time-management the workshops are highly structured (though nevertheless improvised) and the involvement of the participants in certain domains (such as editing) is kept rather limited.

When confronted with this criticism, one of the project co-ordinators expressed the intention to increase the level of participation in the workshops-to-come, in the production of the fourth newspaper and in subproject in the estate. In the case of the newspaper it is being considered to ask the participants of the workshops to interview other residents and write articles on issues of their choice.

The discourses used during the workshops and in the media products are strongly related to the alternative-mainstream dichotomy. The analysis made of the North Belgian mainstream media can be considered critical, when it comes to their (commercial) intentions, their lack of interest for the 'real' problems of 'ordinary people' and their disinterest in a problem-solving role. For this reason(s) the KdW-project can be linked to the analysis made in the sphere of civic/public journalism, although it is more related to 'participatory journalism'<sup>17</sup>. At the same time KdW offers a set of 'alternative voices and images' that contrast with the representations used and created by mainstream media. The inhabitants are represented (and allowed to represent themselves) as critical and creative citizens, showing great interest in the evolution of their neighbourhood. Being outside mainstream media also creates problems of (financial) stability and continuity, which results in a relatively small number of workshops with a relatively small number of participants for a relatively limited amount of time. This problem is explicitly recognised by one of the KdW-co-ordinators: *'As long as there is no alternative medium, through which we can give these realisations news value, by confronting them with an audience of listeners and viewers, we will stay in the margins of the world of communication. And the participants will remain – despite our efforts – ordinary people.'* He also expresses the need for the creating a form of 'permanent follow-up' for the project: *'The young Deborah, the old Adriaan and the participants from the Open House belong to a target group (not the right phrase, but still ...) that cannot act independently in reporting the issues and stories they find relevant. They do not have the means (yet), as the teachers and equipment are gone. Hence the idea of a cybercafé for the continuation and permanent follow-up of the project. Up to now, we've only shown them the possibilities ...'*

Thirdly KdW explicitly aims to improve the democratic (local) culture, by creating a more critical stance towards the functioning of the mass media and towards local problems as perceived by the inhabitants. Moreover, the project offers the participants a tool for social change, by teaching them a way to tell, structure and record their stories. Although participation at certain levels is rather limited and the teacher-participant relation sometimes echoes the 'professional elite' - 'ordinary people' relation<sup>18</sup>, the residents of the Seefhoek are empowered to have their voices heard.

---

<sup>17</sup> 'Participatory journalism' is linked with what McQuail (1994: 131-132) calls the democratic-participant media theory.

<sup>18</sup> This for instance happens when a teacher uses technical jargon that is beyond the comprehension of the participants. The participants also define the teachers as professionals - because they are seen to possess

Apart from keeping a large segment of the community media identity intact, the KdW-project could also be framed within a more agonistic approach of community media relations with the outside world. Especially the mixed media approach, the lack of media centrality and the use of a network of different organisations – ranging from a local working group for social photography to an Antwerp community radio station – should be considered a major strength. From this viewpoint, the project takes on the role of a crossroads, bringing together people from different organisations and from different backgrounds. Although this situation also sometimes creates differences of opinion and/or strategy, it also enables different social struggles to meet, thus further deepening (local) democracy. Furthermore, the strategic alliance with some of the Belgian and Antwerp government bodies - financing the project - has allowed these civil society organisations to cut across the traditional borders between state, market and civil society, without fundamentally weakening their identity construction as different or alternative from state and market organisations. By breaking with a more isolationist tradition the organisations (and especially the community radio station in question) are given the opportunity to expose the outside world to their combined democratic discourses, potentially destabilising mainstream (media) discourses.

### **5.5 A brief note on methodology**

This evaluation of the KdW-project is based on the analysis of the available documents, provided by the two project co-ordinators, which were also interviewed. The text-analysis was supplemented by an analysis of the recordings of two of the PSC-workshops. One of the researchers was also present (as an observer) during the third PSC-workshop. The four theoretical approaches discussed above were used as sensitising concepts, structuring the analysis and the brief report. The results of the analysis were then mailed to the two co-ordinators for feedback, allowing them to give their view on the analysis. In the next phase this feedback was analysed, and relevant changes and additions were implemented. As the KdW-project is an ongoing project, the research should be (partially) defined as interventionist, as it is (also) aimed at identifying the factors that delimit the residents' participation, thus attempting to increase the level of participation of this project.

## **6. Conclusion**

Community media research has a long theoretical and empirical tradition that has tried to capture their identity. Due to the complexity and elusiveness of this identity this project has proven to be a very difficult task. For this reason a multi-theoretical approach is preferred in this paper, combining essentialist and relationist positions within the general framework of the (political) identity theory of Laclau and Mouffe. None of these four approaches discussed above can be considered as giving a sufficient overview when applied independently, as we postulate that the only way to capture the diversity that characterises community media is the simultaneous application of these approaches.

Nevertheless special attention should be attributed to the fourth approach which uses the metaphor of the rhizome in order to radicalise the civil society and alternative media approach. The application of a rhizomatic approach to community media identities has a series of specific

---

'professional knowledge' – despite the efforts of the teachers and their different – sometimes opposite - self-identification.

advantages. Firstly this approach is - together with the civil society approach - situated within a more society centred approach to media. Media studies and communication sciences as a whole have a very long tradition of media centrality, which in a way has to be valued but at the same time considered to be reductionist, as it leads to an artificial separation between media and society.

Secondly the rhizomatic approach also allows deepening the civil society approach. The complexity and elusiveness of community media thus become defining elements, in contrast to the more rigid state and market. The role of community media at the crossroads of social organisations and movements, connecting people - to abuse a commercial slogan - is also brought into the picture in this fourth approach.

Finally the rhizomatic approach allows breaking through the rigid separations that are created by the antagonistic position towards mainstream media (approach II) and towards the market and the state as such (approach III). Community media have attempted to resist a large number of mainstream discourses at the communicative, organisational and political level. Fighting a war of position on numerous fronts has left the community media movement in a rather problematic, vulnerable and isolated position. Placing the rhizomatic approach on the foreground creates more room for both the deterritorialising of mainstream identities and at the same time the collaboration with state and/or market organisations. In this way the survival of the community media can be guaranteed (better), on the condition that their independence vis-à-vis other civil society (non-media) organisations and vis-à-vis state and market organisations is sufficiently protected.

The rhizomatic approach can help to support a more agonistic relationship with mainstream media and with the market and the state, reducing the antagonism that has hounded these media organisations for years. As the case study has tried to show, this strategy has already been put to the test, not without success (at least at a small scale). A further increase of the weight of the rhizome will help community media to combine their critical stance towards mainstream communicative, organisational and political discourses with strategic alliances with the mainstream in order to ensure the continued existence of these important media and the democratic discourses they carry.

## References

- AMARC-Europe (1994) One Europe - Many Voices. Democracy and access to communication. Conference report AMARC-Europe Pan-European conference of community radio broadcasters, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 15-18 September 1994, Sheffield: AMARC.
- Ang, I. (1991) Desperately seeking the audience. London/New York: Routledge.
- Berqué, P., Foy, E., Girard B. (1993) La passion radio. 23 expériences de radio participative et communautaire à travers le monde. Paris: Syros.
- Berrigan, F. J. (1977) Access: some Western models of community media. Paris: Unesco.
- Berrigan, F. J. (1979) Community communications. The role of community media in development. Paris: Unesco.
- Clark, D.B. (1973). 'The Concept of Community: A Reexamination', *Sociological Review*, (21): 397-417.
- Cohen, A.P. (1989, 1985). The symbolic construction of community. London: Routledge.
- Cohen, J., Arato, A. (1992) Civil society and political theory. London: MITpress.
- Deleuze, G., Guattari, F. (1987) A thousand plateaus. Capitalism and schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Downing, John (1984) Radical Media. The political experience of alternative communication. S.I.: South End Press.
- Fraser, C., Restrepo, Estrada S. (2000) Community radio handbook. Paris: Unesco.
- Girard, B. (ed.) (1992) A passion for radio. Montréal: Black rose books.
- Girard, B. (ed.) (1992) Radio apasionados. 21 experiencias de radio comunitaria en el mundo. Quito: Ciespal.
- Gumucio, Dagron A. (2001) Making waves. New York: Rockefeller Foundation.
- Held, D. (1987) Models of democracy. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hollander, E. (2000) 'Online communities as community media. A theoretical and analytical framework for the study of digital community networks', *Communications: the European journal of communication research*, 25 (4): 371-386.
- Husband, C. (1994) A richer vision. The development of ethnic minority media in Western democracies. Paris: Unesco.
- Jankowski, N. (1994) 'International perspectives on community radio', In AMARC-Europe, One Europe - Many Voices. Democracy and access to communication. Conference report AMARC-Europe Pan-European conference of community radio broadcasters, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 15-18 September 1994. Sheffield: AMARC, pp. 2-3.
- Janowitz, M. (1967) The community press in an urban setting. The social elements of urbanism. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Jones, S. G. (1995). 'Understanding Community in the Information Age', In: Jones, S. G. (ed.), CyberSociety; Computer-mediated Communication and Community. London: Sage, pp. 10-35.
- Keane, J. (1998). Democracy and civil society. London: University of Westminster Press.
- Laclau, Ernesto, Mouffe, Chantal (1985) Hegemony and socialist strategy: towards a radical democratic politics. London: Verso.
- Leunissen, J. (1986). 'Community' en 'Community Development' bij de Australische Aborigines, In: Van Bakel, M., Borsboom, A., Dagmar, H. (eds.), Traditie in Verandering; Nederlandse Bijdragen aan Antropologisch onderzoek in Oceanië. Leiden: DSWO Press, pp. 57-82.

- Lewis, P. (1993) 'Alternative media in a contemporary social and theoretical context', In P. Lewis (ed.) Alternative media: linking global and local. Paris: Unesco, pp. 15-25.
- Lewis, P. (ed.) (1993) Alternative media: linking global and local. Paris: Unesco.
- Lindlof, T. R. (1988) 'Media audiences as interpretative communities', *Communication yearbook* (11): 81-107.
- Martin-Barbero, J. (1993) Communication, culture and hegemony. From the media to mediations. London, Newbury Park, New Delhi: Sage.
- McNair, B. (1998) The sociology of journalism. London, New York, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold.
- McQuail, D. (1994) Mass communication theory. London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi: Sage publications.
- Merton, R.K. (1957, 1968 enlarged edition). Social theory and social structure. New York: The Free Press.
- Morris, A., Morton, G. (1998) Locality, community and nation. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1997) The return of the political. London: Verso.
- Mouffe, Chantal (1999) Deliberative democracy or agonistic pluralism? *Social research*, 66 (3): 745-758.
- Nostbakken, D., Morrow, C. (eds.) (1993) Cultural expression in the global village. Penang: Southbound.
- O'Sullivan-Ryan, J., Kaplun, M. (1979) Communication methods to promote grass-roots participation. Paris: Unesco.
- Pateman, C. (1972) Participation and democratic theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Prehn, O. (1991) 'From small scale utopism to large scale pragmatism', In N. Jankowski, Prehn, Ole, Stappers, Jan (Eds.) The people's voice. Local radio and television in Europe. London, Paris, Rome: John Libbey, pp. 247-268.
- Putnam, R. D. (1993) Making democracy work. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Reyes Matta, F. (1986) 'Alternative Communication: Solidarity and development in the face of transnational expansion', In Atwood, R. McAnany E. (eds.) Communication and Latin American Society. Trends in critical research 1960-1985. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 190-214.
- Savio, R. (ed.) (1990) 'Communication, Participation and democracy' Development. *Journal of the Society for International Development*, (2): 7-123.
- Servaes, J. (1999) Communication for development. One world, multiple cultures. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press.
- Sjöberg, M. (ed.) (1994) Community radio in Western Europe. Sheffield: AMARC-Europe.
- Stavrakakis, Yannis (1999) Lacan and the political. London and New York: Routledge.
- Sundaraj, V. (2000) 'New age, new challenges. Unida and its mission in radio, television and audiovisuals', In Servaes, J. (ed.) Walking on the other side of the information highway. Communication, culture and development in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Penang: Southbound.
- Thompson, John B. (1995) The media and modernity. A social theory of the media. Cambridge, Polity Press.
- Tönnies, F. (1963) Community and society. London: Harper and Row.
- Verba, S., Nie, N. (1987) Participation in America. Political democracy & social equality. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wasko, J., Mosco, V. (eds.) (1992) Democratic communications in the information age. Toronto & Norwood, NJ: Garamond Press & Ablex.
- Williams, Raymond (1976) Communications. Harmondsworth: Penguin books.