GLOBAL MEDIA POLICY

A SYMPOSIUM ON ISSUES AND STRATEGIES

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SYMPOSIUM

INTRODOUCTION

MARC RABOY

The following series of short texts originated in two sessions of the Working Group on Global Media Policy held during the 21st scientific conference of the International Association for Media and Communication Research in Glasgow in July 1998. The working group was created in order to stimulate reflection, discussion and exchange on the premise that the challenges of globalisation demand new, transnational policy approaches aimed at enabling media and communication to better serve what can be termed as a global public interest. This in itself was no mean challenge, insofar as so much conventional wisdom has it that globalisation and the accompanying disintegration of national sovereignty heralds the end of public policy approaches to media and communication. Our contrary assumption was sufficiently provocative so as to attract more than seventy participants in the two sessions.

The Glasgow meetings revealed a broad and vital concern for the issues posed by the theme of "global media policy." The diversity of viewpoints expressed in the sessions, and the force with which they were presented, indicated both a clear need and enthusiasm for pursuing reflection and debate on this theme. The discussion furthermore indicated a number of directions that such consideration could take.

The first day's session began with the presentation of various "shopping lists" of *issues*, which had in common the attempt to frame and re-frame the notion of media policy in light of the new regulatory framework(s) in which media policy issues are being played out. The discussion emphasised that such attempts have to take into account: (1) the shifting locations, or sites, of media policy-making, (2) the need to reconceptualise what one means by "media," in light of trends such as the convergence of broadcasting and telecommunication technologies, and the accompanying new focus of policymaking on technological as opposed to content-related issues, (3) the range in different conceptions of media policy priorities, depending on national, regional, economic or identity contexts in which issues emerge and are considered relevant.

A number of important clusters of concern emerged as points requiring further clarification and debate. These included: (1) identifying the parameters of the specific field of media policy (e.g. are we talking about technical-legal aspects, concerns about identity and cultural diversity, both?), (2) deciding where the focus of attention should be placed (the national? the transnational?), (3) developing a better understanding of the political contexts in which policy is being made, as well as the knowledge base on which policy assumptions are made (i.e., a need for research and analysis), (4) clarifying certain conceptual issues regarding the broad tendencies or trends with respect to the ongoing development of media policy (what is now meant by concepts such as access, and public or universal service?). Many participants saw the discussion as pointing towards a new *research agenda* in the area of global media policy; it was also noted, however, that many critical or progressive media policy researchers also "wear other hats" in a range of activist undertakings.

With this as backdrop, the second day's discussion then addressed a range of possibilities regarding *strategic intervention* for influencing media policy development, focusing on three sub-themes:

1. possible *sites* of intervention (where do the spaces for intervention exist; where can such spaces be created? what are the likely costs/benefits of trying to work in each

of these areas?): national policymaking processes; multilateral/international/global agencies; regional bodies; the corporate sector; NGO activities;

2. possible *types* of intervention: lobbying activities, media awareness and consciousness raising, constituency building and mobilisation, research;

3. specific *projects* (ongoing or proposed), such as: People's Communication Charter, Cultural Environment Movement, London Platform on Democratisation of Communication, Videazimut and AMARC activities on the right to communicate, the proposal for a World Congress on Media and Communication.

On the whole, the discussions revealed an overriding concern for *issues of governance*. Clearly, global media policy issues can not be addressed in the absence of a broader political addressing of governance and regulatory questions in the context of globalisation. For participants in the IAMCR working group, *both as researchers and activists*, this was seen as pointing in two general directions: (1) building on cumulative expertise and experience in an attempt to influence media policy debates and developments, (2) working "transversally" to try to introduce awareness of a media policy dimension to more general debates and processes regarding global governance issues.

Following the Glasgow meetings, at the invitation of *Javnost—The Public* editor Slavko Splichal, we approached a number of participants in the sessions suggesting that they expand on their remarks in a series of short, focused texts. The result is this symposium. In view of the urgency of this theme and the interventionist thrust of the working group, we chose to sacrifice some of the usual academic formalities in exchange for what we hope will be a lively, provocative and above all timely contribution to the emerging debate on media policy in the new global communication environment.

CHALLENGES FOR THE GLOBAL REGULATION OF COMMUNICATION

MARC RABOY

Establishing and protecting the spaces in which mediation and discussion can take place is the domain of communication policy. Over the years, as communication technologies developed and became more complex, various models for the regulation of communication evolved in different national contexts. Today, an interconnected communication environment is emerging at the global level. This poses an unprecedented challenge for the global regulation of communication.

Until quite recently, communication policy was made and executed for the most part by national governments. Countries borrowed and adapted organisational models for structuring and regulating media from one another, but national communication systems by and large reflected the societies within whose national boundaries they operated. Issues requiring international agreement, such as the allocation of radio frequencies, were resolved between governments, with the implicit assumption that those governments were then free to use those resources as they wished.

That general framework has now changed. Communication policy is now made in a global environment where, for the time being, there is no institution equivalent to the national state. National governments have lost important parts of the sovereignty they once enjoyed in communication, and at the global level, accountability is loose, where it exists at all. National communication systems still exist, but they resemble

one another more than they ever did, and their evolution is increasingly determined by developments beyond the control of any one government.

Communication technologies play an increasingly important part in every aspect of people's lives, and the disintegration of the nation-based regulatory framework for guiding and orienting the interaction of media and society is therefore an urgent social issue. If history is a guiding light, we should expect the new global environment to engender its own structures of governance — among these, institutional and regulatory mechanisms for dealing with technologies of communication.

So what will this new regulatory framework look like? We should recall that the accumulated benefits of the nation-state-based world system were not the result of anyone's benevolence but of often bitter social struggles, class negotiation, and at certain moments, enlightened political and economic leadership. Communication played a role in this process. From the early beginnings of parliamentary institutions, communication rights were framed as basic social and political rights. Media were used by social actors as sources of empowerment as well as for mobilisation and persuasion. Typical of the modern state was the creation of institutions such as public service broadcasting, public telephone and telegraph monopolies, and public regulatory agencies. Today, the emergence of a global media regime is at once symptomatic of a new type of society in emergence, and a challenge to shaping that society towards a new phase of social progress.

In the era of the nation-state, media were seen as institutions of social cohesion at the national level. One of the characteristics of globalisation is the questions it raises about conventional forms of social cohesion, "national" solidarity and shared values. In fact — as we see with the proliferation of global media — globalisation basically transposes to another level the characteristics of societies whose boundaries (and media systems) were once upon a time contiguous with those of the nation-state.

In response, new structures of governance are beginning to emerge to complement the nation-state, at the global, regional, international, sub-national and local levels. As these structures consolidate, they will inevitably give rise to new mechanisms for media regulation. The nature of these is in no way pre-determined. The media structures of the 21st century will emerge from the convergence of a range of social struggles, entrepreneurial strategies, geopolitical developments and diplomatic negotiations. They will also be tied to prevailing communication technologies and, most importantly, to the uses to which those technologies will be put.

One can argue about how much space there is to manoeuvre with respect to this historical process, and about where that space is. But the key starting point to this necessary argument is to recognise that we are indeed engaged in a historical process, and like all historical processes it will be marked by both continuity and change with respect to what came before. If we are concerned with the evolution of communication in this context, we have to ask ourselves what forms of media regulation might be appropriate to integrating communication into the overall project of a just and equitable global society.

Towards a Global Public Space

The emergence of a global communication policy environment and the extension of national debates on communication policy to the global level have both limitations and possibilities. Debates on communication policy issues in local (i.e., national) contexts are not only constrained but also enhanced by global policy developments.

Globalisation, therefore, should be viewed as a policy *challenge* rather than a justification for "the end of policy" arguments presented in deregulationist discourses.

In order to begin developing a global framework for democratic media, we need to begin thinking about global public policy mechanisms, as well as legislative, regulatory and supervisory structures for media. This is a *political* project. The first step is to force a general debate on the need to create global mechanisms for ensuring the public interest in media; the next will be to create a permanent, democratic forum for developing global media policy. As there is no appropriate global public forum in which to talk about such questions, the question of global media regulation has yet to be seriously addressed.

Transnational free-enterprise media will need to be countered with global public service media. The structural basis of such institutions is not immediately evident, given that these have traditionally operated exclusively at the national level. Hence, it is all the more important that such questions be discussed in democratic, multilateral fora. The role of existing world bodies such as UNESCO and the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) is crucial to this, but these will have to be opened up to include participation by a broader range of actors than the present assortment of member states. New structures will need to be developed in order for media to fulfil their potential as the central institutions of an emerging global public sphere.

Credibility will need to be given to the idea that the global media environment, from the conventional airwaves to outer space, is a public resource, to be organised, managed and regulated in the global public interest. This implies recognition of the legitimacy of public intervention on a global scale. Broadening access will require appropriate transnational regulatory mechanisms, as well as mechanisms for a more equitable distribution of global commercial benefits. There is a need for the international appropriation of some air and space for the distribution outside the country of origin of viable creative products that currently have no access to the new global agora that figures so prominently in utopian discourses on the new information technologies.

The convergence of communication technologies requires a parallel convergence in programs and policies. This is going to require the invention of new models, new concepts and a general new way of thinking about communication. The central issue is still who will get to use the full range of local, national and global media to receive and disseminate messages, and on what basis.

The Globalisation of Communication Regulation

The global arena for communication policy was launched in 1865, with the first international conference on telegraphy in Paris. For the next 130 years, international relations in communication were largely focused on managing the environment in which communication resources would be used at the national level, according to the goals and capacities of individual nation-states. From the harmonisation of technical standards to the development of a common rate-accounting system, to the allocation of radio frequencies and later geostationary satellite positions, the underlying assumption was that communication was a national affair requiring a minimum of international coordination.

This multilateral framework remained basically unchanged until 1995, when it was radically transformed with the launching of the U. S. -initiated proposal to establish a Global Information Infrastructure, presented as a transnational, seamless communication system which would revolutionise human relations and national economies. The

GII proposes a single vision, program and policy framework for the role of communication technology as a means for achieving an idealised global society. The GII project traverses a continuum connecting public purpose and private enterprise by mobilising such concepts as free trade, industrial development, modernisation and technological progress. U. S. strategy for the GII calls for bringing its partners in the alliance of advanced capitalist countries aboard under US leadership. This was achieved through the G7, at a meeting in Brussels in 1995, where the promoters of the GII outlined the necessity for international coordination of regulatory policies on competition, interconnectivity, global applications and content. Since that time, these principles have driven a range of multilateral agreements negotiated in venues such as the International Telecommunications Union, the World Trade Organisation and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. They have become the operational basis for a new global regulatory framework in communication.

This process has been marked by important shifts in power relations between major social actors. National states, as we have seen, are trading away what remains of their diminishing sovereignty for a new role as brokers of international agreements on behalf of their client national corporations. Stateless conglomerations of corporate capital, meanwhile, have risen to unprecedented political dominance on the world scale, increasingly in their own right without even needing to pass through the filter of nominal political control and accountability. Civil society, which had achieved certain gains in 200 years of struggle within the parameters of the nation-state — albeit relative and unequally distributed — now has to invent new ways to mobilise and channel political leverage at a global level bereft of democratic institutions. The recent battle surrounding the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) provides a current snapshot of this situation.

Indeed, the emerging global regulatory system in communication is a harbinger of a future system of world governance. Left unchecked, it will have enormous implications for the future of democracy and human rights, insofar as it is based on political decisionmaking at a level where there is no accountability, the recognised autonomy of private capital, and the formal exclusion of the institutions of civil society. In terms of international relations, it extends the dependency of the technologically-less-developed parts of the world. As a social project, it locates human development as a potential benefit of economic investment, rather than as the principal goal. As a challenge, it presents a tremendous opportunity to imagine a different role for communication in global society, and to organise politically to create and sustain a framework in which such an alternative can be achieved.

What Is To Be Done?

Calls for global regulation of communication have begun to issue with increasing frequency, from sources which until recently would have seemed highly unlikely. In September 1997, European telecommunications commissioner Martin Bangemann, author of a high-profile blueprint for communication liberalisation which bears his name, called for an "international charter" to govern the new world order in global communication. Within days, his remarks were endorsed by White House policy adviser Ira Magaziner, who stated that the U.S. believed there was a need for international understanding on information policy issues, "some of which may need to be formal agreements, some informal understandings and common approaches."

One can well imagine the type of governing framework they have in mind; it is in fact spelled out in the pile of policy documents and multilateral agreements that have been formalised in the last few years. But if there is to be an agenda for action on global regulation of communication, it can not be left in the hands of those who have dominated the debate up until now. The debate must be broadened to include the participation of civil society, in a permanent manner, in the new regulatory framework and the structures it creates.

What types of issues and mechanisms could this involve? In general, the global regulation of communication could and should address:

- regulation of commercial activities in the public interest, for example, to guarantee equitable access to basic services;
- funding and institutional support for the creation and sustaining of public service and alternative media;
- placing limits on corporate controls resulting from transnational concentration of ownership in new and conventional media and telecommunications;
- ensuring access to available media channels on the basis of public interest criteria;
- development of universal codes and standards for curtailing the spread of abusive contents;
- facilitating the networking capacity of not-for-profit organisations;
- provision of public communication spaces for conflict resolution and democratic dialogue on global issues.

The "Action Plan for Cultural Policies for Development," adopted at the recent UNESCO-sponsored Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, 30 March - 2 April 1998), provided some important examples that can serve as a starting point for discussion on such matters. Recognising that "in a democratic framework civil society will become increasingly important in the field of culture," the conference endorsed a dozen principles including the fundamental right of access to and participation in cultural life, and the cultural policy objective of establishing structures and securing adequate resources necessary "to create an environment conducive to human fulfilment."

More directly with respect to the concerns of this paper, the conference affirmed that:

- "Effective participation in the information society and the mastery by everyone of information and communication technology constitute a significant dimension of any cultural policy."
- "Government should endeavour to achieve closer partnerships with civil society in the design and implementation of cultural policies that are integrated into development strategies,"
- "In an increasingly interdependent world, the renewal of cultural policies should be envisioned simultaneously at the local, national, regional and global levels."
- "Cultural policies should place particular emphasis on promoting and strengthening ways and means of providing broader access to culture for all sectors of the population, combating exclusion and marginalisation, and fostering all processes that favour cultural democratisation."

Among the relevant policy objectives recommended to UNESCO's member states, the conference proposed to "Intensify co-operation between government, the business sector and other civil society organisations in the field of culture by providing the

latter with appropriate regulatory frameworks." A number of proposals then dealt specifically with media and communication technologies. The conference asked member states to:

- "Promote communication networks, including radio, television and information technologies which serve the cultural and educational needs of the public; encourage the commitment of radio, television, the press and the other media to cultural development issues [...], while guaranteeing the editorial independence of the public service media."
- "Consider providing public radio and television and promote space for community, linguistic and minority services..."
- "Adopt or reinforce national efforts that foster media pluralism and freedom of expression."
- "Promote the development and use of new technologies and new communication and information services, stress the importance of access to information highways and services at affordable prices..."

The appearance of such an action plan endorsed by 140 governments under the sponsorship of a world intergovernmental organisation is certainly uplifting, but the subtext and context surrounding its adoption also point to the difficulties that lie ahead.

It took two-and-a-half years to organise the Stockholm Conference, following the tabling of the Report of the UN/UNESCO World Commission on Culture and Development, *Our Cultural Diversity*, on which the working documents presented in Stockholm were based. That original report underscored the premise that communication media are an essential cornerstone of democracy and cultural development, as well as a part of the "global commons," and argued for extension of conventional national policy mechanisms to the global level. A global framework for media regulation, it suggested, could provide a framework for a more pluralist media system by, for example, enabling a tax levy on transnational commercial media activities which could be used to generate financial support for global public service and alternative media. This proactive thrust, based on the use of existing policy mechanisms and the extension of the national policy logic to the global level, did not survive the diplomatic horse-trading that culminated in the Action Plan adopted in Stockholm.

Furthermore, the draft version of the action plan presented at the outset of the conference was far more affirmative in encouraging member states to provide public radio and television (rather than merely "consider" their provision), and in calling for international as well as national legislation to promote media pluralism. Significantly, a proposal that such legislation foster "competition and prevent excessive concentration of media ownership" was changed to refer instead to "freedom of expression." A proposal to "promote the Internet as a universal public service by fostering connectivity and not-for-profit user consortia and by adopting reasonable pricing policies" disappeared from the final text.

In terms of implementation, the Stockholm Conference recommended that the Director-General of UNESCO develop a comprehensive strategy for practical follow-up to the conference, "including the possibility or not of organising a World Summit on Culture and Development." *Our Cultural Diversity* had proposed such a Summit — which was endorsed, among others, by participants in a forum of civil society organisations parallel to the intergovernmental conference in Stockholm. But director-general Federico Mayor has already ruled out the short-term organisation of a world summit.

In a statement to the Panafrican News Agency, PANA, at the close of the Stockholm conference, Mayor said it would take three or four years at least for the seeds sown at Stockholm to mature. Meanwhile, the initiative should be left to the member states and regional organisations to implement the principles and commitments undertaken, he said.

The problem with this is that three or four years from now the member states of UNESCO will have even less implementation power than they do now. Corporate capital, which continues to mobilise and organise on a transnational basis, will have put more institutional structures in place at the global level. And civil society risks being left once again in a role of bridesmaid, watching from the sidelines, observing from the margins, hoping there will be a next time. Unless it can be more aggressive in formulating the agenda.

Note:

An earlier version of this article was presented as a contribution to the working group on legal approaches at the Videazimut virtual conference on The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights in June 1998.

NEW REALITIES IN THE POLITICS OF WORLD COMMUNICATION

CEES J. HAMELINK

Over the past decade the arena of world communication politics has seen major changes. Among the most important ones are the following.

The international governance system for communication operated during the past hundred years mainly to coordinate national policies that were independently shaped by sovereign governments. Today's global governance system to a large extent determines supra-nationally the space that national governments have for independent policymaking.

World communication politics is increasingly defined by trade and market standards and ever less by political considerations. There is a noticeable shift from a predominantly political discourse to a largely economic-trade discourse. Evidence of this can be found in the growing emphasis on the economic importance of intellectual property and the related priority of protection for investors and corporate producers. In the telecommunications field the standards of universal public service and cross-subsidisation have given way to cost-based tariff structures. In the area of transborder electronic data flows, politics changed from political arguments about national sovereignty and cultural autonomy to such notions as trade barriers and market access.

The private most powerful players have become more overtly significant. The "invisible" hand of the economic interests that have all along guided political decision making became in recent years more and more visible. Transnational corporations became very prominent players in the arena and played their role very explicitly in the foreground. Actually the locus of policy making shifted from governments to associations of private business actors.

The recent developments in connection with the proposal for a Global Charter on Communication demonstrate the reversal of roles. During the Interactive Conference of the ITU in September 1997, European Commissioner Martin Bangemann proposed

the idea of a Charter with key principles for the information society. The Charter was to be a non-binding agreement on a framework for global communications in the 21st century. The idea was further elaborated during a G7 meeting in Brussels in October 1997. On June 29, 1998, Commissioner Bangemann invited some fifty board chairmen and corporate presidents from 15 countries to a round table discussion on global communications. Among the companies invited were Microsoft, Bertelsmann, Reuters, Polygram, IBM, Siemens, Deutsche Telekom, Sony, Toshiba, and VISA. On the agenda were questions such as "What are the most urgent obstacles to global communications and what are the most effective means to remove them?"

As urgent issues intellectual property rights, taxation, tariffs, encryption, authentication, data protection and liability were identified. The business participants proposed that regulation must be kept to a minimum since the global nature of the on-line economy makes it impossible for any single government or body to regulate. The industry expressed a clear preference for self-regulation. The meeting proposed to set up a Business Steering Committee to ensure that the initiative would be business-led. The industrialists announced their intention to begin a new Global Business Dialogue to which governments and international organisations will be invited.

Ironically, the initial Bangemann plan was for a political declaration which would launch a dialogue between governments and companies on the global electronic market place, the goal of which would be a market-led approach in which the private sector would actively participate through a consultative process with governments and international organisations to shape global communications policy. This process has now been taken over by the private sector that will — when it sees fit — invite governments and international organisations to take part in the shaping of a self-regulatory regime.

The World Trade Organisation

World communication politics was traditionally made in such intergovernmental fora as UNESCO, the World Intellectual Property Organisation, and the International Telecommunications Union. These organisations were relatively open to the socio-cultural dimension of developments in the field of information and communication technologies. Moreover, they offered a platform where the interests of developing nations could also be voiced. In recent years the position of these Intergovernmental Organisations (IGOs) was considerably weakened as the major players began to prefer a forum that was more conducive to their specific interests. This forum is the successor to the General Agreement of Tariffs and Trade: the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The WTO was established as one of the outcomes of the GATT Uruguay Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations that was completed in December 1993.

The WTO is generally more favourable to the trading interests of the major industrial countries than other intergovernmental bodies. Among its main policy principles are the world-wide liberalisation of markets, and the non-discrimination principle that provides for national treatment of foreign competitors in national markets and most favoured nation treatment. Actually, it should surprise no one that communication politics has shifted to this trade forum given the increasing economic value of communication networks and information services. Today's global communications market generates over 1.5 billion dollars annually. Together with the fact that the major communication and information corporations provide the essential support structures for commodity and financial markets, the governance of communication issue-areas is now largely destined to be subject to a global trade regime. This

implies that the rules of "free" trade are applied to the three main components of the world communications market: the manufacturing of hardware, the production and distribution of software (contents), and the operation of networks and their services.

The significance of the WTO in connection with communication policymaking can be illustrated with reference to provisions in the WTO Agreement on Basic Telecommunication Services which was signed by some 70 countries in early 1997. This Agreement has far-reaching implications for the governance of the basic infrastructures of communications. It states on the issues of universal service, "Any member has the right to define the kind of universal service obligation it wishes to maintain. Such obligations will not be regarded as anti-competitive per se, provided they are administered in a transparent, non-discriminatory and competitively neutral manner and are not more burdensome than necessary for the kind of universal service defined by the member." With this provision the signatories have accepted that local conditions for universal access should not be "more burdensome than necessary." This seriously limits the space for independent national policymaking on the access issue.

The crucial issue is that because foreign industries cannot be placed at a disadvantage, the national standards for universal service standards have to be administered in a competitively neutral manner. They cannot be set at levels more burdensome than necessary. If a national public policy would consider to provide access to telecommunication services on the basis of a cross-subsidisation scheme rather than that of cost-based tariffs, foreign market entrants would most likely see this obligation as more burdensome than necessary. As a consequence the policy would be perceived as a violation of international trade law. It would be up to the (largely obscure) arbitration mechanisms of the WTO to judge the (il)legitimacy of the national policy proposal. In the WTO Telecommunications Agreement, the essential focus is on access to markets for telecommunication service providers, and not on public access to telecommunication services. The WTO approach to universal service favours the business interests of foreign corporations over the social interests of a nation's citizens. Actually, in the WTO regime people are seen as consumers for whom telecommunications provide commercial services and not as citizens for whom telecommunications offer a political forum for exchange and interaction. Under the global guidance of the WTO, communication networks and information services are almost exclusively placed in the realm of commercialism and as a result the emerging information society is most likely to become a global electronic shopping mall accessible to those with purchasing capacity.

Conclusion

World communication politics is undergoing a historical shift from a public service orientation to private competition and to a commercial service focus. The likely loser in the process is the public interest. Global governance of communication and information is largely committed to minimising public intervention and maximising freedom for market forces. Today's key institution for world communication is the WTO and this forum should be the major focus for all those citizens' groups and civil coalitions that are concerned about the accessibility, availability, and affordability of communication networks and about the quality and accountability of information services.

Given the current trends it is imperative that world-wide civil action is mobilised to regain political control over the global system. The political domain — in spite of all its shortcomings — is in the end more representative and accountable than the market

place. For the quality of future global communications a political regime should prevail over a trade regime.

A NEW TRILATERALISM IN GLOBAL COMMUNICATION NEGOTIATIONS? HOW GOVERNMENTS, INDUSTRY AND CITIZENS TRY TO CREATE A NEW "GLOBAL COMMUNICATIONS CHARTER"

WOLFGANG KLEINWÄCHTER

Regulating the information highway is a highly complex, multi-dimensional and delicate issue. On the one hand, the Internet, as the most typical symbol of cyberspace, has evolved as a non regulated medium. In the second half of the 1980s, when the global discussion on a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) came to an end and to the conclusion that the free flow of information does not need a global regulation, development of the Internet was driven mainly by human rights activists and grass roots groups, who saw in the Net the most democratic medium in world history, offering everybody the opportunity to make her or his voices heard globally, to express their own opinions freely in a borderless global communication process with others and to have unlimited access to a broad variety of diverse and pluralistic sources of ideas and information. With the appearance of the World Wide Web everybody can become a publisher or a broadcaster without having big money or a government licence. The ambitious concept of the free flow of information, limited objectively by the technical limitations of the traditional media of the press, radio and television and restricted very often by government controllers, finally found its limitless medium. Jan Postal's idea of "Internet self-governance" became the guideline for all efforts to bring order to the network of networks.

On the other hand, info-drivers do not leave the legal order in which they live in real life when they are exploring the virtual world of cyberspace. Like the interstate highways, the electronic highways need rules of the road to avoid crashes and to balance the interest of the various traffic participants. And there are very practical issues which need to be regulated. Without agreed standards there is no interconnectivity and interoperability among networks, and that means there is no communication. Frequency allocation has to be coordinated. Safety, privacy, intellectual property are human values that also have to be protected by law in cyberspace. Who will take care of the fundamental question of the "Internet addresses" to guarantee that the hundreds of millions of users find their partners for communication without any problems? The discussion on illegal and harmful information content, a controversial legal issue over centuries, will not disappear with the Internet. And if crashes are happening and disputes are arising, procedures and mechanisms for conflict resolution are needed.

While regulating the traffic on the information highway was seen as an unnecessary effort in the late 1980s, by the middle of the 1990s the spirit of the time had changed. More and more groups from both the public and the private sector as well as from first and third world countries are recognising the need for rules of the road for the electronic networks. The disappearance of the old ideological confrontations between East and

West and North and South and the explosion of the information traffic in the early 1990s, the perspective of hundreds of millions of users and the billions of dollars which are transferred via the Internet have changed the basis for the global discussion on the legal dimension of information flow in international relations. Regulation is no longer seen as a kind of censorship against the free flow of information but as a needed instrument to balance the interests of different partners in order to protect the freedom of information. There are significant signs around the globe that after two decades of deregulation the discussion will turn in a different direction. Will we see a new wave of international regulation for communication at the beginning of the next century?

Activities of regulators around the globe during the last couple of years would tend to prove this. In 1997 the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) drafted two "Memorandums of Understanding," for Internet Domain Names and for Global Mobile Personal Communication by Satellites. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) adopted two instruments to liberalise the trade of information and communication products and services in 1996 and 1997. And the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) raised at its last diplomatic conference (Geneva, February 1996) the issue of copyright on the Net when it was confirmed that the fundamental principles of the Berne Convention for the protection of literary and artistic works applied to new media such as the Net. The conference also adopted a new treaty on the rights of performers and producers of phonograms, and provided for a protocol on the rights of performers and producers of "audio-visual fixations" to be added not later than 1998. And after the presentation of the U. S. White Book on Internet Domain Names in July 1998 an extensive discussion has started on how to introduce a proper Internet Governance on the basis of the non-governmental IANA (International Association of Names Assignment). The three Geneva based United Nations specialised agencies, at the same time, are changing their character as inter-governmental organisations. While national governments still play a crucial role in the drafting of legal principles, all three bodies have opened their doors — with different degrees — to non-governmental members, mainly from the private sector.

The most radical move in this respect was made by the ITU in the early 1990s. The ITU changed its constitution and introduced two categories of members instead of one as in the past: Members with a big "M" are governments while members with a small "m" are representatives of the private sector. Meanwhile ITU has 188 govern-mental "Members" and about 450 private "members." And as the development since the last ITU Plenipotentiary Conference (Kyoto, Japan, 1994), has shown, the small "m's" have more and more influence in the organisation. There is a significant power shift from the "M's," who founded the organisation in 1865, towards the "m's," who will dominate it in the next century. The building of the above mentioned MoUs can be taken as an illustration of this process. Both instruments were driven mainly by the private sector organisations, who drafted the basic principles and are the majority of the signatories.

The shift from governmental dominated global communication negotiations, which have produced legal binding conventions in the past, to non-governmental dominated negotiations, which produce "MoUs" or other legally non-binding instruments, signals another turning point in international communication regulation. While in the last two decades the main issue of negotiations has been the removal of out-dated legislation with the aim to liberate the free flow of information and communication services and products via deregulation, there are signs that the next decade will see more re-regulation to secure the free flow of information.

But re-regulation does not mean re-introduction of the old laws. It is not the swinging back of a pendulum. It is a watershed which brings world communication into an unknown area where the new rules of the game are not yet written.

What is going on is a search for a new type of agreement among a broad variety of different partners with different legal status who try to combine the positive elements of a regulated system, like stability, with the flexibility of a non-regulated environment. The compromises of these negotiations are more driven by the economic interests of the private partners than the political (and/or ideological) interests of national governments. The norms which are produced in this process, are very often defined as voluntary principles, which are not binding under present international law. But the binding power of these voluntary principles is very often higher than that of a legally binding norm. While ignorance and violations of these principles are not punished by an international court, they are punished by the market with sometimes much more disastrous consequences for the person or institution violating the agreed principle. While institutions can survive a decision of a court, they risk dying if they violate the voluntarily agreed rules of the market.

The benefit of voluntary principles is that they can be more easily changed and/or amended if a changing environment calls for adjustments. To change a legally binding multilateral convention needs a new diplomatic conference and long as well as lasting legal procedures. What modern negotiators are looking for nowadays is a combination of a bottom up approach in a sense of self-regulation by the industry with a minimum of top down regulation by governments, where needed.

Against the background of a changing communication environment the whole philosophy of law-making in international relations is challenged and has to be reconsidered. This has far reaching consequences for the whole contemporary system of international relations, which is still mainly based on inter-governmental relations and the principle of national sovereignty and the other fundamental principles of international law, laid down in the United Nations Charter.

This new situation reflects the political and social as well as the technical and economic developments of the last ten years. Globalisation is challenging national legislation. The principle of national sovereignty is under attack. And it becomes more and more difficult to define what is an internal affair of a single sovereign nation state, which is protected by international law against foreign interference.

But not only international law is challenged, traditional legal sub-systems like "the law of telecommunication" or "the law of broadcasting" are becoming obsolete when telephony via the Internet or television via the World Wide Web will be common practice and traditional frontiers between different regulatory areas are disappearing because technology has gone beyond borders.

The new challenges will not be met by simply enlarging existing legislation to the new medium. If you move towards integrated services in digital networks, you need an integrated regulation which is much more than a combination of the traditional regulation. Converging technologies call for converging legislation. Information and communication are no longer sectoral elements which can be separately regulated internationally in a number of specific conventions. The Internet will penetrate all areas of life and it creates its own sub-systems which do not fit into existing classifications and definitions.

This trend towards a new approach was illustrated by a landmark G7 Ministerial Conference on Global Information Networks, which took place in Bonn, Germany,

July, 6 - 8, 1997 with high level representation both from the public and the private sector. The three day conference adopted three declarations: a "Ministerial Declaration," an "Industry Declaration" and a "Users Declaration." All three documents try to define, from different perspectives, basic principles for global communication via global networks.

While the Ministerial Declaration defines the future role of government as providing the framework, stimulating new services, building confidence and empowering the users, the Industrial Declaration formulates the key principles which governments should respect when dealing with global information networks. As far as the regulatory framework is concerned, it is the Industrial Declaration which gives clear recommendations for issues like convergence, intellectual property rights, encryption, data protection and taxation.

The Users Declaration stresses on the one hand that "sovereignty in the information society must belong to the people; their preferences should determine its uses and how the new technology will be applied" but it recognises on the other hand that "public policy makers and industry have already gone to great lengths in stimulating and developing the information society and global information networks. Currently the technological side is leading the process and stronger user participation is considered essential to bridge the current gap and ensure successful deployment." security, confidentiality, data protection, media pluralism, reliability of services, consumer protection, education, and training and complaints mechanisms are issues raised by the Users Declaration.

But while this new trilaterial approach looks like an impressive innovation in international communication negotiations — never before has a ministerial conference produced three different documents for different actors — the innovation has its limits: Nothing was said about how the three complementary documents will interact and no mechanism was introduced to stimulate a future trilateral dialogue among governments, industry and users.

The innovative aspect of the Bonn conference was, nevertheless, to publicly demonstrate for the first time that there are indeed three different groups with different interests which can not be grouped in camps defined by geography or ideology as in the past. Geography and ideology do not play a central role anymore, it is the status as a private organisation, as a government or as a user, which defines special interests and concepts for regulation. And the new coalitions are rainbow coalitions which have at the same time identical, similar and controversial interests with their counterparts.

Insofar as the Bonn conference marks the beginning of a new process — a new trilateralism — it could lead to a totally new system of global regulation for information and communication. Industry, government and users do have a lot of common interests in managing the structural change from the industrial to the information society, but they also have different priorities. While industry has to look first of all for a return on investment, government is more interested in stability and security (and maybe in taxes) while users think in categories of costs, trust and in particular of human rights.

Martin Bangemann, the Commissioner responsible for communications in the European Union (EU) proposed at the ITU Inter@ctive Conference in Geneva in September 1997 the elaboration of a Global Communication Charter. According to Bangemann, such a Charter could summarise the main principles for the information society and could create the framework for global communication in the 21st century. During a G7 conference in Brussels in October 1997, Bangemann specified his proposal.

Such a Charter would not be a binding legal convention, but a set of basic principles which would give different groups in society such as governments, industries and citizens' guidelines to coordinate their efforts and to harmonise their approaches.

Ira Magaziner, the information society adviser to U. S. President Bill Clinton, supported the idea in principle at the Brussels conference, but stressed that the private sector has to take the lead in creating future frameworks. Based on the recommendations of the Clinton administration for electronic commerce, Magaziner said that the time is over where industry came to congress to lobby for special legislation. In the future, government will have to go to the industry to lobby, so that the industry will take into account public interest while building the information highways and developing the traffic on it.

The whole process was pushed further along by an official paper of the European Commission on "the need for strengthened international coordination" in February 1998. The EU paper proposes an International Charter which would (1) be a multilateral understanding on a method of coordination to remove obstacles for the global electronic marketplace, (2) be legally non-binding, (3) recognise the work of existing international organisations, (4) promote the participation of private sector and relevant social groups, and (6) contribute to more regulatory transparency.

The EU discussion paved the way for the next landmark event, a Business Round Table on Global Communications held in Brussels on June 29, 1998, among business leaders from around the world and members of the European Commission. While there was agreement that "there is a need for improved cooperation between business and governments on critical issues for the global on-line economy," the idea of the Charter disappeared from the final document. "The global and diverse nature of the on-line economy makes it impossible for any single government or body to regulate. As a consequence, industry self-regulation is the preferred approach," stressed the final document. Furthermore, the Round Table did set up a "Business Steering Committee, representing businesses from all regions of the world, to ensure that this initiative remains business-led and global." Industry leaders will take the initiative to set in motion a dialogue on the global communication order and "governments and international organisations will be invited" while "consumer interests should be taken into consideration."

This approach turns the traditional rule making for international issues in a new direction. Industry does no longer "influence" decisions which are made on the governmental level, but they take the lead and "invite governments" to contribute to solutions, which will be under the control of global business. Consumer or citizens interests are taken into consideration but no invitations to consumer or other public groups to participate in the elaboration of solutions has been expressed in the final document.

How far this will go remains to be seen. It is interesting to observe that an OECD Ministerial Conference on Electronic Commerce (Ottawa, October 7 - 9, 1998) which followed the Round Table only three months later, stressed the need that "co-operation amongst all players (governments, consumers, business, labour, and public institutions), as well as social dialogue must be encouraged in policy making to facilitate the development of global electronic commerce in all countries and international fora." And the Ottawa Declaration adds that "business should continue to play a key role in developing and implementing solutions to a number of issues essential for the development of electronic commerce, recognising and taking into account fundamental public interests, economic and social goals and working closely with governments

and other players." The OECD conference followed more or less the model of the Bonn Conference, but did not refer to the "International Charter" or the "Global Business Dialogue."

But while industry is fighting for the pole position in determining the rules of the information highway for the next century the question arises how the interests of the third party, the citizens, are introduced to the global dialogue on a new world communication order. Will there be a special users' lobby? Is the user represented by the government or will the user need his own representation by an independent party, by a representative non-governmental organisation (NGO) or other grass roots groups? How is the user defined: mainly as consumer or first of all as a citizen?

NGOs, from the Electronic Frontier Foundation to Article 19 to professional organisations of journalists to academic association and many others, have been active for decades to secure that the information revolution will not lead to a restriction of the traditional human rights to communicate but to a widening and a deepening of these rights, overcoming limits and deficiencies of the traditional concepts. Jan Postal's idea of "Internet Self Governance" was the idea of the ancient Greek *agora* where citizens communicate together (and also doing business in the marketplace by communicating). This tendency can also be seen in other fields where traditionally governments were setting the rules and where non-governmental actors are now more present and influence the decisions taken at inter-governmental conferences.

Starting with the United Nations Human Rights Conference in Vienna in 1993, dozens of groups and thousands of individuals have drafted and discussed a People's Communication Charter, which defines basic principles of the individual and collective right to communicate in the new context and will be adopted at the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in December 1998. Like Greenpeace is working for a healthy natural environment, the communication groups are beginning to unite themselves to build a global platform from which they can work towards a healthy intellectual environment, an environment, in which everybody can enjoy his or her or their human rights to communication freely and fairly. The Cultural Environment Movement (CEM) is an umbrella for dozens of NGOs, working in the sphere of information and communication. Such a platform, representing citizens and users, could certainly be a partner in a trilateral dialogue with similar platforms from industry organisations and national governments.

The unprecedented opportunity of cyberspace has to be an offer to everybody, not for invited guests only. Cyberspace should be a barrier free zone, where everybody has access and a right to participate. Individuals and groups have to have the same human rights to communicate in the virtual world of tomorrow as in the good old days, where real communication took place in the real world. And certainly, rights and freedoms carry with them duties and responsibilities, both for service providers and service users.

This raises the question: who is going to define the rules? Governments? Industry? Citizens? Will the rules be liberal or restrictive? Will freedom dominate or will a new kind of censorship arise on the horizon of the networks? Whose freedom will dominate and which responsibilities will individuals and institutions have if they enjoy the unlimited freedoms of cyberspace?

While the new trilateralism is looking for a balanced solution among sometimes controversial interests of the different participants of the network, other approaches

are more hierarchically (unilaterally or bilaterally) oriented where one group will make the decisions and the others have to follow. The search for new frameworks has only now begun and which approach will finally dominate and determine the design of the new world communication order of the 21st century remains to be seen. 1999 could become a decisive year in this process.

Note:

1. "A Borderless World: Realising the Potential of Global Electronic Commerce," Conference Conclusions of the OECD Ministerial Conference, Ottawa, 9th of October 1998, SG/EC(98)14/REV6.

THE CONTINUED RELEVANCE OF THE "NATIONAL" AS A SITE FOR PROGRESSIVE POLICY MAKING

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Strong accounts of internationalisation, international movements and globalisation embrace the potential for moving the world beyond the nation-state. Globalisation is seen to threaten national sovereignty by taking a degree of economic control away from national economies and into multi-national or global corporations, and the globalisation of media is seen to undermine the ability of national governments to maintain political control and a sense of national unity. The decolonisation process which occurred after the Second World War led to huge waves of migration which created new diasporic communities in virtually every part of the developed world. Up to this point, there were higher degrees of congruence between economy, polity and culture. Economies were largely organised along national lines, although with increasing amounts of international trading and a large degree of centre-to-periphery economic control through branch plants and foreign investment. Political structures were organised virtually exclusively around the nation-state and the ideology of nationalism enforced a high degree of cultural uniformity within the nation (Gellner 1983).

For "post-national" critics, the acceleration of transnational flows across the globe that began after the Second World War has gradually led to an erosion of the appearance of congruity between economy, polity and culture within the nation-state. As Arjun Appadurai (1990) has famously noted, the increased flow of people (immigrants, guest workers, refugees, tourists), of technology, of finance (through increasing deregulation of financial markets), of communication (telecommunications, information and media) and of ideologies (the spread of "Western" ideas of democracy) has increasingly undermined the primacy of nation-states and of a world whose human geography could be understood as a collection of discrete and independent nations who interacted along the lines of the liberal democratic model of citizens — the model that is designated by such terms as "the community of nations."

The picture is even more complicated on the cultural level. The situation in a "post-colonial" world is one where within national borders there exist diverse cultures either because of high levels of migration (as in settler societies like Australia, the US, Israel or Canada) or because national borders were historically drawn in a way that pulled together people of diverse ethnic and linguistic origin (as in the case of former

Yugoslavia). These movements of peoples around the globe have of course created cultural, ethnic, racial and religious linkages across borders — diasporic Chinese and Jewish communities are the longest established and best known — but virtually every other ethnic group can point to diasporic communities across the globe.

The implications of this for the media are apparent: they can no longer address an entirely culturally uniform audience. As Immanuel Wallerstein (1991) says, these days minorities are in the majority. As well as national media which address the audience as citizens of the nation, there are also significant splinterings within the national community which call for the media to address specific cultural, racial, ethnic, and linguistic groups. Multicultural television is one solution to this. Other possibilities are the development of narrowcast services which appeal to niche markets within the national community and the development of global niche market services which satellite techno-logy makes feasible. The fracturing of the nation state clearly is another reason for questioning the media imperialism thesis as an explanatory mechanism for under-standing international power relations in the domain of communication. If we can no longer so clearly regard nations as culturally homogeneous and politically united, the success of this explanation is undermined.

However it is important not to announce the death of the nation prematurely. One of the limitations of theories of globalisation is that they have been produced out of the North Atlantic information "corridor," and bear distinct traces of a Western, metropolitan bias that takes as its template for progressive change the nature of the societies of Western Europe, the U. S., Canada and possibly Japan — in other words, G7 nations with pre-eminent economic and political power. It is these societies for which supra-national globalisation makes most sense, because it is the process which they are undergoing most strongly and from which they stand to gain most.

It is a peculiarly Eurocentric notion as well to assume that the history of nationalism has been uniformly in its twentieth century guises violent, suppressive and destabilising. Any account of national culture from the optic of a nation state peripheral in the world system, as most of the countries of Africa and Asia, Latin and South America, together with the Europeanist settler societies like Argentina, Australia and New Zealand, must take its distance from these theories of globalisation in respect of the postmodern *construction* of a national culture and the positive role the state plays in buttressing these cultures. It is the postcolonial cultures of those states peripheral to the metropolitan power blocs that have most to gain from a "strategic nationalism" that welcomes the sometimes polycultural, polytechnic nature of their societies and which holds to the central role that a nation-building state can perform in shoring up the cultural as well as the jurisprudential, political and economic integrity of small countries in the context of globalisation. In this way, they at least have some possibility of sharing some of the benefits as well as bearing some of the burdens of globalisation. While understandable, rhetorics and justifications for seeking to move beyond nationalism in the metropolitan centres have little purchase in many of the peripheral countries of the world system.

Why, then, has the political and theoretical left in communications and cultural studies continued to be so dominated by the vestiges of traditionalist Marxist internationalism? The left has a long history of opposition to nations and states. Both are thought to be mystificatory, illusory points of loyalty that hold back classes from recognising themselves for what they and their interests really are. Cultural studies, for its part,

has continued this traditional posture, extending it into a wider concentration on the interests of social fractions additional to classes, such as racial, ethnic and gender fractions.

Communications and cultural studies internationally has focused strongly on the "national question" and has typically embraced a "hard" left critique of the co-optative nature of national culture, which takes up the theme of the devolution of the nation "at both ends" — its eclipse by the internationalisation and regionalisation of culture. Andrew Milner sums up this stance concisely. While defending the need for theory to support the "solidarity, community and culture" afforded by communities of class, gender and race, the category of the nation is definitively ruled out:

> *Solidarity, community and culture need not always prove bogus; they might even render social life meaningful, creative and, indeed, genuinely co-operative. Yet this has not been the case, and could not have been so, for the imagined community of the nation state, if only because it remains unimaginable except as superordinate to and sovereign over other imaginable communities. It was, then, one of the central achievements of [...] radical semiotics to have established the theoretical grounds from which one might proceed to defamiliarise, demythologise and thereby deconstruct the cultural politics of [...] nationalisms, radical or otherwise* (Milner 1991, 79).

British inflections of cultural studies, influenced by Tom Nairn (1977), have celebrated the "breakup of Britain" as a central imperial power and have resolutely sought to render problematic its continued symbolic reproduction in official culture. Taking just one example, Geoff Mulgan and Ken Worpole, in their discussion of British arts policies *Saturday Night or Sunday Morning?* (1986), ask us to "recognise that the end of national boundaries is often no bad thing. Afro-Caribbeans in Brixton could have more in common with Moroccans in Paris than with their upper-class neighbours in Dulwich." They quote Saatchi and Saatchi, apostles of global advertising, when they point out that there are "probably more differences between Manhattan and the Bronx than between Manhattan and the 7th Arrondissement in Paris." It may well be that Afro-Caribbeans in Brixton feel greater affinities with Moroccans in Paris than with their neighbours in Dulwich, but this comparison is advanced in the context of European satellite broadcasting and the strategies of advertising most relevant to the North Atlantic region. If we are to take account of the means by which such transnational affiliations were actually to be realised, significant differences between regions of the world emerge.

Mulgan and Worpole develop their innovative theories of the cultural industries against the background of a decade of aggressive Conservative government in Britain which had removed the national arena from effective leftist interventions. This must be taken into account as the context for their forwarding of the potential virtues of internationalism. For these writers, the corollary to accepting internationalisation as providing potential benefits is to develop regional cultural initiatives within the nation state. This model of regionalism must also be seen in the specific context of Britain, where there is no constitutional federal system clouding the issue of nationalism and regionalism; and in the context of the European Union, where regionalism has been used as a means to skirt metropolitan centres of power. The European Union is, however, an entity *sui generis* in the world and policy making modelled on it elsewhere is a highly problematic enterprise.

Mulgan and Worpole argue instead for a radical version of regionalism which "would involve strengthening regional bodies to give them much greater powers of investment and economic development, as well as the power to award franchises for local radio and cable systems." This may have great pertinence in Britain, but if we are to ask appropriately situated questions of theory, we must conclude that the concept of regionalism as a progressive political and cultural force is highly variable around the world. In Australia, for example, the demographic, economic and political difficulties that overcame the progressive Laborite Whitlam government's major experiments in regionalism in the 1970s should give pause to any uncritical adoption of Mulgan and Worpole's model. The rhetoric of the devolution of national cultural infrastructure is firmly part of the conservative repertoire in Australia and always implies a devolution to the much more parochial and conservative states within a federal system.

Some of the most sustained attacks on nationalism come from the critique of the nation state as a bastion of monoculturalism. One example is Stephen Castles, Bill Cope, Mary Kalantzis, and Bill Morrisey's *Mistaken Identity: Multiculturalism and the Demise of Australian Nationalism* (1988). A clear consequence of this powerful critique of the incorporative strategies of nationalism, and of the official Australian rhetoric of multiculturalism, is that the only cultural formations worth fighting for are those formed at the level of the community. This is an even more anti-infrastructural concept than that of regionalism, when it is pitted against nationalist rhetorics which have undergirded the growth of a broad-based national cultural infrastructure covering broadcasting, film, heritage, and the arts in this country.

What analyses like that of *Mistaken Identity* overlook is that a rhetoric and infrastructure for community cultural production, and its consequent employment and economic multipliers, have emerged in Australia only recently, and that these developments have been facilitated by initiatives taken and arguments won at the level of national co-ordination, policy and funding. National rhetorics, which might appear transparently ideological to these critics, are of recent vintage and are quite vulnerable to the stronger imperatives toward internationalisation and globalisation which have a persuasive technological and economic cachet. Without a national cultural infrastructure, and a workable rhetoric to sustain it, the sources for enlivening community, local, regional or ethnic cultural activity would be impoverished. Additionally, if the assumptions of the authors of *Mistaken Identity* were to be implemented, they would undermine the basis in communications policy for the legitimacy of the unique Australian multicultural broadcaster, the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS). Its "special" remit is to advance minoritarian, multicultural concerns *in the national interest*, and it relies on official national policies associated with multiculturalism for its public legitimacy and community support.

What is needed then, in any debate around global, international, national, regional and local movements and levels of progressive policy and practice, is a well-informed sense of articulation between and among these levels, and an ability to assess the relative effectivities of each at any specific, grounded point in the cycle of change, resistance and renewal. Ideological extrapolation from cases whose salience embraces some areas of the North Atlantic metropolitan corridor to their assumed centrality for the world system may not assist this process.

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GLOBALISATION AND COMMUNICATION EQUITY

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There are wide disparities in the world today, and these imbalances range from issues of health, education, income and food supplies to both basic and advanced communication technologies. Building on the traditions of liberalism set forth by authors such as Locke and Mill, I argue that not only are the inequities in our society widespread, but also that these inequities jeopardise our very existence. The new communication technologies not only further demonstrate the divisions that exist in the world, but also may hold the key to our potential success in trying to rectify the gross social inequities of our society. The very prospects of a civil society may rest in our ability to discover ways to distribute communication technologies and channels among all communities. A global "right to communicate" may therefore be more than philosophical jargon, it may ultimately be the necessary prerequisite to our continued residence on the planet.

The MacBride Commission (UNESCO 1980), while addressing news media inequities, was also concerned with equity in the availability and use of other communication technologies. Presently, twentyfour countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) account for seventy percent of the world's telephone mainlines and ninety percent of mobile phone subscribers, yet have only sixteen percent of the globe's population. In addition, the developing world has access to only some 10 percent of the electromagnetic spectrum. Today over half the world's population has not yet made a telephone call, and this is a century-old communication technology! What is missing is the wide-scale recognition of communication as a basic social opportunity or primary good, a basic human right if you will.

Just as the flow of carcinogens resulting from the Chernobyl nuclear accident could not be fully tracked for the first ten, maybe twenty, and possibly thirty, forty, and fifty or more years, so too will the fallout of populations living in a communicatively deprived environment be grossly impaired. Yet many members of the developed world and the Western governments themselves are often impassive to these woes. It is just as important for farmers to discuss better methods of rice production , for rural doctors to be able to dialogue with their large city counterparts, and for students to have access to the best educational resources as it is for stock brokers to access current market

data, for militaries to use sophisticated surveillance systems, and for merchants to be linked to their suppliers via computers. What good is the technology and systems of modern communication if they fail to help the least disadvantaged of our society? It is our moral imperative to share these resources.

With 70 percent of the Third World's children suffering from malnutrition, 82,000 children starving to death each day, and one billion illiterate in the population, these are no longer matters we as global citizens can afford to ignore. The consequence of the inequities in the distribution of basic goods is a moral dilemma we must confront. These plights will ultimately affect us all, even if we live thousand of miles away from the afflicted.

Major portions of the world, of course, are still without modern telephone systems, basic broadcasting, accessible newspapers, sufficient libraries and post offices, basic computers, etc. When we look at computers we find that just four percent of the global supply is owned by people in the Third World. Often communication resources have not been introduced because Western businesses do not realise pre-set profit margins for their efforts, or the existing organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade/the World Trade Organisation (GATT/WTO), and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) fail to provide adequate resources for such development. This is also a time when many developing countries are actually becoming poorer as they look at increasing debt burdens largely a result of steep interest rate increases and the collapse of commodity prices.

Problems with Development Policies

We continue to face the barrier of our inability to address social inequities while tempering the many and often conflicting interests of the Western business community and misguided government policies. Collection of world debt, the introduction of market liberalisation and privatisation, and minimal and poorly placed aid programs collectively help complicate matters for the developing world. Aid-giving is on the decline with industrialised countries giving only some 0.27 percent of their gross domestic product.

Some say that the Third World causes many of its own problems, but as Donaher and Riak (1995) demonstrate in their study of Africa: 1. export crops, not draught is the leading cause of famine; 2. many other continents including Europe have far more dense populations; 3. most agricultural assistance goes to the production of cash crops earmarked for exportation and debt repayment; 4. the world financial system is a greater cause of hunger than bad weather; 5. nearly all U. S. Aid is directed to repressive elites who use the money to maintain power.

Regarding international lending institutions, a common charge is that their overriding interest is in guaranteeing debt repayment for Western banks rather than helping provide true assistance to a population in need. Consider an embarrassing example. In Mozambique, a country where the per capita GDP is $87 (U. S.), the International Monetary Fund (IMF) instructed the country to increase tax revenues from 17.6 percent of GDP in 1994 to 22.6 percent in 1997. This was a two year increase of $93 million. They were also instructed to lower the deficit from 29.7 percent GDP in 1994 to 16.8 percent in 1996, a $173 million decrease. These were stipulations required before any IMF grants were to be awarded (Africa Faith 1997; Hanlon 1996).

Even the World Bank in its World Development Report 1997 observed that "Mozambique was ill-advised." Yet there are many other countries where IMF and

World Bank stipulations are almost as severe, and their effects are disastrous on a world-wide level. Hence, IGOs such as the IMF, the World Bank, NAFTA, G7, ITU, and even UNESCO and the UN are often too involved in politics to do an effective job. Too often they promote the agenda of leading governments and their business communities first, and the agendas of these groups and the world's poor often is not compatible (UNDP 1997).

Communication Technologies

A widely held belief is that new communication technologies hold the potential for a "quick-fix" for many in the developing world today. The lure is further enhanced by the hope that these digital technologies might help developing countries "leap frog" over a number of development stages and "catch-up" with more developed countries. Central to this vision is the notion of technological determinism that places such high hope on investing in technology.

While communication inequities are seen in many realms from numbers of post offices or libraries to volumes of books, newspapers or broadcast outlets per capita, the potential for development leapfrogging vis-à-vis the digital communication technologies may have captured greater rhetorical attention lately. It is these media that also suggest a larger margin of profit for investors in the IT industries. We are reminded by the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) that 70 percent of the world's population has just 3 percent of the telephone lines. In addition, more than half the world's population has never made a telephone call. Unfortunately, there is not a vast profit opportunity for social program investments in this industry, and profit maximisation often drives the investment of capital. The response by the West, particularly the U. S., has been skewed in the direction of neoliberalism and privatisation and more and more against notions of sustainability. If huge profits are not possible, many firms see little reason to invest their time and energies in helping to build a telecommunication infrastructure in the developing world.

The reality is that there are many IT needs in the developing world and more investment money world-wide is being directed from national infrastructure benefiting investments to speculative investment areas. While being potentially lucrative to the investor, government infrastructure projects run the greater risk of going unfunded

And, even if available, what exactly would an Internet connection cost for people in the developing world? The costs vary dramatically, and in many places connections are only available in major cities, sometimes only the capital city. Availability often is limited to e-mail only. Now, there is little doubt that once in the hands of people, the Internet has potential to make a difference. Consider how the Internet is being used to help market local artisans and craft producers. The UN International Trade Centre is one such example. Others have put the producers themselves on-line to market their wares. Labour unions too have been finding the Internet to be a valuable medium for communication and are increasingly turning there. These along with many other groups find the Internet, multi-media, and new, portable, high-quality video production to be an avenue filled with potential for organising constituents as well as gaining access to public forums.

Even the more traditional media offer vast opportunity for helping promote objectives of a civil society. Citizen participation and decision making may be enhanced through access to channels for information and discussion. Unfortunately, the general availability of these media are not a given in many portions of the developing world.

Whereas industrialised counties have 1,018 radios per 1,000 people, developing countries have only 178 and the least developed countries have 96. Trends are often even more profound for other media. For television it is 500/140/20, for metric tons of printing and writing paper consumed it is 74/5.8/0.5, and telephone main lines 40.1/3.3/0.3 (UNDP 1997).

When we look to the Internet, we find that it is already heavily committed to a design largely inspired by U.S. commercial broadcasting. It appears that this structural and programming philosophy will only worsen in months and years to come. We must take lessons from the history of U.S. broadcasting where both radio and television channels were allocated to commercial rather than cultural and educational interests. While the new technologies hold potential to reverse this trend, we already see cases where non-commercial interests are taking a back seat. The market does not always resolve problems. It only seems to work when there is a large critical mass willing to pay for a product or service.

Proposed Actions

If we are going to pursue world agendas of internationalism and global growth, then we must also provide offsets for inequities. Business will likely complain and lobby against such moves. As William Greider argues, however, the primary objective of capitalism is to survive. In addition, regulatory adjustments will ultimately be accepted and absorbed by industry if it appears that controls are likely to be applied (Greider 1997). I therefore propose the following agenda for helping to promote world equity with particular attention to the communications sector:

- Take seriously the Maitland Report (1984) recommendation to set aside "a small proportion of revenues from calls between developing countries and industrialised countries to be devoted to telecommunications in developing countries." Consider taxing all industrialised and recently developed countries (RDCs) communication media revenues with a one percent tax, with revenue earmarked for regional DC telecommunications development.
- Consider providing debt relief for investment into local IT industries by governments in DCs.
- Establish a tax relief program for telecommunications firms in the industrialised world to encourage low profit or no profit telecommunications infrastructure development in developing countries.
- Find an alternative model to the U. S. television-based model of commercialism currently guiding the development of the Internet.
- Create a body comparable to the G7 for the developing world to act as an organ for technological development.
- Create an international academic exchange program in telecommunications at the university level.
- Organise the writing of an updated MacBride Report dealing with the new communications milieu.
- Work to have communications rights accepted as basic human rights within the United Nations and other world bodies.
- Establish grassroots and other citizens' group efforts to help increase awareness of business practices such as liberalisation and privatisation, and its effects on human development.

Conclusion

As the UNDP concludes, "globalisation is proceeding largely for the benefit of the dynamic and powerful countries." While the aftermath of the Uruguay Round of the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) means that global income will increase some $200-$500 billion, the least developed countries may lose $600 million a year, and this will increase for sub-Saharan Africa to $1.2 billion (UNDP 1997). Clearly, inequities do exist in our world today. Of particular concern to us here are the implications that exist through the unequal distribution of communication technologies and channels of expression. As stated earlier, the new communication technologies not only further demonstrate the divisions that exist in our world, but they may also hold the key to our potential success in that they allow for citizen inclusion in societal governance. To foster ideals of a civil society, people must first be able to communicate equally, on multiple channels and in all communities. A global "right to communicate" may be more than philosophical jargon, it may ultimately be the necessary prerequisite to our continued residence on the planet.

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RESEARCH IN (DEVELOPMENT) COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRATISATION

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JAN SERVAES

At the end of 1996, a group of NGOs agreed on establishing the "Platform for Co-operation on Communication and Democratisation." One of the problems identified by the Platform was the lack of insights in the status of research in the field. Therefore, this paper addresses research in processes of (development) communication and democratisation. Within this field the paper gives special attention to the *relevance* of research in general; to *trends* in research that is being conducted, and to *gaps and needs* in the area of research. Separate attention needs to be given to two urgent needs at the applied level of research: 1) the need for *collaboration* among NGOs with regard to research, and, 2) the need for an *inventory* of existing research.

The Relevance of Research

Research is carried out in order to provide insights into complex, unknown or problematic processes. The "democratisation of communication" is such a process. The simplest definition of research is that it provides data with regard to these processes. Data are generally regarded as being important, because much of the actions being taken are based on research data. Such a central perspective on "data for action" also puts research in the spotlight as an important tool for gathering information. Three general classifications can be made with regard to research:

1. *At an epistemological level.* At this level one can distinguish between *positivistic research* and *interpretative research*. Most contemporary research is still based on positivistic assumptions, stating that we can objectively know the social world "out there." In interpretative research, however, it is argued that objectivity is nothing more than inter-subjectivity, principles and parameters which people agree to agree upon. All research begins with some set of assumptions which themselves are untested but believed. Positivistic research, which comprises the mass of modern communication research, proceeds from the presupposition that all knowledge is based on an observable reality and social phenomena can be studied on the basis of methodologies and techniques adopted from the natural sciences. In other words, "reality" exists apart from our interpretation of it, we can objectively perceive, understand, predict, and control it. Furthermore, its methodological premises and epistemological assumptions are based almost exclusively on the Western experience and world view; a view which holds the world as a phenomenon to be controlled, manipulated, and exploited. If we subscribe to the notion that social research should have a beneficial impact on society, it is imperative that we pay more attention to research philosophies that can profitably handle, and indeed stimulate, social change.

2. *At a methodological level.* Positivistic research has always been associated with *quantitative* methodologies and research techniques, whereas interpretative approaches have been associated with *qualitative* methods and techniques. This distinction is not as rigid as it sounds as quantitative data are very useful as a basis for qualitative research. However, interpretative research, in our opinion, borrows the concept of the interpretative, inter-subjective, and human nature of social reality from qualitative research and the inherence of an ideological stance from critical research, combines them, and goes one step further. Rather than erecting elaborate methodological facades to mask the ideological slant and purpose of inquiry, the question becomes, "Why shouldn't research have an articulated social purpose?" In combination with relying on participant observation or complex techniques to gain the subjective, "insider's" perspective, it can also be asked "Why should the 'researched' not do their own research?" Why is it "The poor have always been researched, described and interpreted by the rich and educated, never by themselves?" Why is it such a great deal of research has been conducted about participation in a non-participatory fashion? As in the case of participatory communication, the major obstacles to participatory research are anti-participatory, often inflexible structures and ideologies. We cannot be reductionist about holism, static about dynamism, value-free about systematic oppression, nor detached about participation. Therefore, participatory research may be better than positivist social science for many development and democratic purposes.

3. *At a fundamental versus applied level*. One of the most common distinctions that is being made is the one between *applied research* and *fundamental research*. Applied

research is carried out in order to gather data that can be used for direct practical implementation. Action research and participatory communication research are examples of applied research. This kind of research is not neutral, but explicitly states that it favours processes like democratisation, empowerment, positive social change, decentralisation, etc. Fundamental research has a more descriptive and explorative nature. Results here are important, not only for increasing our knowledge, but also for deepening our understanding of the nature of the processes in general. In this understanding both types of research are important for processes of democratisation. On the one hand we need results with a high degree of practical relevance in order to give our actions ground for departure. On the other hand we also need fundamental insights in order to grasp the process of democratisation more firmly.

What Kinds of Research Data Are Available?

In both areas of fundamental and applied research a variety of data are available. Fundamental research provides the philosophical background upon which to ground action. This philosophical background has changed in accordance with the general theories on development. We have seen shifts from an emphasis on the sender-side of the communication process to an emphasis on the receiver side of the process and we have seen a shift towards a more fundamental interest in culture, where it used to be structure. These paradigmatic shifts and fundamental theoretical background are well documented in academic literature and widely available. In the applied field, data and lessons learned are generally available on exemplary projects. In the field of "development communication" and "democratisation," the following project examples are widely cited and used to illustrate:

Educational Television, Western Samoa, 1964-1976: The educational television station KVZK-TV was indeed the biggest educational television experiment in the world. It failed and the lessons learned have been well documented. It was generally agreed that television was a useful backup for the classroom teacher but did not succeed as the primary method of instruction and was not the ultimate answer to educating and democratising an underdeveloped country.

The Fogo Island project, Canada, 1971: This project marks the beginning of a democratic use of the media in community decision making. In an isolated settlement in Newfoundland, authorities planned to resettle the inhabitants on the mainland because the region was not economically viable. A Canadian film crew used film to initiate a dialogue between planning authorities and inhabitants. Out of the film-based dialogue emerged concrete plans for action such as financial aid and a rejection of the resettlement.

Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE), India, 1975-1976: This project was a one-year experiment in distance education using a geostationary satellite to broadcast instructional programmes directly to receivers in 2,400 villages in India. The programs concentrated mainly on rural development objectives including family planning and improved agricultural practices, as well as promoting national integration.

Programa de Desarrollo Rural Integrado del Trópico Humendo (PRODERITH), Mexico, 1978-1984: PRODERITH is a multi-disciplinary and integrated rural communication project for the tropical wetlands in Mexico. The target groups of the project were farmers and their families in the tropical wetlands. The project illustrates FAO's Development Support Communication Strategy (DSC) by demonstrating communication dimensions of local participation, training at the field level, and adaptation of agricultural innovations. Communication (using video as its major medium) is

integrated into programme formulation and management, and facilitates participation with local population.

What Kinds of Research Data Are Needed?

We currently lack a comprehensive overview of the research data that are available and this makes it very difficult to provide even preliminary statements about what kind of research data are needed. In general, and in research related terms at the epistemological, methodological and fundamental levels, we can state that there is still too much emphasis on "objective" research instead of "intersubjective" research, on research that emphasises quantitative data, and on research that sees communication processes primary as a linear, top-down transmission processes and consequently approaches people as homogeneous masses.

At the applied level it is more difficult to make general statements, but the emphasis seems to be primarily on economic and technology based research, and on research that focuses on the sender side (production side, infrastructure) of the communication process.

What Kind of Research Fits Best?

Besides the above distinction between applied and fundamental research, research data are needed for different levels of society (e.g., the global level, the macro-regional level, the level of the nation-state and more local levels, like, the regional level, the city, the community, the household, etc.). Especially in the current globalising age, data about these different levels become more important. The kind of research that fits best depends on the societal level under research. Data about changing macro-structures at a global level need other methods and techniques of data gathering than data about alternative grassroots media at community levels.

Understanding how people in local, community settings use alternative media and other means of communications for processes of democratisation is a necessity. For these kinds of efforts and this kind of understanding, interpretative participatory research consists of a suitable set of techniques. Active participation of the people involved is preferred. In survey methods, this is most of the time not the case.

Therefore, this paper tries to identify some general trends, gaps and needs in research in the area of (development) communication for democratisation.

Trends, Gaps and Needs

We can identify different trends with regard to the current situation on the democratisation of communication, especially in a development context. Among what we can describe as "social trends" are: (1) the trend of globalising spheres and changing roles of nation-states and macro regions; (2) the continued trend towards expanding media institutions and content mainstreaming; (3) the trend toward the expansion of information and communication technologies; (4) the trend "from public to market," (5) the trend toward a colonisation of the "life world" or "public sphere," and (6) the trend toward cultural complexity and consequently the emergence of old and new "cultural" tensions.

We can also identify the following "interpreting trends:" (1) the growth of a deeper understanding of the nature of communication itself and understanding communication as a two-way process; (2) the trend towards seeing people as active actors and participants in community processes; and (3) recognition of the imbalance in communication resources.

With this in mind, we can point to the following needs in the area of research:

1. The need for clear terminology. Terminology is important. Terminology provides the basis for discussion. A basic agreement on terms and what they encompass is important in order to be able to discuss effectively. First, we need to make sure that we are talking about the same issues and define these issues on common bases. We therefore need to define our terms more specifically in a collective way. A clearinghouse could co-ordinate consensus about terminology. However, we should not become overly "academic" about definitions and terminology.

2. The need for grasping diversity in general theory. Each human being, each community, each society and each nation is unique. Each human being or collectivity should therefore be approached in its own terms and should be sensitive to its own specific cultural situation. Though, if we want evaluations and lessons learned from individual and "unique" situations to be of relevance to other situations, we will have to find adequate and workable ways to grasp the complexity of diversity. Therefore, an interdisciplinary approach seems to be obvious.

3. The need for addressing the global level as well as the local levels of communication and democratisation. We are witnessing the existence of two parallel trends. With the interest in globalisation there is a parallel interest in localisation. On the one hand there is the trend towards homogeneity, synchronisation, integration, unity and universalism (*scale enlargement*) and on the other, there is the trend towards heterogeneity, differentiation, disintegration, diversity, variety and particularism (*scale reduction*). Both need to be addressed separately, but also in connection to one another.

3.1 The need for insights in fast changing global communication structures. Global communication structures are changing rapidly and there is a need to constantly monitor these changes, though, currently this area seems to be overemphasised in research interests. We should aim for a more balanced research interest between global and local structural communication studies. Knowledge about global distribution channels and patterns only partly addresses issues of democratisation. Local access and use are of equal importance.

3.2 The need for insights in fast changing local communication structures. Most of the current research in the field of changing communication structures focuses on global telecommunication players and global communication infrastructure. Although this kind of research is very important, there is also a growing need for research that focuses on *the localisation-side* of globalisation. This means that there is also a need for research in local community settings that tries to grasp the globalisation-feeling with local people with regard to democratic processes. For instance, how can we support the voice of the local (which in some cases can also mean national or even macro-regional) or disadvantaged groups (either in a global, macro-regional, national, regional or local arena), in order to counterbalance the global communication flow and to positively favour "the right to democracy" from the inside out?

3.3 The need for insights in the link between global and local communication structures. Building on the above there is also a need for insights in local reactions to these global changes. In other words there is a need for related local and global insights. A constant monitoring of the changing structures in global and local perspectives seems to be necessary.

4. The need for more cultural research in addition to, and in consultation with, dominant media and technology centred research. Much of the research conducted to

date has been media or technology centred. This is the case in most third world countries, but is very visible with, for instance, new technology in Africa. The first issue of concern is providing the infrastructure for Africa, but there is little discussion on why it is needed to provide the infrastructure, who is going to profit from the infrastructure, what kind of information will be transmitted through the infrastructure, and so on. This is not to say that providing the infrastructure is not important. It is. Though a parallel discussion on cultural issues is of equal importance. Most of the time the hardware-discussion seems to be perceived as being of more importance than the software-discussion. This is a dangerous situation because in the end, access to the hardware and the content/the software will be more important for democratisation than the hardware itself. The hardware is only a means to transmit the software. An infrastructure is of no use if one does not know how to use it.

5. The need for more fundamental and long-term research in addition to short-term research with direct practical relevance. Fundamental research is research that is not of direct practical relevance, but aims to benefit practical research and understanding in the long run. This kind of research can provide us with basic insights in communication and cultural processes. We still know little, in an overview sensitive way, about how people incorporate communication and media in their daily lives. We assume a lot, but often do not ground these assumptions on research findings. Sometimes it turns out we were right, and sometimes we were wrong. Fundamental research can help us change this situation and provide more basic data on the democratisation of communication in daily life.

6. The need for more qualitative data in addition to quantitative data. This need has already been touched upon while discussing research at the methodological level. Besides quantitative data, which are needed and are important, there is also an urgent need for more qualitative data. Qualitative data provide the "why" and "how" of the quantitative data. Especially in a participatory approach this is essential.

7. The need to address the relation between power and democratisation. Processes of democratisation always take place in power driven environments. Especially in (cultural focused) research circles, this has been neglected for a long time. Today we are more aware of the power structures in which people and their means of communication function. Still, there is more research needed that couples communication/democratisation theories with power theories.

8. The need for the development of an "alternative" view and use of the Internet and specifically addressing the potential for democratic communication processes. Internet and e-mail are new technologies that open up new ways for democratisation. However, we need to be cautious about not overemphasising the technological possibilities of the new tools. They are and should remain means to an end. Therefore, there is an urgent need for more research data on the (possible) uses of new information technology related to development and democratisation.

9. The need for an inventory of existing research. The Platform identified the need for access to research as a high priority. As already mentioned earlier, we currently lack a comprehensive overview of the research data that are available and this makes it very difficult to provide even preliminary statements about what kind of research data are needed. In general we stated that there is a need for more fundamental research and long-term research in addition to short-term research with direct practical relevance (need #5). The problem with the more practical and applied research is not

that it is not conducted. The problem here seems to be how to have access to these data and how to share knowledge.

10. The need for collaboration among NGOs. There is an urgent need for identifying areas for research collaboration between NGOs, research institutes and universities. NGOs could voice a priority list for urgent research topics.

Conclusion

Within the competing trends of globalisation and localisation we need to address the role of research in communication in development and democratic processes. Therefore, this paper has addressed the relevance of research in general and has identified trends, gaps and needs in the area. Not underestimating or neglecting the research needs at the epistemological, methodological and fundamental research levels, there is also an urgent need for cumulating knowledge at the applied research level. Especially the more practical needs of collaboration among NGOs and the need for an inventory of existing research should be given high priority.

Note:

A more extensive version of this paper was produced by the Communication for Social Change research centre at the Catholic University of Brussels, on behalf of the Platform for Cooperation on Communication and Democratisation.

THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE AND THE COMMUNICATION OF RIGHTS: CREATING ENABLING CONDITIONS

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Introduction: The Right to Communicate

Never static, the right to communicate has changed with shifts in global geography, developments in technology, and changes in national and other boundaries, evolving through freedom of the press, freedom of expression, the right to information, and now, in response to global media developments, the right to communicate. But, what is the right to communicate, and why is it important now? Communication and information have become central elements in the global neoliberal capitalist order and thus struggles over the right to communicate are more essential than ever to the quest for genuine participatory democracy.

As one considers the right to communicate in the late 1990s, one is pummelled with a language of globalisation, convergence, citizenship. These terms are activated across a multiplicity of institutional locations by a variety of social actors — in policy documents for universal access to telecommunications by national governments, in international resistance movements by local civic organisations linked through the Internet, in advertising for the new information order by transnational media mega-corporations. Clearly, however, a shared language does not imply a shared social vision. What are the implications of these same terms being mobilised by very different social actors?

The World Wide Web offers a visual metaphor of these "hot words" — concepts, ideas, and connections that while contingently located in one context, require elabo-

ration, explanation, exploration. These hot words — globalisation, convergence, citizenship — mark not merely lexical content, but when "clicked on," reveal themselves to be complex sites of contestation.

Increasingly the media of communication, locally and globally, are owned and controlled by a smaller and smaller number of social players; communities have become markets; and in many places in the world, people are denied fundamental access to the means of communication and the media are used to deny basic human rights. It is necessary for everyone concerned with the role communication can play in social democracy to challenge, reappropriate, and negotiate these "hot words" and the spaces and practices they involve.

Globalisation. Globalisation as a material reality, and as a neoliberal project, is provoking changes in relationships between markets, states, civic, and supra-state organisations. Globalisation through technological developments is leading to new and different borders, new public spaces. In an environment dominated by transnational market logic, new actors are emerging, such as global civil society, and the roles played by long-standing actors, such as the state, are shifting.

Convergence. Convergence is most frequently viewed as a technological concern — the melding of broadcasting, telecommunications and computer platforms. Convergence is occurring at the institutional level as well; for example, traditional policy and industry distinctions between broadcasting and telecommunications are being left behind. Convergence is occurring with civic organisations, as more players clutter the global communications landscape working to explore shared goals, shared strategies.

Citizenship. Citizenship entails speaking and acting up in political public space; citizenship practices cannot be limited to market interactions. Effective citizenship in an era of globalisation requires the production of autonomous public zones for democratic practices of discussion and debate. Citizenship practices around the right to communicate are often charged to the "third sector" — alternative or community media — these groups must guard against both babelisation (speaking only of themselves to themselves) and ghettoisation (being incorporated and disempowered through institutionalisation).

The Overall Problematic: Creating Enabling Conditions

How can we create the enabling conditions to develop and protect a right to communicate which includes the ability to both receive and produce information, the ability to access, and participate in, both mainstream and alternative media institutions, and the ability to participate meaningfully in public decision making?

How can we shift our paradigms as well as our practices to reflect the fact that the right to communicate is a social human right, including but constituting much more than individual rights to expression or to information?

If the right to communicate remains a question of resources and their strategic deployment, how do we redistribute and deploy these effectively?

If access to decision-making is at the heart of the right to communicate, how do we ensure democratic public policy processes at the local, national and global levels?

How do we recognise and address the fact that access to media technology is complex, involving resources but also knowledge, language, comfort, and training?

How do we remove the Internet from its naive utopian discourse and reconfigure it as a strategic and practical tool in support of democratic practice?

Citizenship, democracy, and public debate are often figured as elements of consumption practice taking place in public spaces figured as markets. How do we rewrite this discourse? How do we make participation and access to political processes and spaces key elements of an active citizenship? This paper considers how, through the three problematics of democratising policies, democratising institutions, and democratising images, we can answer some of these questions and activate the right to communicate.

Democratising Policies: Acting in the Global Public Interest

Communication policies are sets of practices to establish and protect the public spaces where discussion and debate over communication and the public interest take place. Until recently, communication policy has been the purview of state governments. The context has changed. The media environment is now global, characterised by increased transnational media concentration, deregulation, neoliberal market logic, technological convergence, and shifts in governmental power from states to transnational capitalism. These shifts change the playing field, requiring new strategic interventions. The effects of both the project and the reality of globalisation cannot be adequately addressed by mere access to technology or the right to information. These rights are often interpreted as individual rights only. The right to communicate, on the other hand, reflects a collective spirit; the right to communicate is a social human right. It offers both a set of rights, but also, of responsibilities; the right to communicate must be assumed by social actors. States are strongly implicated, moving from a role of maintaining, to enabling, the right to communicate as a fundamental social right. Considering this right in the context of globalisation, two major lacunae become evident: one in the nature of law itself, and the other at the regulatory level.

Law is a crucial factor in the establishment of communication policy. However, law has typically focused on individual rights, and faces a challenge in offering tools in support of a social human right. The very nature of the law and its relevance in policy formation is at stake. There is also an absence of democratic structures with regulatory authority at the global level to prepare and administer global policy. Neoliberal market logic and the Global Information Infrastructure (GII) have failed to protect "the public good."

The questions become: first, how can an active citizenship build law and regulation which offer a middle ground between the authoritarian model of the imposition of law by the state and the market's model of "self-regulation?" And second, what are the appropriate structures of global governance to enable an effective right to communicate?

The Tasks for Global Media Policy

In order to develop a global civil society, there needs to be a recognition that the global media environment is a public resource; the generation of a general debate on the need to create global mechanisms for ensuring public interest in the media; and the creation of a permanent democratic forum for developing and administering global media policy.

Access and participation are the central elements in activating the right to communicate. Both are very complex notions, however. They include access to the technology of communication but with the knowledge to participate in them meaningfully; access to media institutions (both alternative and mainstream) and the

opportunity and tools to participate in their communication processes; and access to, and the space to participate in, the processes of public discussion and decision-making in relation to the media. Too often these discussions are limited to plans to distribute technology alone.

When considering questions of access and participation, specific policy attention must be devoted to certain groups in order to address larger structural inequities which pose additional barriers to their genuine access and participation, such as language, gender, class, age, and others.

Questions in considering democratising policy: What constitutes the public interest/good for global communication policy? Is there/can there be a global public sphere? Civil service organisations often face a lack of coordination, represent particular interests, and have limited access to decision makers; how can they influence the setting of global policy? How can information technologies aid them? Who should author global communication policy? Who should administer and enforce it? How do we guarantee that universal access includes access to a broader depth of services, the capacity to use media effectively (through training and support), and that universality/access are truly global?

Democratising Institutions: Disrupting the Market Model

Prior to the 1990s, media systems were primarily national; now a global commercial media marketplace has become dominant, and some would argue, largely determinative of national and local media institutions and practices. The global media system is certainly produced by, and productive of, the global capitalist political economy with its central tools of deregulation and advertising. Corporate concentration continues at an alarming pace. Transnational media conglomerates control both content and distribution and are rapidly moving to simultaneously engage several media sectors. Nine or ten transnational corporations, among the largest firms in the world, control an overwhelming amount of the global media market. Cross-ownership, frequent mergers, and interlocking boards further complicate the terrain.

The U.S. clearly dominates the global media market — resulting in a flattening of diversity in content and form of media, both internationally and within the U.S. Once the institutional framework for consciousness production is in place, it becomes invisible. The struggle over the right to information and knowledge must therefore begin with the democratisation of information and communication institutions. The global nature of this struggle makes it, at the same time, very necessary, but highly complex. For example, new communications technologies are creating new types of communities not anchored in physical contiguity, offering potential for new forms of civic organisation. Arguably traditional centres of control (through ownership) are challenged and traditional distinctions between different types of media (broadcasting, film, print) are blurred. However, these shifts have considerable implications for freedom of expression, particularly in culturally plural environments. For example, Rupert Murdoch's StarTV, not satisfied with Asia-wide audiences for its English language programmes, is catering to regional language audiences within Asia. Cultural interests and the logic of the market are fragmenting the global media into regional, geo-linguistic areas, which are supra-national and represent multiciplicities of mores, customs, laws and traditions.

Further, the global media system is producing a power struggle between the owners of multinational media and the governments of Asian countries, with freedom of

expression caught in the middle. The liberal model of the press embraced by the global media system is not a universal model and often comes into conflict with national and local practices. Global media systems offer the potential of unprecedented cross-fertilisation between cultures, but with the simultaneous risk of eroding cultural identities of indigenous peoples. Globalisation of media highlights the dual and opposite forces of internationalisation and localisation in interaction. Any potential for consensual global culture will require international understandings, agreements, and cooperation based in equality and fairness.

Questions in considering democratising institutions: Is it possible to problematise the utopian model of the international NGO movement, and move beyond it to address a viable and coherent global civic project? Conservative research foundations produce knowledge to reinforce non-democratic social visions, intervening directly into state policy; how can these strong voices be resisted and challenged through the production of counter-knowledges? Can a coherent project be activated by civil society based on these counter-knowledges? What hope does the Internet offer as an alternative, perhaps more democratic, media institution? As media institutions become global, what are the shared standards of reporting, recording, and representing other cultures?

Democratising the Image: The Dialectics of Openings and Closures

The media are growing ever more significant in social life. Through language, technology, and content, dominant media serve as both products and producers of inequality, mobilising both practices of inclusion and exclusion. Any review of global trends in communication and information will reveal the need for alternative models, alternative practices, and alternative content which challenge the non-democratic, market-driven model of the global media system Media literacy campaigns can help to generate the informed media criticism essential to real democracy. Arguably the most effective opposition, however, is a non-commercial accountable media. Alternative media function in the chinks of the world machine often by using the technological cast-offs of dominant media systems, benefiting from the overall improvements in capacity produced in the dominant media, and rewriting the uses of certain technologies for activist purposes. However, this is a largely reactive approach to democratising media — what is needed are more proactive models. Such media can be developed through sharing resources, strategies, and successes.

Alternative media: some success stories and actions with consequences. Alternative media can be used for community mobilisation, for establishing global links across interest communities, for preserving and reconstructing popular history, for creating sites of access and training, and for building alternative structures of communication. They are central to the education of media activists, not only in the necessary technical skills, but also in different models of understanding the interplay between media, citizenship, and democracy. Most importantly, perhaps, alternative media create public spaces within civil society, and empower citizens to take back, create, and participate actively within politics; they are essential to democracy. For example, the Outcomes-Based Education process in South Africa is working to bring together traditional and alternative media organisations to offer broadened broadcasting education. This is not without challenges on issues of qualifications, standards, and monitoring, but there exists a need for formal training and qualification in community media planning and production. There are other successful initiatives — public access channels are "taxing" the profits of the telecommunications industry to support public interest

communication; video is being used by activists to mobilise support for labour unions, to mobilise international boycotts, and to share information in communities; small radio transmitters challenge monopolies of mega-watt commercial stations, offering alternative content; and websites have been used successfully to launch world-wide activism campaigns. Often, however, attempts to mobilise participatory media are met with concerted opposition from state and market players. For example, the Kurdish community in Europe launched a daily programme in their native tongue (Med-TV) through satellite in March, 1995, after being denied both their identity and language by the Turkish state. It offered a daily menu of news, educational and entertainment programming. Once the channel went on air, Turkish police in Kurdistan began to destroy equipment and arrest and intimidate viewers, dish sellers and installers of equipment. When this was not successful in silencing the station, jamming, espionage, and diplomatic pressure were used. Businesses associated with the channel were pressured, leading to a number of satellite providers retracting their services. Finally, in September the police raided the Med-TV office in London and their main studios in Brussels — arrests were made, and equipment and archival material seized. Later, a court found there had been no wrong-doing by Med-TV justifying the attack. However, the actions damaged the reputation of the station and constituted a concerted and focused effort to deny communication rights to Kurds. How do we overcome such oppression? Some have called for cultural freedom anchored in global ethics. Culture is central to democratic development. Cultural freedom is a collective, rather than individual right, and one which includes the right to communicate. The right to communicate includes both the passive and the active right of the receiver to inform and be informed. It places the burden on states to create the enabling conditions for the flourishing of a diversity of accessible media. The right to communicate, as it has developed in international discourse, is grounded however, in a particular cultural setting.

Questions in considering democratising the image: How can alternative images be produced and circulated, both within mainstream and alternative media structures? What sorts of support structures are possible on local, regional, national and global levels to ensure access to alternative and dominant media institutions? What are some of the models for participatory use of communication technology that challenge existing orders? What are the consequences and constraints of cultural freedom for participatory communication? How do we build a global ethics?

Conclusion: Creating Enabling Conditions

Though the right to communicate is widely shared theoretically, it is difficult to promote in practice. There is a need to reach out, to create a network of people across a panoply of institutional sites around the world, both working in the domain of the democratisation of media, but also those implicated in the outcomes.

As a variety of groups and gatherings consider the idea of a World Congress on Media and Communication (see next article), the following objectives have been suggested: (1) to bring together various ongoing efforts towards a global media social movement, consolidating otherwise dispersed activities; (2) to focus on joint means to implement the programmes and good intentions of present initiatives; (3) to identify media and communication issues on which inadequate attention is currently focused; (4) to sensitise other groups and organisations around media and communication issues and to establish linkages between social movements in different but related areas of concern.

The outcomes of such an initiative could include: (1) joint agreements on means to implement existing proposals, such as those of the People's Communication Charter; (2) the establishment of an umbrella organisation, that can reinforce existing actions; (3) the establishment of linkages for ongoing cooperation between concerned groups and individuals, from grass roots to international organisations; (4) significant media coverage and enhanced public awareness of the issues; (5) the creation of a new institutional structure or organisation.

Ongoing Questions. What are the central issues for democratisation of the global media and communication scene? Does the basis exist, on the ground, for a global social movement in media and communications today? What are the key requirements to bring it together?

Note:

A more extensive version of this article was prepared as a Background Paper for delegates to the Vidéazimut General Assembly and International Seminar on The Right to Communicate and the Communication of Rights, Capetown, South Africa, September 18-21, 1998. It presents a synthesis of contributions to the virtual conference on the same topic organised by Videazimut in June 1998.

A WORLD CONGRESS ON MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION: THE NEXT STEP?

SEÁN Ó SIOCHRÚ

The Context

Most people involved in alternative and progressive media and communication, whether as activists, practitioners, academics or policymakers, believe two things: First, there is reason to be concerned about certain global trends in media and communications, and more and more people are realising this. Second, there has been a flourishing of activities at all levels to expose the dangers of these trends, to counter their impact, and to build alternatives.

Of course, it is difficult to prove these empirically, but gut feeling and accumulated personal impression must count for something. Surely few doubt the growing interaction in recent years between the various concerned groups, and the rise in the international dimension of NGOs involved in media and communication some perhaps aspiring to the status of a nascent social movement. At any number of world, regional and national meetings of NGOs and civil society groups, of academic organisations and even of some intergovernmental events, a cluster of similar and overlapping questions are heard, questions such as:

- Beneath the unrelenting hype, what are the real risks, for culture, economy and society, of a headlong rush into globalisation and convergence of media according to commercial principles?
- What could or should be the respective roles of civil society, of governments, and of corporate interests?
- What forms of governance at national and especially international level are needed to avoid the risks and guarantee accountability, people participation, and democracy?

Different groups emphasise different aspects, and no one can deny a diversity of conclusions. But there is a further common thread: *A desire to progress to another stage of*

organisation, to pull diverse progressive forces together, and to tackle the issues through strategic interventions at different levels. This is evident in recent World Congresses of AMARC and Vidéazimut (international community media NGOs); in declarations and statements from many meetings and events on just about every continent; and in the promotion recently of a number of initiatives with precisely the aim of fulfilling this desire.

The subject of this paper, the notion of organising a *World Congress on Media and Communication*, originated at one such event, a meeting held in Madison, Wisconsin in September 1997 to debate the strategic options for the People's Communication Charter. Some of those present, now expanded to include others, agreed to explore the idea of a World Congress as a possible next step in building a movement.

A "World Congress on Media and Communication"

The term "Congress" is simply a label to catch attention and suggest a large coordinated activity. It could equally be called (it has been suggested) a Civil Society Summit; a Coalition; a Platform; a Movement or many other things. The point is: it is intended to imply a process, and a target or milestone on the road to a *global social movement on media and communication*.

The *process* is central. It builds on the belief that the only available means to gain influence, for those outside positions of direct political and economic power, is to motivate and mobilise large numbers of people and people's organisations. This is a basic premise.

But it is also useful to set a *target*, a date at which a major *milestone* will have been reached on the process underway. The year 2000 seemed sufficiently distant to allow time for some serious organising, for an event that would self-consciously mark a new stage in movement building.

The "Congress" idea, at this point, is simply a framework within which these possibilities can be more widely discussed and refined. Its aim is to play a positive role, alongside others, in the consolidation of a global social movement around media and communication, challenging what has become the new orthodoxy of market dominance. It is not seen as yet another independent initiative, but rather as a development of, and support for, existing organisations and initiatives.

Since Madison, an exploratory period of consultation has been underway on the shape such a "Next Step" might take. Since May 1998, a "concept paper" for the Congress has been presented to a number of events to test it against different realities. So far, the AMARC and Vidéazimut World Congresses and the IAMCR Conference have held sessions (including two virtual conferences) at which it was discussed; and the International Forum on Communication and Citizenship in San Salvador in September 1998 endorsed it. It has also been circulated widely (including in publications of the Cultural Environment Movement and the World Association for Christian Communication) and feedback obtained from a variety of individuals.

This process will continue until early 1999, at which point the Interim Organising Group (which remains open to new members) will decide where, if anywhere, to take it.

The Problem

The problem, as perceived by so many, can be succinctly stated.

The long-term implications of current trends in media and communication extend far beyond media *per se* to the broader social, cultural and economic structures and environment. We are witnessing rapid concentration of ownership and control globally,

a wholesale shift towards a trade paradigm in national and global interactions, and the enfeebling of what limited democratic global governance structures exist. Media and communication are more and more treated as merely another sector, producing commodities destined for consumption according to principles of private property and oligopolistic market control. The potentially destructive impact of such a scenario, over generations, cannot be underestimated.

The risks relate not simply, or even primarily, to mass media and communication channels themselves. Rather it is the impact on the broader social, cultural and economic structures that is of far greater concern. The narrowing of the public communication sphere and the failure to democratise media and communication could stifle the growth of democratic processes in society, restrict meaningful participation in the creation of a common life-world, and undermine our heritage of cultural richness and diversity. The long-term consequences are unknown, but, overall, there is a disturbing absence of debate in the public domain regarding the undeniable risks.

Responses

Certain UN organisations such as ITU and UNESCO have sounded notes of warning, if somewhat timidly and hesitantly. But internationally, NGOs, independent organisations and some academics have been most vociferous in raising the alarm, with a string of meetings, publications and internet activities, and some limited lobbying and campaigning. Lately, these groups have been reaching out to each other, and several attempts have been made to build networks and coalitions (for instance the People's Communication Charter, Platform for Cooperation on Democratisation and Communication, Network for the Social Empowerment over New Communication Technologies).

Yet for all this activity on the ground, an understanding of the issues and a sense of their urgency has yet to penetrate broader progressive constituencies, for instance in development and environmental movements, and amongst the public in general. Media and communication organisations and individuals converse almost entirely amongst themselves — an essential stage in building a critical mass, but unlikely on its own to have any significant impact on the scale of the challenge confronting us. There is a real danger that unless this nascent movement can move beyond the existing level of loose internal organisation, and take advantage of the impetus that has built up, it may turn inwards and fail to progress.

Thus, the conviction is growing (confirmed in the consultation to date) that the time has come to reach beyond organisations concerned directly with media and communication, to begin the process of building a broader social movement with the capacity to mobilise other progressive movements and motivate the general public to express its concerns.

An Approach to a Congress

The first ideas for the Congress organisation were pretty loosely formed. It should be:

- organised by a broad coalition of groups, active in diverse areas not all related to media;
- involve a set of linked events/activities in different geographical locations;
- focus on achieving concrete outcomes for a popular coalition or social movement;
- aim for an impact with the public in general, through the mass media and other means.

Neither were precise objectives and outputs laid down. These might include:

- helping to consolidate various ongoing efforts towards a global media social movement;

- devising joint means to implement the programmes of present initiatives;
- identifying media and communication issues on which inadequate attention is currently focused;
- sensitising others, in related areas, to media and communication issues.
- gaining wide media coverage and enhanced public awareness of the issues;
- establishing an umbrella group or new institutional structure.

Discussions so far have already enriched the original concept. Feedback received would suggest the following:

*A Common Vision for the Next Step. S*ignificant effort is required simply to build, amongst those who already see the need, a *common vision* of what the next step should be, its precise aims and the form it should take; and to gain a serious commitment that we must act together on it. If the Congress idea (or any other initiative with similar aims) is to build a solid institutional base, it must be "bought into" by many organisations, and individuals within them. Passive endorsement will be insufficient. But securing more requires persuasive arguments and conviction; as well as clear aims and objectives.

Reaching out to Others. Having created a core group, the process of organising a Congress must preach beyond the converted to gain the understanding and active support of its natural allies among NGOs and international organisations. These include those who see the dangers of a market driven agenda in their own spheres, in economic development and trade, in the environment, in gender issues, in indigenous people, in cultural homogenisation, and so forth. The Congress aims less at encouraging new actors *into the media movement* (premised on the notion that they should become more concerned with media issues), than at the idea that such movements will find it ever more difficult *to achieve their own ends* if trends in media and communication continue unchecked (premised on the notion that we bring something to them, that we can help them achieve their aims).

Doing this demands that the risks of current trends, and benefits of a different approach, are spelled out in ways that correlate to their agendas, translated into clear and well founded arguments that relate on the one hand to what other social movements are trying to achieve, and on the other to people's everyday lives. Too many media critics simply take for granted that others understand why, for example, homogenisation of media and concentration of ownership are dangerous trends. Any movement must take its arguments to where people currently are; not expect them to come to the movement.

Reaching out to others will thus require very significant outreach and educational work, over a long period of time. This in turn demands resources, in materials and in time.

Need for a Bottom Up Approach . An international event can attract broad institutional support, involve thousands, and bask in media attention — yet fail to achieve anything lasting if it lacks deep roots to communities and people. To attain a milestone in movement building, an initiative must be organised with the direct participation of the local, national and regional levels, growing upwards from real concerns. The motivation and mobilisation of people will be forthcoming only through such participation; and, ultimately, valid direction can only come from that level. There is little purpose to developing the most brilliant global strategy, if the commitment to act does not come from the ground level, where the power resides. Plans of action and strategies must thus build at the ground level first.

Needless to say, this encounters the contradiction of how to initiate and support a process which must nevertheless have a significant centralised organising component.

Indeed, most international NGOs already face this problem as a fact of their own organisational development. No single event can, in itself, achieve anything like this level of bottom-up commitment. A number of suggestions have been made regarding how to go about this: for instance through a cumulative set of coordinated actions; simultaneous congresses in different places; and/or a series of meetings nominating delegates to an international event.

Need to Address Diversity . Related to a bottom-up approach is the need to address the diversity of people's situations and needs. Although distinct trends in media and communication are visible at a global level, they act in contradictory ways and impact very differently in different circumstances. They thus demand different responses. No single, simplistic approach can address such a diverse terrain. To be effective internationally does not mean imposing a single strategy, but rather developing a nuanced set of strategies based on the real regional and social diversity. It might also mean beginning with activities solely on a regional level, and only later looking internationally. Such diversity, which might equally embrace gender, ethnic, cultural and other factors, must be built into the process of organising a movement, not simply as one topic of its agenda. (The Interim Organising Committee for the Congress recognises its own shortcomings in this regard.)

A Longer Time Scale. Most of the above point to a longer time scale, and a more phased approach to the Congress. The year 2000 is probably too close to secure the resources and undertake the groundwork required.

Continuing the Consultation and Exploration

Overall, the consultation so far has answered some basic questions, largely confirming the premises of the idea but raising a new set of questions that underline the complexity and resource intensity of such an undertaking. These matters will need some careful consideration.

The Congress proposal, and the thinking behind it, is to be put to further gatherings in coming months. Individual comments and expressions of interest are also welcomed. Plans are in hand to link up with parallel initiatives including a permanent virtual conference on Strategies for Alternative Media, and a Website. An internet list for those interested will also soon be available.

If sufficient agreement can be reached on a coherent set of basic principles, the next step will be to undertake an in-depth feasibility study on the idea, to rigorously assess the resources required and potential sources of funding, to see the idea through.

Note:

The Interim Organising Committee, advising and overseeing the exploratory phase described in this article, comprises: Alain Ambrosi, Michael Eisenmenger, George Gerbner, Cees Hamelink, Robert McChesney, Kaarle Nordenstreng, Seán Ó Siochrú, Marc Raboy, Pradip Thomas, Lynne Muthoni Wanyeki. Please address comments and expressions of interest to sean@nexus.ie.

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