

UNIVERSITY OF TAMPERE

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COMMUNITY MEDIA AND PARTICIPATION

Theoretical discussion with cases from St. Petersburg

Master's Thesis  
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication  
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CUSTÓDIO, LEONARDO DA COSTA: Community media and participation: Theoretical discussion with cases from St. Petersburg

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This thesis presents a theoretical framework for the study of community media. Communicative actions performed by social and civic organizations are discussed in an attempt to define whether or not these activities can be considered community media. Selected non-governmental organizations from St. Petersburg serve as illustrative cases. The central question is whether or not any symbolic actions of social and civic actors can be considered community media

This research is mostly a theoretical effort to locate non-governmental actions within a framework for in-depth media studies. With that in mind, democracy is understood in *radical pluralistic democratic* terms as a terrain for a multitude of social struggles where each collective action is built through *discourse*. Under these circumstances, community media are spaces and results of symbols and practices that *may* cause mobilization and forge social identities. These processes present different *levels of participation* that can be used as indicators of how effective these actions are. For the development of the analysis, community media are perceived as an *articulated circuit*. Its three moments – *production, message* and *reception* – can be scrutinized separately, in their interfaces and/or as an entire process. The empirical data was used to demonstrate the applicability of this framework.ok

The illustrative data was collected in St. Petersburg in April 2009. From a *factist perspective, non-structured interviews* were conducted with four representatives of three non-governmental organizations. Only one of the cases could be considered real community media. The two remaining cases were there merely to illustrate non-participation levels. The identification of different participatory levels in the same case studies suggested that participation does not determine what community media are. Consequently, the main contribution of this study is to present a theoretical framework that can be applied as a tool for further research and generate both practical and analytical results. For practitioners, the measurement of levels of participation can be used as a performance indicator. For media scholars, the participatory issue is a gateway to in-depth investigations of the community media process.

The understanding of community media as an articulated circuit opens up a range of possible qualitative approaches as soon as the participatory levels are disclosed. Among other themes, researchers can scrutinize the symbolic construction of the messages, the interpersonal relations and conflicts among participants and non-participants and the effects of the media employed. These studies can provide rich knowledge to support the relevance of *strategic plans* for the formation, maintenance and success of social and civic groups. Ultimately, community media researchers may effectively contribute to transformations in socio-political life.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

During my initial moments of European and Russian Studies at the University of Tampere, one of the most difficult tasks was to define what the final theme of this thesis would be. After a number of courses on Russian media, I identified three distinct study lines from where I was tempted to choose one that would suit my interests best. They are better outlined by Anna Leinonen's (2008) description of her similar impressions. Some scholars concentrate on the structural development of Russian media systems; others focus on the relations between the political power and the media; another group explores the development of journalism as a profession with great attention paid to its norms and practices (p. 7). As for her own interests, Leinonen explored the uses made by St. Petersburg residents of television products in an academic effort that resulted in a groundbreaking reception study on Russian media. In my case, I was disheartened and unwilling to spend any more time on mass media analyses, probably due to the disappointment I had been through in my previous studies.

In the thesis for my Bachelor's degree, I combined *political communication* and *agenda-setting* theories, and employed them to the investigation of the coverage given by one of the most traditional Brazilian newspapers to the presidential elections of 2006 (Custódio 2007). On that occasion I concluded that there was a mutual influence between the newspaper and the speeches of the candidates: a discursive circle where the news about the campaigns and personal political figures generated declarations by their opponents causing more news to be printed (p. 64). That work may have contributed to increase the discussions about media and political power in the field, but I was dissatisfied with the lack of relevance of my study for the comprehension and the enhancement of aspects of the social life of my country. For a similar reason, the Russian scenario of communication research also increased my disappointment. Interestingly though, the exit to these motivational difficulties was also related to experiences lived during my prior studies.

During the Bachelor's degree program, there were two courses that many future journalists who attended it regarded as meaningless, but they happened to become crucial landmarks for the development of this research. The first was a theoretical introduction to the notion of community media, where the lectures were based on Raquel Paiva's doctoral dissertation (2003) on the interfaces between community and media in a global society. Her theorizing was illustrated with empirical cases of television and radio stations developed in slums in the city of Rio de Janeiro where the residents of those poor areas were involved in all the levels of the broadcasting process: from decision-making phases to content production. Since those media phenomena were considered

small and derogatorily described as “piratas” (pirates), many of us did not take them seriously. The other course was a pragmatic approach to third-sector media. Ana Lucia Vaz, the professor responsible for the lectures, had been an activist involved in the production of a number of informational channels developed by students’ unions, workers’ unions and non-governmental organizations. The experiences she shared with the group and the field trips for the observation of these communicational activities of social and civic actors in the metropolitan region of Rio struck many of us. However, it would be only years later, in Finland, that that knowledge would prove its relevance for my studies: they would be central in the development of my plan for the Master’s thesis.

After wandering around different theories and concepts in order to find inspiration for my research project, it was one lecture course that shed a light on the theoretical and pragmatic status concerning social and civic activities in Russia. The meetings and discussions reminded me of the notion of community media and made me believe in its applicability to Russian studies. “New forms of politics in Russia” was a detailed introduction to the debates regarding non-governmental organizations and other collective actors in the country. Suvi Salmenniemi, scholar responsible for the course, provided us with fundamental literature about the issue. Those books and articles allowed me to establish a linkage between what I had learned about community media in Brazil and the activities of some collective actors in Russia. The most significant of those writings was Zdravomyslova’s descriptive analysis of the procedures and activities developed by the Soldiers’ Mothers movement in order to build the group’s identity (Zdravomyslova 2004). However, even though the author approached symbolic actions built through communicative activities, the theme was not explored from a communicational perspective. At that moment, I was sure that the case could generate rich results if approached through the notion of community media. Most importantly, I finally confirmed that the concept could be theorized and adopted for further investigations in the Russian studies if it was adapted to fit the discussions concerning that society. Accordingly, I engaged in the construction of a framework from which my coming academic journey would be launched and the newfound excitement was put to test as I crossed the intersections among sociology, political science and communication.

As soon as I had defined the general lines of my research interest, I examined the available literature concerning the key concepts for this work: the notion of community media and the conceptualizations referring to non-governmental actors. A more complete account of the construction of the definitive theoretical background will be provided in the following chapter. Before, I will briefly describe my initial readings and how some existing discussions surrounding

these two topics tended to cause analytical confusion and create incoherence between my analysis and my personal objectives. At first, I read a number of authors who had written about the media developed by social and civic actors and the quantity of different approaches to very similar phenomena was impressive. Terms like *alternative media*, *citizens' media*, *radical alternative media*, *popular media*, *indigenous media* and several others have been used as academic labels for these actions. After all, most of the times these names change due to the approaches they are given. As a consequence, this multitude of classifications normally generates lack of conceptual clearness. "The terms 'participatory', 'alternative' and or 'community' are generously used to refer to a wide diversity of experiences that often are not very participatory, alternative and/or community-based" (Dagron 2007, p. 197). A similar situation was met in what concerns social and civic actors.

The terminologies used to refer to non-governmental groups of public activists are also wide-ranging. These groups are commonly referred as *non-governmental organizations* (NGOs), *collective actors*, *social movements*, to name but a few. I acknowledge that there are distinctions among each of these terms especially on the theoretical level (some of them are concepts of their own), and these differences should matter in specific investigations from a sociological perspective. However, I opted not to distinguish these actors in my analysis because I believe they can be seen as peers in the struggles for the development their own media systems. For that reason, I sought for a single concept that could gather them in a way that my possibilities of empirical observations would not be limited to this or that kind of group. Soon, I started considering *civil society* as a suitable defining notion. The idea of an arena in society outside the governmental and the business spheres where there are possibilities of self-organization and concerted actions (Bryant 1993) appeared as the most adequate umbrella concept for all those activities. Nevertheless, I noticed that most part of the discussions on civil society referred to power struggles between the state and the commercial enterprises. Media (sometimes comprehended as a synonym for the press) would be instruments in dispute by the two powerful pillars of society while social and civic actors most likely would never have controlling access to these symbolic tools (Galtung 1999).

As a result, if I had chosen to proceed in this understanding of the relations between these social actors and the media, I would have probably reached similar conclusions to those of my Bachelor's thesis: the reaffirmation of the power of media owners and a superficial argument regarding the social (ir) relevance of these groups from the communication perspective. That is, once again I would reinforce mainstream assumptions and not contribute for improvements of social life. Such impasse in relation to the definition of community media and how to refer to social and civic actors in this research caused a positive outcome: it granted me a chance to read much

more on the subject and reflect on my own objectives and goals. In the end, not only a solution for these conceptual problems was found, but also the whole structure of this thesis was designed so that its objective was reached. The main contribution of this investigation is the development of a theoretical discussion for approaching community media, which here are understood to be symbolic actions produced by social and civic actors in order to build identification and mobilization among their participants.

Since I am part of a degree program called European and Russian Studies, I decided that most of the theoretical and exemplary argumentations of this thesis would revolve around data from studies of Russian media and non-governmental organizations. The empirical section of this work is meant to illustrate the theoretical discussion through the presentation of empirical cases of communicative actions produced by social and civic actors from St. Petersburg. Having given a brief anticipation of the general contours of this work, let me introduce the questions that will be pursued and thus present the ideas that will guide the elaboration of this thesis.

## **1.1. Research questions**

In this thesis, I will dedicate my efforts to *suggesting a theoretical framework for the studies of community media*. Then, I will provide different examples of communicative actions performed by social and civic organizations and *attempt to define whether or not these activities can be considered community media*. Such a way of employing empirical cases that may or may not be samples of a conceptualization is problematic, but I believe that this is an imperative first step into a complex, ramifying and consequently fruitful matter. One reason for the introductory purposes of this thesis arose during the period of my theoretical maturation, when many colleagues had the same question after listening to the presentation of my ideas for this work: “What is community media?” Thus, I realized that no matter how much effort I would have put to theorizing, it would have never sufficed. Illustrative cases from the world out there will always be needed for this kind of theorization to be complete.

Consequently, those questionings led me to reflections about my original ideas for the investigation. At first, motivated by the question whether there was community media in Russia or not, I struggled with difficulties to find cases in St. Petersburg. Then I decided to admit my own need for empirical experiences and ask: *What is necessary for these communicative actions to be considered community media?* Not only is this question more honest and realistic, but also an opportunity to put the theoretical construction to test. However, I should also emphasize that since



this is mainly a theoretical discussion, the empirical analyses shall not be regarded as deep and comprehensive inquiries, but only as mere illustrations for a framework that may (and certainly will) be employed in future in-depth research.

The questions that will be used to support this inquiry are drawn from the features of community media (see chapter 3). One of the assumptions I have made about social and civic actors is that their participatory nature would make them automatically interested in promoting identification and mobilization. In order to evaluate the accuracy of such argument, I will focus on *what objectives these groups have in performing their communicative actions and how these groups try to reinforce the sense of belonging of the participants in the group, and to mobilize others to join the group and participate in the actions*. These questions are aimed at generating observations about the strategic aspects in the construction of a social identity through community media. The other aspect that will be emphasized in this investigation refers to the active nature of the community media production process. Thus, the question of *how participatory these actions are* will be pursued since both messages and practices are important for the construction of community (see 3.2). I suppose that the more participatory these activities are, the more chances they have of being considered community media. Nevertheless, this hypothesis should also be verified and, for that reason, I will try to discover *what impact the different levels of participation cause to the effectiveness of the community media process*. These questions will be supported by more objective inquiries (see 4.3). They will be developed based on the moments of the articulated communication circuit of community media (see 3.2). As I will display throughout this work, the focus on these activities unveil a gap in the Russian communication field and still an underexplored research ground in NGO studies. A preliminary observation of the outline of this thesis will allow the comprehension of ways in which the research will be conducted. It will also be an introduction to the concepts and theories that were adopted and combined to fit this and future investigations in the field.

## **1.2. Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 2 accounts for the construction of the theoretical background for this research. It is divided into three main parts. At first, I deepen the reasoning about the problematic concept of civil society, this time by extending the discussion into the conflicting zone of the *transitional democratic* debates. While some Russian and Western scholars perceive Russia as an apprentice of neo-liberal rules of thumb, others claim that those democratic terms cannot be transposed to Russian society. Meanwhile, little of the democratic debates are dedicated to the actions promoted

by Russian social and civic actors. Thus, this section suggests and justifies the abandonment of civil society and the re-conceptualization of democracy based on the *radical democratic* theory developed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). Briefly put, their theory puts democracy as a discursive element in the construction of social forces that struggle against the socio-economic oppressing forces of the contemporary society. On a second moment, I engaged in providing a theoretical basis for the analysis of these symbolic constructions from the perspective of communication studies. For that matter, the Latin American paradigm of reception studies appears as a source of inspiration for the development of researches in the communication field outside the boundaries of mass media studies. Through the notion of *mediations* (Martin-Barbero 1993; 2003) the symbolic actions those social and civic organizations are in focus: how media procedures and technologies are used for the achievement of social transformation is the main question in this line of thought.

This scenario is an adequate foundation for the investigations of community media. Hence the third chapter is devoted to the conceptualization of these phenomena and to the description of how they may be investigated. In the first part, some features of distinct definitions of the term were combined so that a suitable and flexible definition of the term would be reached. John Downing (2001), supported by Klaus Jensen (2002), allowed a broader comprehension of the term *media*. The relevance of participation and the effects of those actions in the lives of individuals were respectively reasoned according to the studies by Cicília Peruzzo (1996) and Clemência Rodriguez (2001). At last, Kevin Howley's (2005) comprehension of *community* as being a result of practices and invested meanings in symbolic actions concluded the contributions for the definition of community media's main characteristics. In summary, these media can be conceived as a space and a result of symbolic actions that may increase the chances of collective identification and improving mobilization among participants and potential participants of the group. The second part complements the theoretical framework adopted for the investigation of communicative actions produced by social and civic groups. At that point, I introduce the notions of *articulation* and *communication circuit*, both coined by Stuart Hall (1973; 2001). The combination of these concepts will derive the understanding of community media as an articulated process in which *production*, *message* and *reception* are described as three independent, but interconnected moments of the communicational process will be the basis for the development of the method applied for the production of the data to be scrutinized.

In the fourth chapter, I introduce the technical procedures for the production of the illustrative empirical data. Due to lack of time and other obstacles for more in-depth investigations,

the data collection was oriented by Alasuutari's methodological approach called *factist perspective* (1995). Through this notion, the knowledge about a social reality is acquired through descriptions made by people who are in a position to give a trustful account of facts concerning a social environment or group. In order to generate these descriptions, I will perform *non-standardized interviews* (Fielding & Thomas 2008; Lofland 1971, Lofland & Lofland 1984). The questioning will be guided by an *interview guide* that will also be presented along with the explanation of the process through which I defined the groups to be analyzed.

The fifth chapter accounts for the results of the interviews. Four representatives of three distinct social and civic organizations were the respondents. In the first case, I interviewed two editors of "AIDS Sex Health", a non-profit-oriented magazine produced by members of a non-governmental organization that works for the building awareness of the St. Petersburg society in the combat against HIV/AIDS. In the second case, I interviewed the president of the "African Union", a non-governmental organization that struggles for the rights and well-being of Africans living in the city. At last, I interviewed the current president of the "Ingrian Union", an ethnic organization that promotes the cultural traditions of the Ingrian Finns, a nation that struggles to keep its ethnic heritage alive after suffering a forced geographical dispersion. In the end, not all these cases will be defined as examples of community media.

The concluding chapter six shows that the reasoning employed for this conclusion and subsequent remarks may be of significant contribution not only for future research in the communication field, but also for the enhancement of the symbolic practices executed by social and civic organizations.

## 2. RUSSIAN COMMUNICATION FIELD IN FLUX

This and the following chapter result of an attempt to find a spot among distinct theories where I could look at communication in Russia from the perspective of community media. In order to reach my objective, I focused on answering what this concept and its relevance in the communication field are, as well as how it can be applied to investigations in Russian media studies. The theoretical journey was a challenging exercise of re-evaluation of concepts in different fields, such as sociology and political sciences, proving the interdisciplinary nature of communication studies.

The notion of community media is part of a greater democratic debate. Thus, in this chapter I will problematize the adoption of transitional theories in Russian studies of media and social and civic activism. By drawing from Laclau and (mainly) Mouffe's theorization on a *radical and pluralistic democracy*, I will present a way to avoid entering the debate concerning the use of democracy as a neo-liberal tool towards societies in transformation. Then, I will borrow Jesus Martin-Barbero's reasoning to reach his notion of *mediations* and develop an analytical portrait of the limitations of the traditional approaches to communication in current Russian literature. By doing so, I indicate a theoretical gap in the interface between the communication research field and the academic approaches to social and civic actions. That is, in the coming sections I present the reasons that justify my interest in investigating the community media phenomena.

### 2.1. The limitations of transitional theories for Russian studies

Two historical concepts are usually employed while investigating community media: *democracy* and *civil society*. The combination of these two concepts would certainly lead to John Keane's *Democracy and Civil Society* (1998) as a primary and mandatory source. However, soon I realized his work would not suffice as a theoretical background for the investigation of the participatory communicative actions performed by social and civic actors. Keane's comprehension of democracy as a plural and unstable system is certainly an inspiration to avoid the understanding of it "as simply government by means of party competition, majority rule and the rule of the law" (preface). In this context, civil society appears as an indispensable moment – "a thorn in the side of political power" – for the existence of a democratic environment where "without a secure and independent civil society of autonomous public spheres, goals such as freedom and equality, participatory planning and community decision-making will be nothing but empty slogans" (p. 15). By civil society Keane means the institutions that are non-governmental, self-organizing, and

usually non-violent and protected by law that would appear in the shape of a multitude of actors like productive units, households, voluntary organizations and community-based services (preface; pp. 11–15). Therefore, at first sight, Keane's thought could be a prolific base for the construction of the theoretical blueprint of this thesis. However, I opted not to fully base this discussion in his writings for two main reasons.

The first is the fact that the author focuses on democracy from the perspective of political science, mainly addressing the roles and interrelations between civil society and the state in the constitution of democratic environments. I am interested in very specific actions within specific political actors and, for that reason I concluded that the theoretical debate would have been excessively apart from the sense through which I want to conduct this study. The second and most important reason refers to the conflicting adoption of the notions of democracy and civil society in relation to Russia. A discursive war can be easily noticed on the policymaking level if one observes the infinite number of news and articles reporting on Russian government's acts. In general, some voices tend to criticize the status of democracy in Russia in relation to the West. Counterarguments appear in form of complaints, especially sputtered by the Russian authorities who claim that Westerners are neither able to understand nor apt to interfere in Russian issues. Such conflicts may be a barrier for one trying to grasp Russian social and civic activities. For this reason, the concept of civil society shall be problematized and then a different possibility of approach to democracy in Russian studies will be pursued.

One of the negative outcomes of the transitional discursive conflict is the danger of overly biased views generated by the comprehension of democracy as a kind of "manual of instructions" for societies in transformation to build a democratic environment on capitalist terms. In his analysis of the Russian discourse on civil society, Risto Alapuro (2008) describes how the popular movements would play an important role in the post-Soviet efforts to align Russia with the liberal ideals and *modus operandi*. The author describes how the notion of civil society was adopted in Russia as prerequisite for the country's democratic future after the dissolution of the Soviet system (p. 79). However, the decline of the popular movements during the 1990's made it difficult to believe that the project of construction of civil society would be successful. "The disappointment led a number of scholars to reflect on and analyse the concept in relation to Russia, especially the obstacles to its realization." (p. 76) The discontentment also generated a series of criticism raised by Western and Russian analysts. Paradoxically, though, disagreements were caused by an analytical consensus: different arguments conceived democracy as a model to be emulated by Russians in

order to be on a par with liberal societies, namely the United States and Western-European countries.

Diana Schmidt-Pfister (2008) examined the literature on Russian civil society and looked critically at both Western and Russian writings. As a result, the author described a research front. Some Western scholars claim that Russian civil society is problematic and weak. On the other hand, some Russian scholars protest saying that Western views cannot explain Russian issues. (pp. 41–42) Many of these scholars also tend to measure civil society's development in Russia by observing its impact on governmental politics. As a consequence, they conclude that “civic groups have played a much smaller role than expected in the reorganization and reformulation of state policy and politics” (p. 44). Therefore it is clear that the disappointment is not caused by the social and civic activities as such. Instead, it happens because these actions did not propel the Russian transitional project into the status it had been idealized to. Unfortunately, such analyses seem to ignore that a number of NGOs, public associations and other kinds of social groups and organizations are still active in Russia, even if in small-scale activities. Consequently, little is known about these actors' survival strategies or about their own judgement and evaluation of the effectiveness of their activities.

Thus we may argue that the weakness is not intrinsic to these groups. Instead, we should question the effectiveness of the purposive adoption of the notion of civil society (see Alapuro 2008) to investigate the actions of these groups. Suvi Salmenniemi (2008) developed an interesting analysis of how civil society has been approached in contemporary post-communist literature. After identifying and describing three major approaches to the concept (op. cit., pp. 5–10), the author describes her difficulties in establishing a fruitful relation between her empirical observations and the theory she had initially chosen. “My primary interest was to identify the characteristics of Russian civic activity and understand the actors' signifying practices, but civil society theories had very little to offer for this purpose” (p. 10). Such statement corroborates the argument developed so far which implies that this concept is not appropriate for more in-depth investigations of the peculiarities of social and civic groups. For agreeing with Salmenniemi, I will also discard the notion of civil society from this research.

Regarding democracy, similar conflicts appear when the consequences of globalization are considered. Garzon Ernesto Valdés (2005) warns that the understanding of democracy should not lead to generalizations. The author is critical to the political thoughts based on cultural aspects that accuse globalization of being “nothing but an updated version of the old

phenomenon of colonialism” (p. 38). On the other hand, Valdés also questions “whether economic globalization may be a necessary or even sufficient condition for the promotion of democracy” (p. 40). In both ways, democracy is still debated in on the policymaking level, which ends distancing it from social life. For that reason, another understanding of democracy should be sought to grant central relevance to the social and civic groups in the processes of social transformation. In that sense, Chantal Mouffe’s distinction of aspects of democracy creates a theoretical bifurcation where a choice for which path to follow can be made.

In the descriptions of her views about modern democracy, Mouffe calls our attention for the duality concerning the comprehension to the term. One trend refers to the idea of democracy as a kind of sovereign principle of the people. The other conceives it as “the symbolic framework within which this democratic rule is exercised”. (Mouffe 2000, p. 2) Considering the arguments raised so far, it is rather easy to guess the choice that will be followed in this work. The option for the latter is justified by the clarification of the adjective *modern*:

The novelty of modern democracy, what makes it properly ‘modern’, is that, with the advent of the ‘democratic revolution’, the old principle that ‘the power should be exercised by the people’ emerges again, but this time within a symbolic framework informed by the liberal discourse, with its strong emphasis on the value of individual liberty and on human rights. (ibid.)

This argument, which approximates Mouffe to Keane in the sense of equality and liberty (Keane, op. cit., p. 11–15), is the basis for the development of the following section. There, I will focus on Mouffe’s ideas about democracy and citizenship by using her reasoning as a basis for the development of a suitable background, based on democratic foundations, for the discussion about the communication activities of social and civic actors.

## **2.2. Radical democracy and new democratic struggles**

Above, I argued that the transitional discourses of democratization and the notion of civil society are limited perspectives for thinking the roles and the communicative actions of social and civic organizations. As briefly described, the main barrier for the adoption of those views is that both have been thought, developed and applied in Russia as part of the global expansion of capitalism. For that reason, an alternative was searched and found through the work of Mouffe. Thus the objective of this section is to review some of the contributions of this author and to justify why I believe her argumentations are suitable for the development of this thesis.

Below, I will divide the discussion in three parts as an attempt to move from a more extensive socio-political analysis to the specific reasons that place communication in the core of social transformations. First, I will refer to Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau's book *Hegemony and Socialist Strategies* (1985) and briefly describe their notion of *radical pluralistic democracy*, some other concepts – including the symbolic relevance of the democratic revolution – and how they shape the authors' understanding of the social. Secondly, I will define what kinds of groups will be approached in this work by referring to Mouffe's distinction between *democratic antagonism* and *democratic struggles*. At last, I approach the author's understanding of *citizenship* and conclude my argumentation on the role of communication for the construction of social and civic actors.

The notion of radical pluralistic democracy developed by Laclau and Mouffe in their *Hegemony and Socialist Strategies* is pertinent for this work for several reasons. Firstly, it “allows constructing democracy beyond the confinements of traditional politics (as a system) and elite-selection” (Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006, p. 968) and for this reason the avoidance of those transitional discussions is possible. Secondly and most important, the concept and its role for the construction of a hegemonic counterpart for the neo-liberal prevalence in today's world are permeated with discourse. This symbolic characteristic is of key importance for the understanding of community media as a space for construction of these social forces, as it will be seen in the next chapter. For now, we can notice the discursive character of their proposal when we observe the origins of their thought of a new democratic theory.

According to the authors, the World War II was a crucial moment for the development of the contemporary hegemony, one whose complete evolution was triggered by the transformations that happened after that tragic event. After that moment, capitalism developed and caused three major changes: the logics of commodification and accumulation prevailed in labor processes and economy, the state became mainly a bureaucratic institution and the expansion of mass culture shook traditional identities increasing the uniformity of social life (Laclau & Mouffe 1985, pp. 160–164; Mouffe 1988, pp. 91–94). These happenings caused the Marxist notion of class to lose its revolutionary appeal and hegemonic character. After all, the domination of capital burst the walls of the factories and reached other spaces of life.

Today, it is not only through the sale of their labor power that individuals are submitted to the domination of capital but also through their participation in many other social relations. So many spheres of social life are now penetrated by capitalist relations that it is almost impossible to escape them. Culture, leisure, death, sex, everything is now a field of profit for capital. The destruction of the environment, the transformation of people into mere consumers – these are the



results of that subordination of social life to the accumulation of capital. (Mouffe, op. cit., p. 92)

As a consequence, “numerous new struggles have expressed resistance against these new forms of subordination” (Laclau & Mouffe, op. cit., p. 161). These included urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, feminist, anti-racial, ethnic and sexual minorities, for instance. This scenario inserts us in the most meaningful contribution of Laclau and Mouffe for this thesis: their efforts to “identify the discursive conditions for the emergence of a collective action, directed towards struggling against inequalities and challenging relations of subordination” (p. 153). It is in this debate that the discursive weight of democratic revolution comes to focus.

Laclau and Mouffe (op. cit.) trace the origins of the democratic revolution back to the French Revolution, when a democratic culture was invented and its main symbol, the Declaration of Rights of Man, provided “the discursive conditions which made it possible to propose the different forms of inequality as illegitimate and anti-natural” (p. 155). After that point, the ideas of liberty and equality were employed for many forms of resistance, like the women’s claims for political equality between sexes and the birth of feminism (p. 154). The authors’ argue that these antagonistic relations were only enabled through the availability of the democratic discourse. Nowadays, however, in the context of the contemporary hegemony – and the consequent collapse of the notion of class struggle – the new movements appear as “extension of the democratic revolution” (p. 160). The social conflict has expanded and the forms of resistance to the social subordinations have proliferated in efforts to differ and isolate from one another into individualism through symbolical aspects that range from clothing to music, regional traditions and so on (p. 164). These contemporary antagonisms are “identical in all cases. That is to say, it always consists in the *construction of a social identity* [...] on the basis of the equivalence between a set of elements or values which expel those others to which they are opposed with” (pp. 164–165) [emphasis added]. This aspect opens another bifurcation where my work separates from their main objective: a strategic plan of building a hegemonic counterpart against the contemporary subordination of capital proposed by the Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

The authors argue that the current social *status quo* demands that the notion of “universal class” is rejected in an argument similar to Keane’s, who claims that democratic institutions would never be completely accepted “as if controversies concerning power, justice, or law could somehow be resolved once and for all through the adoption of a universal metalanguage” (Keane, op. cit., p. 240). For that reason, the Marxist class is replaced by an approach that accepts

the autonomy of those new political subjects in their own struggles. This conception is in the core of the idea of *radical and plural democracy*, where:

Pluralism is radical only to the extent that each term of this plurality of identities finds within itself the principle of its own validity [...]. And this radical pluralism is democratic to the extent that the autoconstitutivity of each one of its terms is the result of displacements of the egalitarian imaginary. Hence, the project for a radical and plural democracy, in a primary sense, is nothing other than the struggle for a maximum autonomization of spheres on the basis of the generalization of the equivalent-egalitarian logic (Laclau & Mouffe op. cit., p. 167)

In this sense, the democratic revolution is simply a framework where these political subjects operate under the equality imaginary. This symbolic terrain would not “predetermine the direction in which this imaginary will operate” (p. 168). That is, by classifying these forms of resistance as polysemic, Laclau and Mouffe indicate that they “can perfectly well be articulated into an anti-democratic discourse.” (p. 169) In other words, the way in which their social identity will be constructed could vary from discourses based on the defense of human rights to political arguments based on fascist or neo-Nazi beliefs, for example. I will return to this point later in this section.

Regarding the socialist strategy, the authors postulate that an alternative for the Left is to engage in another hegemonic project, but not based on universal classes. Instead, the political subjects would form a *chain of equivalence* where “the logic of equivalence implies forms of cross-project collaborations that remain respectful of the differences between the distinct movements” (Carpentier & Cammaerts, op. cit., p. 969). The expansion of these chains would allow the construction of a new common identity of different groups. It is only under this condition “that the struggles against power become truly democratic” (Laclau & Mouffe, op. cit., p. 184). This is, however, the moment in which I follow a different path. My main interest is in understanding how these different meanings are constructed and form this polysemic environment. That is, I am interested in the discursive constitution of each of the rings that could form that chain, in how these political subjects construct their social identity. For that reason, it is urgent to establish the terms that define the kinds of groups that will be considered throughout this investigation. I am referring here to her distinction between *democratic antagonism* and *democratic struggle* and her understanding of *citizenship* – which places community media as a ground for individual democratic action in the construction of collective identities.

Laclau and Mouffe (op. cit.) demonstrated concern regarding what they called “the anti-democratic offensive”, expressed in their critique of the “new right” and its “neo-liberal

defense of the free market economy with the profoundly anti-egalitarian cultural and social traditionalism of conservatism.” (171–175) This view, when extended to the argument which suggests that a democratic environment does not define the way in which discourses will be articulated in the formation of social identities, allows the existence of religious, moral and ethnic fundamentalists “which can very often put into jeopardy the civic bond that should unite a democratic political association” (Mouffe 2000, p. 96). These kinds of groups, commonly referred to under the umbrella term “uncivil society”, have in common the fact of not promoting democratization, but instead providing “a medium for the spread of radically particularistic world views, ascriptive notions about human nature, and illiberal and/or bellicose political ideas.” (Umland 2002, p. 362) In what concerns Russia, for instance, Andreas Umland’s analysis of the political decline of the extreme right wing disclosed the presence of a multitude of minuscule ultranationalist and fascist groupings in different spheres of social life ranging from religion (e.g. Russian Orthodox brotherhoods) to music (e.g. the ultranationalist hard-rock and punk scene) in addition to skinhead movements and many others (p. 371). In all this, I admit beforehand that the analysis of the community media processes may be employed for the improvement of the symbolic actions of these groups, since the contemporary political agents only differ in their discourses, as we have seen above. Nevertheless, Mouffe provides us with a solution for the optional avoidance of these “uncivil” organizations.

We have already seen the terms that define the democratic revolution through which the antagonistic relations emerge in society after being constructed in discourse, and how the outcome of these constructions are not necessarily democratic. In this aspect, in order to clarify and justify her rejection of those anti-democratic groups, Mouffe distinguishes democratic antagonism from democratic struggles. According to the author, the key difference is in the employment of the *democratic discourse* in the conception of a political subject’s social identity. The fundamentals of this discourse are grounded on the extension of equality through social life, economy and politics as well as on the questioning of all sorts of inequalities and subordination. (Mouffe 1988, p. 96) Mouffe explains that “democratic antagonisms do not necessarily lead to democratic struggles. Democratic antagonism refers to resistance to subordination and inequality; democracy struggle is directed toward a wide democratization of social life” (ibid.). Therefore, this is an opportune moment to clarify my interest in communication activities promoted by groups that engage in democratic struggles within Russian society, like the Soldiers’ Mothers.

From the governmental politics of *Perestroika* onwards, democratic values were disseminated and consequently opened a window of opportunity for the rise of a multitude of civic

groups in Post-Soviet Russia. It was in that period that the old drama of violence in the Russian army became a target of popular engagement for instance. In her article about the Soldier's Mothers organization in St. Petersburg, Elena Zdravomyslova (2004) describes how the group uses different kinds of symbols, rituals and other available instruments to develop their cognitive work. Through these symbolic actions, they legitimize themselves as a group and mobilize different people to join them in the defense of the rights of the draftees and for better conditions in the military service. Their symbolic actions illustrate how the group employs the democratic discourse in the construction of their collective identity and in the promotion of social change. In addition to these cases of protection of human rights, I would argue that the boundaries that limit the understanding of democratic struggles could be enlarged and include other groups other than those that fight against the subordination of capital.

As we will see in chapter five, some groups can be engaged in welfare struggles to combat issues that have a destructive impact on society (even if not resulting from capitalism). We could mention organizations that fight against the spread of lethal diseases, for instance, where these groups are defined more for what they propose (in this case as means of prevention) rather than what they oppose (Servaes 1996, p. 93). In this case, the actions would be motivated not by a clear antagonist relation but by the fact that "the most basic of all rights, that of life, has been called into question" (Laclau & Mouffe, *op. cit.*, p. 165). That leads us to think that the active participation in these struggles does not necessarily happen because the individuals are themselves inserted in a relation of subordination. Therefore, in these struggles, individuals are viewed as part of the political identities and in constant exercise of their citizenship.

In her search for a conceptualization of an appropriate understanding of citizenship for a radical and plural democracy, Mouffe (1992) makes an interesting parallel between the liberal and the civic republican conceptions of what a citizen would be in a modern democracy. The prior has the merit of having based the terms of citizenship in the universal notions of equality and liberty. However, its problem is that citizenship would merely be a legal status where individuals are free as long as they do not break the rules of the state. The latter gives emphasis to political participation and the communitarian notion of "common good", which is barely compatible in our contemporaneity due to the prevalence of the liberal pluralistic ideals (pp. 227–228). As a solution for this dilemma, the author reaffirms her understanding of the political life as concerning collective and public action (the reason for the construction of social identities) and claims that rather than a simple legal status, citizenship is "a type of political identity, a form of identification" (p. 235). In this sense, individual liberty would be respected, but the individual's acceptance of the "norms of

conduct” of their civil association would create a “common political identity among persons otherwise engaged in many different enterprises. [...] It is therefore a community without a definite shape or a definite identity and in continuous re-enactment.” (p. 233) In that sense, I believe that communication is in the core of the construction of the social identity and can provide the space for the practice of citizenship. As argued by Wasko and Mosco (1992 cited in Carpentier & Cammaerts 2006, p. 969), democratization can happen *through* or *in* the media, where citizens would be active parts of public dialog and deliberation as well as in the processes of media production and decision-making. I believe that the communicative actions of social and civic actors are places where these processes of democratization may happen. For that reason, I advocate the development of more studies dedicated to community media, which can be justified by observing how Jesus Martin-Barbero (1993; 2003) describes the shift in the communication research field in Latin America.

### **2.3. Mediations: approaching people through communication studies**

If surveys were conducted among communication students in order to discover their reasons for choosing this field, most of them would certainly define “the media” (television, radio, internet and newspaper) as their primary source of interest. Many are willing to understand how they work; others want to be part of them somehow. Thus it is undeniable that each time more minds are attracted to the field probably by the importance of information and communication in our contemporaneity. All these aspects lead us to an intriguing paradox, especially visible in Russian studies: Even though media play a central role in the lives of everyone, a large number of the academic work on the topic is still not concerned about investigating the “receiver”, the audience: the people.

A similar concern led Martin-Barbero (op. cit.) to propose the notion of *mediations*. Martin-Barbero argues that mediations are articulations of the communication practices and the social movements. By this notion, the author proposes a shift on the analyses of the communication process to the “reception”, a place where social subjects and new cultural identities constitute the massive through transformations in subaltern culture, when the products of mass culture are appropriated and transformed in societies. To reach this conclusion, Martin-Barbero analysed the limitations of two traditional communication research trends in Latin America which he considered the two stages of the hegemonic paradigm for communication in the region (Martín-Barbero 1993, p. 204). According to him, the first stage appeared at the end of the 1960’s and had Lasswell’s transmission scheme as an analytical model. During that period, many countries in the region were either going through dictatorial regimes, or into them. In addition, the oppositional forces were

strongly influenced by Marxism. These facts contributed to a traditionally leftist academy to observe media as ideological instruments in the hands of the political and economic rulers. Such views led to esquizofrenic accusations against those who had the power to control media (pp. 204–205). This stage is called *ideologization*, which

[ ... ] made it impossible for the study of communication to be anything other than the study of the “tracks of the dominator.” Of no interest were the communicative actions of the dominated and much less the conflict in communication” (pp. 204–205)

*Informationalism*, the second stage, was the moment when more mechanical approaches to the process of communication were developed. By then, different fields had been approaching the communication process their own way. The lack of centrality among the disciplines and methods engaged in investigating communication in Latin America was thought to limit the development of a single field. As a solution, the middle of the 1970’s saw the revival of the theory of information. When approached from this perspective, all antagonistic relations and discursive constructions that happen within society are reduced to data that can fit the informational formula. Semiotics and discourse analysis, among others, were reduced to instruments of positivist approaches to media studies. (pp. 204–207) Martin-Barbero claims that

the [informationalist] model excludes any communication that cannot be reduced or compared to the transmission and measurement of information flow. Ignored is anything that does not fit into a schema of sender, message, receiver – for example, a dance or a religious ritual – and anything that introduces an asymmetry between the codes of the sender and the receiver, thus destroying the linearity on which the model is based. (p. 206).

### **2.3.1. Informationalism and ideologization in Russian media research**

A similar scenario can be identified in contemporary Russian media studies, except that in this case both trends are simultaneous and ongoing. Vera Zvereva’s (2008) analysis of the current characteristics of Russian television studies – and presumably of other media research as well – shows similarities with Martin-Barbero’s portrait of Latin American research. According to the Russian scholar, studies about television are fragmented among different disciplines, but little is done towards in-depth investigations of the audience. Some researchers focus on audience surveys (sociology), media language (philology), and political discourse, persuasion and media influence (linguistics). In addition, the author considers that these works concentrate on a common feature of the Russian media system: its close relations with the power spheres.

TV is seen as an instrument of management in the sphere of public consciousness, so the authorities propose their own language of media interpretation. In other words, there are direct links between politics, political order towards humanities and academic researches. (ibid.)

This view resembles the notion of ideologization and it tends to influence the analyses devoted to thinking Russian media. Elena Vartanova (2001) claims the post-Soviet media model has retained a number of features of the Soviet system, including “the traditional dependency upon the political power whatever form it may take at national or local levels” (p. 124). The government is not the only interested part in using media for its own purposes. In addition to official authorities, private owners form the other side of media crossfire. “The losers in this case are not only journalists and the media, but also the public, the society, the individual citizens, the public interest.” (Zassoursky, 2002, p. 159) Regarding the relation between politics, economy and other socio-cultural forces, Nordenstreng (2001) also identifies the prevalence of this duality: “The Russian media have been run by political and economic power, with hardly any room left for an autonomous sphere of media, culture, etc.” (p. 219)

Russian media scholars mostly focus on the power relation between the State and the commercial ownership. Consequently, it seems that there is little interest in the audience and its intrinsic plurality. Therefore, an alternative for the ideologization-informationalism duality in media studies should also be pursued. As we will see later on, Zvereva and Martin-Barbero agree on what is needed so that goal is reached. Still, first it is necessary to examine the other factors that had an effect on the shift that occurred in the Latin American communication research.

### **2.3.2. Cultural shift in political actions: an example from Latin America**

In addition to the limitations of the hegemonic paradigm, social transformations were also among the reasons for the communication research trends to change in Latin America. These changes in society were triggered by the processes of *transnationalization* and a disguised *nationalization* consequent of neo-liberal expansion (Martin-Barbero 2003, pp. 294–299). While the former meant the internationalization of democracy as a global political model, both represented the homogenization of the pluralistic nature of the cultural constitution of those countries<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Brazil – my homeland – is a good example to the idea of nationalization described here. From the 1960's onwards, there was a project to build a national identity in the country. The Southeastern culture and standard of living were the models. The most developed centers – Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo – are located in the region, as well as the biggest nationwide TV channels. As a consequence, the Brazilian cultural mosaic was crushed to fit the “national idea” and, for a long time, taken for granted.

Consequently, the political space of these societies changed from an ideological battlefield against imperialism into a stage for social transformation.

The popular arena was rediscovered as a valuable place of articulation, mediation and conflict among different political subjects. These subjects started making politics by making culture<sup>2</sup>. Situations like these force the communication field no longer to conceive people as mere decoders or recipients for media input. Rather than a place of circulation of information, the society started being investigated as a place of construction of meanings where even the so-called inferior mass culture would be a relevant element in the building of political life. From this perspective, people would also be regarded as producers and not puppets of hegemonic forces. Thus:

to conceive of communication from the perspective of its role in the formation of cultures implies that one ceases to think of communication only in terms of particular disciplines and as a function of media. It marks the end of the security that came from reducing problems of communication to problems of technology. (Martin-Barbero 1993, p. 209)

The importance of traditional approaches to mainstream media for the development of the communication field is undeniable. However, it seems incoherent that many social and cultural aspects of life are so often taken for granted in media studies. Hall (1989) is extremely critical to how the field of communication research has developed. He agrees with Martin-Barbero about the reductionist way the representatives of the dominant paradigm tend to act (Hall op. cit., p. 42). He argues that this field cannot be developed as an independent discipline on these terms, because communication

[...] is inextricably bound up with the success, the theoretical effectivity or ineffectivity of the general social theories of the social formation as a whole, because it is within this context that it has to theorize the place of communication in the modern social world. (ibid. p. 43)

The contemporary Russian communication field is facing similar problems. Zvereva (op. cit.) denounces the lack of broader research approaches to communication and calls for a change. It would obviously be unreasonable to engage in a simplistic analogy between Latin America and Russia. Still, in the following paragraphs I will attempt to create a similar reasoning to that provided by Martin-Barbero, but based on Russian facts and transformations of recent years. The last decades have been a sea of complexity in the socio-political and economic life of the

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<sup>2</sup> Two contemporary examples of a multitude of these actions are *AfroReagge* (<http://www.afroreggae.org.br/> (PORT)) and *Nós do Morro* (<http://www.nosdomorro.com.br/eng/institucional.htm> (ENG)). Both are non-governmental organizations in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. They promote culture (music, theater, cinema) in different *favelas* (slums) as a way to grant the youngsters in those neighborhoods a chance to escape drug-dealing and to be active citizens.



country. Thus, I will reflect upon how the context has influenced the conditions for the performance of new political subjects. As briefly mentioned above, the process of transnationalization (or democratic transition) in Russia was a window of opportunity for these actors to rise.

### **2.3.3. New Russian political subjects: development, conditions and limitations**

I have already criticized the democratic transitional terms from a theoretical-analytical perspective. However, I must admit that there was a positive outcome of the process in the Russian society. For the new Russian political subjects, the democratic transition period was very fruitful. During most part of the Soviet Era, the alternative social spheres existed, but they “lacked independence and autonomy from the state” (Salmenniemi 2008, p. 7). However, since *perestroika*, a variety of new political actors in the shape of NGOs, social movements and ethnic organizations, to name but a few, started performing actions that ranged from public demonstrations and protests to welfare support, legal assistance, human rights activities, as well as environmental, gender and minority struggles (see Cook & Vinogradova 2006, Zdravovslova 2004, Brygalina & Temkina 2004, Henry 2006, Liikanen 2008). In addition, domestic and foreign groups created exchange connections by which foreign organizations and institutions supplied their Russian peers with important practical knowhow and financial support. (Sundstrom & Henry 2006) All this is not to imply that everything was rosy for those groups at that time.

The other side of the picture shows that most of the social and civic actors in Russia barely endured the economic crisis of the decade without any foreign money (Cook & Vinogradova 2006). In addition, as mentioned before, even in the peak of their proliferation and action some scholars claim that these groups have had very little effective presence in Russian political space or none (Schmidt-Pfister 2008). The poor conditions persist up to these days among the remaining groups, while many succumbed due to lack of money and/or popular support (Cook & Vinogradova 2006; Sundstrom & Henry 2006). In spite of the turbulent development of social and civic action in Russia, it is clear that the new political subjects gained ground for acting in that post-authoritarian society. However, they still face several limitations, including the one posed by federal authorities and policymakers. In Russia, an ongoing process of nationalization also influences the activities of these new actors. These restrictions can be observed in pieces of legislation like the two ones described below.

The “NGO-Law” refers to a set of amendments to several federal laws and legislative acts of the Russian federation. It came into effect in early 2006 and not only does it

regulate non-governmental organizations, but also noncommercial organizations and public associations (Bourjaily 2006). The law can be considered as part of the objective of traditional segments of Russian government to rebuild the country as a strong national state (Evans 2006, p. 152) and a response to the failure of the civil society project. I will not dissect the whole “NGO-Law” here<sup>3</sup>. Suffice to say that it may not prevent NGOs and other organizations from existing, but it does not make their existence easier either.

The law establishes requirements that “restrict who may form an organization in the Russian Federation, expand the grounds on which registration may be denied, and enhance the supervisory powers of the state over organizations” (Bourjaily 2006). The explanation for the tight control is related to national protection and is stated in a very vague paragraph about the criteria for the denial of registration to foreign organizations. They will not be allowed if their objectives “[...] create a threat to the sovereignty, political independence, territorial integrity, national unity, unique character, cultural heritage and national interests of the Russian Federation.” (ibid., p. 14) Thus the definition of what is and what is not threatening or harmful to the nation will depend on the judgement of supervisory authorities. Nevertheless, it is assumable that political opposition to the State will not be accepted. This could be one of the main reasons that prevent civic groups from playing a meaningful role on the Russian political system as we saw previously.

A similar scenario is noticed when ethnic organizations are observed through the analysis of the “Law on National Cultural Autonomy”, passed in 1996. A National Cultural Autonomy (NCA) is a kind of organization that can be established by an ethnic group in local, regional or national levels. The law provides the legal basis for cultural self-organizations which aim to “(...) preserve, develop, and use a native language, including preservation and development of ethnic cultures.” (Fedorova 2007) The legislation rules over the complex ethnic composition of the country after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia consists of over 100 groups (called “nationalities” as heritage of the old regime) and even though ethnic Russians are the largest majority, the minorities amount 27 million people. The law is “an attempt to abandon the nationalities policy inherited from the Soviet Union, as well as the political and symbolic efforts that are under way to implement a new civic idea of a national community.” (Codagnone & Filippov 2000, pp. 263–264) The reactions to the NCA-Law have been quite controversial.

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<sup>3</sup> The whole text can be downloaded in English (unofficial translation) through this link: [http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/news/2006/01-19\\_RussianNGOLawEng.doc](http://www.icnl.org/knowledge/news/2006/01-19_RussianNGOLawEng.doc) Last accessed on January 30, 2009.

Some analysts evaluate the success of the law by counting the number of existing NCAs since the legislation was implemented. In the dawn of 2007 there were 662 NCAs in the country. These organizations have regional authority's support, state funding and partnerships that allow them opportunities to be part of intergovernmental events where they can speak and listen to their mother tongue, play and dance traditional music of their group, and so forth. (Fedorova, op. cit.) However, other observers have also denounced a number of problems of the "Law on National Cultural Autonomy." In addition to a minimal influence on Russian ethnic policymaking and politics (Codagnone & Filipov op. cit., p. 283), insufficient funding and obstruction of implementation on the local level are obstacles to the functioning of the NCA-Law (Lallukka 2001, p. 33). The language factor is also a source of concern to ethnic groups.

Russian is the official language of the country. Nevertheless, according to the law, minorities "are entitled to use their mother tongue in everyday life, in official documents of local importance, in mass media (press, regional radio and television, etc.) and literature." (Fedorova, op. cit.) However, that does not seem to be accurate, at least to some specific ethnic groups. Liikanen (2008) describes the worries of ethnic groups from the Republic of Karelia. The socio-cultural conditions of these nationalities are believed to have worsened due to the plans of uniformization of the country implemented in the early 2000's, when Russian became the official language of the region (pp. 27–30). In conclusion, because of these limitations, Lallukka (2001) calls for a response by these people in their impending challenges, even acknowledging that many groups will not manage to cope with what is needed to be done:

In order to ensure their own ethnic survival, [the peoples and the national movements] should find ways to counteract assimilation, maintain their specific ethnocultural traits, and modernize their cultures so that they will be capable of competing with the dominant statewide culture, even in urban environments. (p. 33)

This overview of the tough conditions faced by political subjects in Russia is enough to prove they are still alive and active. In spite of the difficulties, it is presumable that small activities may indicate the emergence of new strategies to establish new ways of popular mobilization and collective identification. These groups are going through "a process of evolving through a complex set of adaptive and original processes." (Schmidt-Pfister 2008, pp. 39–41; 56–61) For these transformations to be grasped, more should be heard from those who actually live these challenges every day: the own practitioners. A more specific portrait of the development of these activities in St. Petersburg will be provided later during the case studies analysis. For now, we

shall return to Zvereva's concerns and suggest a possible solution for the lack of cultural approaches to communication studies in Russia.

The new political subjects were in the core of Martin-Barbero's reasoning to reach the idea of *mediations*. However, the author had already identified empirical evidences of the shift of social and civic actors to more cultural rather than partidary politics when he developed his theorization. Unfortunately, similar activities have not been found in the literature available on Russian society<sup>4</sup>. Yet, it does not mean this is an analytical dead end. Instead, a whole number of under-explored possibilities rise when this analysis is proposed. In general, communication in relation to Russian political subjects is approached from the surface. In general, there is a shallow description of the relevance of informal networks of friendship and neighborhood for the survival of these groups (Cook & Vinogradova 2006 pp. 29–30; Sundstrom & Henry 2006 pp. 307–309). Investigations about their communicative actions are rarely pursued. Therefore questions about the reception, digestion and transformation of media products (the main feature of Martin-Barbero's mediations) remain to be answered. The same can be said about their actions to articulate their social identity and mobilize more people to join them. For that end, the concept of "community media" seems to be suitable for me to engage in this analysis. However, making this choice unveils even more questions: what is this concept about and what are its main features? How would it be possible to apply it to investigations of Russian political subjects? The next chapters will be devoted to answering these questions.

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting exception is Zdravomyslova's article on the self-identity construction process of the Soldiers' Mothers Movement in Russia (2004) described previously. However, the author focused on the symbolic construct rather than its process of production.

### 3. THEORIZING COMMUNITY MEDIA

In this chapter, community media comes to focus as a concept to be scrutinized and an object to be located within a suitable theoretical framework. Presenting one unique explanation for this notion is not a viable task due to the lack of consensus about it in literature. The concept has numerous different approaches, definitions and to make matters worse, many different names as well. Thus, a theoretical detour will have to be taken not only to define what is understood of community media in this work, but also to review some of the debates concerning them and to provide a suitable conceptualization in order to found the discussions that will be proposed later on.

Thus, in the first section, I will provide a brief description of the complex nature of the concept by presenting its empirical roots and some current debates about community media research. I will also enter the debate regarding participation, which will have a central role especially when the empirical illustrations are analyzed. At last, I combine these different conceptualizations and so that I reach the necessary theoretical flexibility for the development of this research.

In the second section, I present the theoretical framework within which this conceptualization of community media can be scrutinized as socio-cultural and communicational phenomena. For that, I borrow Stuart Hall's notions of *articulation* and *communication circuit*. The theorizing of community media based on these concepts will allow the understanding of the constitutive moments of these communicative actions as independent and interconnected elements. As I propose later on, the dismemberment of the process of community media is meant to increase the possibilities of approaches to these phenomena.

#### 3.1. Defining community media

This section is an introduction to the notion of community media as it is understood in this work. First, I present the empirical nature of community media by referring to different cases of these actions that rose in different corners of the world. I also introduce some known approaches to these phenomena in order to display the diversity of studies about community media that have been developed in the field since the second half of the last century. From this range of approaches, two problems are accentuated:

the interplay between mediated and non-mediated (interpersonal) communication, and the fact that participants in community communication – both senders and

receivers – are members of the same social systems, the geographical community and/or the community of interest (Hollanders et al. 2002, p. 20)

With that in mind, I will first broaden the sense of the term *media* by refusing to adopt it as a simplistic synonym for means of mass communication. Then, I enter the participatory debate and presenting a system for the measurement of levels of participation. After that, I highlight the exercise of citizenship and the power relations within a social group as a way to show how complex these small media can be. At last, I introduce the reason that makes of these media *community*.

### **3.1.1. Community media: empirical origins and academic diversity**

Once upon a time in the late 1940s, California saw the foundation of KPFA/Pacifica, a “listener-sponsored radio” (Lewis 2008, p. 11) that was created “to remake radio for purposes of promoting dialogue, understanding, and peaceful coexistence among all the peoples of the world” (Howley 2005, p. 41). At the same period of time, in the southward land of Colombia, Radio Sutatenza was created to be a pioneer in the use of radio broadcasting for the education of adult rural and poor workers<sup>5</sup>. In the same region, also in the late 1940s, Bolivian miners created a radio to talk publicly about daily issues, to broadcast the music they liked and to provide postal services announcements (Dagron 2007, pp. 202–203). Far from being mere happy-ending tales, these are a few concrete examples of the struggles by which people try to actively participate in the symbolic construction of a democratic environment. However, it was just a couple of decades later that academic interest in these actions was sparkled. And then there was...confusion.

Attempts to provide academic explanations to these phenomena are thought to have started from the late 1960s onwards. The label “community” was used to refer to cable channels of open access in the United States or to emphasize the “involvement of the community in ownership and production” (Lewis op. cit., p. 11). Fuller (2007) claims it is difficult to say when the approaches to community media started. However, she traces a career of the term around the world as having started in the 1970s in North America, then spreading to Europe and currently still being introduced to development countries (p. 3). Contrary to this argument, Peruzzo (1996) states that already during the 1970s community or popular communication gained strength in Brazil. The interest, “on both practical and theoretical levels, corresponded to a broadbased process of change in Brazilian and Latin American societies” (pp. 162–163). Some difficulties to map the studies about these activities may lie on the fact that the terms to define these media change according to

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<sup>5</sup> A more in-depth description of the Radio Sutatenza can be found on <http://www.comminet.com/en/node/150016>. The information is provided The Communication Initiative Network. [Accessed 27 March 2009]

the perspectives applied, or to the people involved, or to the interests of the groups, and so forth. Therefore, it is useful to view different perspectives on the subject in order to capture a meaning closer to the original empirical experiences.

Theories and approaches to how individuals or social groups employ the means available to externalize their concerns about public issues exist in a much smaller amount than those related to mainstream media. In spite of this, one interested in investigating them could easily be lost in a tangle of definitions. Prefixes like “aboriginal”, “guerrilla”, “alternative”, “popular”, along with “community” and others (see Fuller 2007) form a theoretical muddle that may get researchers stuck by just trying to determine a difference among them. Two authors have attempted to create a general picture of the prevailing studies about community media. In the early 1990s, Nicholas Jankowski (1991) claimed that despite the high number of investigation of small-scale media, emphasis has been given to the use of electronic media (radio and television stations, for instance) in the community setting (p. 163). At that point, Jankowski – writing mainly about Western European and North-American cases – suggested that more qualitative empirical research would be needed “within the perspective of a democratization of communication of, for and by communities of different kinds” (p. 173). I agree with Jankowski, but it would also be necessary that the understanding of community media would not be limited to the use of electronic media devices, especially considering that in other poorer regions of the world the access to these media could be limited or totally restricted. In that sense, Jankowski and Nico Carpentier have recently developed a set of theoretical frameworks based on current studies of participatory media without strictly demanding any technical prerequisite for the understanding of these actions.

In their efforts to understand the potential role of participatory media in facilitating the participation of citizens at both micro(organizational)- and macro(societal public spaces)-levels, Carpentier and Jankowski (2008, pp. 113–114) distinguished four different approaches that may allow the comprehension of the multiplicity of participatory media in a more complete manner. *Community media* and *alternative media* form the *media-centered model*. The first theoretical approach validates and strengthens a community by focusing on access and participation of “ordinary people,” and “empowering [them] by signifying that their statements are considered important enough to be published or broadcasted” (ibid., p. 117). The second concentrates on the conflictual distinction between the mainstream media and alternative media where the latter would be a mechanism for the self-representation of multiple alternative voices against the predominance of media conglomerates. The *society-centered model* is formed by *civil society media* and *rhizomatic media*. In the third approach, participatory media would either be part of civil society as

an organization or be a channel for organizations to self-represent in public debates. The last approach focuses on the role of participatory media within larger civil society networks and how they “act as meeting points and catalysts for a variety of organizations and movements” and also how they may establish linkages with segments of the state and the market (ibid., 118).

All in all, it is quite obvious that the community media approach is the one in which this work is inserted in. However, as I have claimed before and will justify in the coming section, I will not limit this work to publishing or broadcasting technologies as the authors suggest. What grants this work a place in that framework is its concern for the functioning of the media and the relevance of these participatory actions for the construction of community. In order to clarify this argument, I will briefly borrow some of the existing definitions for these phenomena and develop a conceptualization based on authors that use different labels and theorize in a distinct way from one another. Nevertheless, they are very important in providing enough data to establish the boundaries for the comprehension of community media in this thesis. The combination of different approaches will also provide me with the necessary flexibility to deal with the unlimited possibilities of communicative actions among political subjects in Russia. Thus, in the coming sections I will present the reasons for my choice of “community” to be designated as the most adequate term to refer to my object of study.

### **3.1.2. A broader comprehension of media**

As shown above, the studies of community media have a dual problem concerning participation and the understanding of the relation between mediated and non-mediated communication. The latter is actually a possibility apparently underexplored in community media research. The fact that communication research has been restricted to mass media has also influenced the approaches to small-scale media. In a way, community media studies have been mainly focused on specific local media as such, their content and audiences (Hollander et al., 2002, p. 25). However, if researchers are aware of the wide range of communication types, styles and techniques employed in these kinds of media, they will certainly realize the need to change their focus.

Research on the process and structure of public communication within a local setting offers insight into the interplay and the changing patterns over time in and between mediated and non-mediated forms of communication with regard to topics relevant for the individual as a member of the local community (ibid.)



Even though community media does not only refer to geographical communities as some authors emphasize (pp. 22–23), they provide an interesting thought about how important other means rather than mass communication devices can be for these phenomena. The often-cited John Downing (2001) and his idea of *radical alternative media* also presents a similar concern. Downing is influenced by Martin-Barbero’s understanding of active audience. In his proposal, he advocates for more in-depth studies of political subjects’ forms of communicative actions instead of a simplistic binary comparison between mainstream media and the alternatives to it (preface). In addition, he considers the communicative process to be much broader than simply a result of the usage of massive means of communication. For him, the term *media* has restrictive implications that stop us from noticing communication as a wider feature in social life than radio, TV and newspaper (p. 104).

This broader comprehension of media is best understood by observing Klaus Jensen’s prototypes of media (2002). According to the author, media can be divided into three degrees. Figure 1 was inspired by Jensen’s conceptualization and illustrates the distinction among them. The

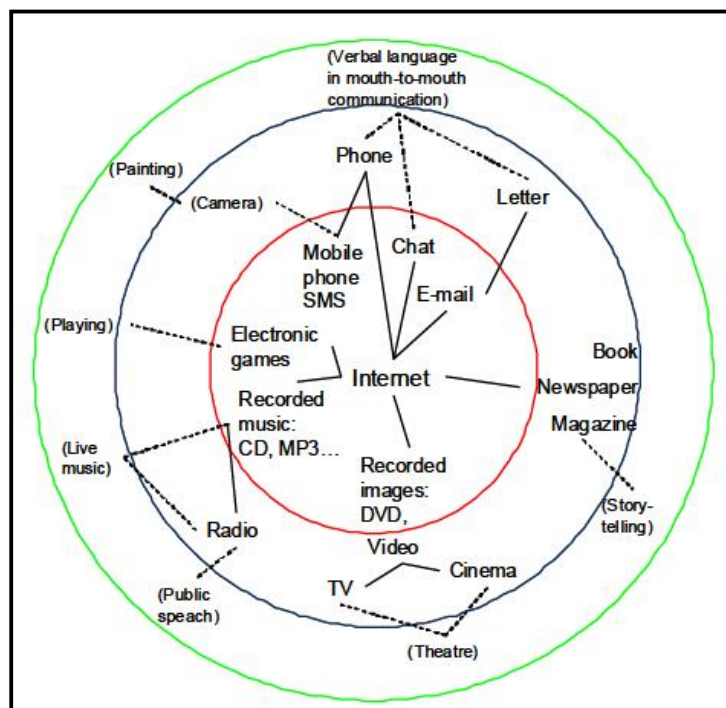


Figure 1: Jensen’s media degrees (Leinonen 2008).

similarity to Downing is evident in the description of media of the first degree because they “depend on the presence of the human body, and operate in local time-space, often relying on

comparatively simple, mechanical techniques such as musical instruments and artistic and writing utensils as constitutive elements” (Jensen op. cit., 3–4). The main feature of this kind of media is verbal language. Moreover, they also manifest as dance, music, drama, paintings and other forms of communication. The same range of characteristics can be found in the description of radical alternative media.

In a scope that reaches far beyond the boundaries of traditional mass media, some empirical examples of radical media are: public speeches, graffiti, popular theater, murals, art performances, flyers, posters and so forth (Downing op. cit., pp. 103–104). According to Downing, these means originate in popular culture (ibid., p. 10) and serve two purposes:

to express opposition vertically from subordinate quarters directly at the power structure and against its behaviour [and] to build support, solidarity, and networking laterally against policies or even against the very survival of the power structure (ibid., preface).

Although the counterhegemonic characteristic of radical media will not be considered in this work, the broadening of the understanding of media in the analyses of the community media process will prevent us from ignoring cases similar to the Soldiers’ Mothers, for instance. One of their actions happens in a room decorated with religious pictures and icons, where leaders of the organization give speeches on human rights (Zdravomyslova 2004, pp. 30–31). At first sight, these activities do not resemble our common comprehension of media. Yet, employing the broadness suggested above would make of the Soldiers’ Mothers a rich case to be scrutinized. Nevertheless, our illustrative case would not escape one of the most debatable issues when approaching community media: the confusing notion of participation.

### **3.1.3. Problematizing participation**

Francis Berrigan (1979) defines participation as the involvement of the public at the production, decision-making and planning levels of the communication systems. The author also describes a more advanced form of participation, called self-management, where “the public exercises the power of decision-making within communication enterprises, and is fully involved in the formulation of communication policies and plans” (p. 19). In general, participation in mainstream commercial media is measured in debates about communication, democratization and development. In these cases, the different levels of involvement, as described by Berrigan, border utopia if we acknowledge the economic and political limitations to them (pp. 18–19). In the Russian

case, for instance, the media systems have historically been used as ideological instruments either by the political leaders of the country, by the business tycoons, or by both simultaneously (Zassoursky, 2002; Trakhtenberg, 2007). Media produced by new political subjects could represent a more open scenario for participation. Nowadays ordinary and inexpensive services (photocopies, web cafes, etc.), new and easy-to-access technologies (cell phones, digital cameras, digital sound recorders, computers, etc.) are widespread everywhere. Thus, with dedication and creativity independent communication systems could be developed. Nonetheless, that still does not mean community media could automatically guarantee a participatory environment.

Let us return to the case of the Soldiers' Mothers. Even though they develop a suitable example of social identity construction, we cannot affirm that their activities allow public participation. Their actions are developed to mobilize people to join the group, however "the leaders and the volunteers position themselves as 'true citizens' who have to teach the people to follow their example" (Zdravomyslova 2004, p. 37). Such posture implies that there is a controlling elite who is responsible for creating these communicational activities in order to reach people who are expected to learn the message. Thus, one could argue that the group's participatory nature does not differ from the unilateral relationship between the senders of the mainstream media and the receivers. However, we cannot fall in the trap of comparison between communication companies and new political subjects for the blatant distinctions their intrinsic features and objectives display. Communication actions produced by social and civic actors are "an integral part of the movements or groups they represent" (Christians et al., 2009, p. 189). For that reason, we should think participation as inherent in these communication system rather than an external or imposed practice as it is suggested by the literature on participation as a strategy of development.

A number of publications regarding the concept of participation are closely related to developmental analyses and proposals of more democratic communication systems in underdeveloped societies. Jan Servaes, one of the most prominent figures in the participatory debate, describes development theory as being concerned with structural change, closely related to developmental strategy and, consequently, having a normative nature (Servaes 1999, p. 3). Mostly speaking from an international policymaking perspective, Servaes (pp. 84–85) argues that in order to consider itself communication and participatory, a project accepts the principles of dialogic communication – based on Paulo Freire's writings on the listening to voices that are never heard – and the UNESCO debate of democratic communication based on access, participation and self-management as briefly presented in Berrigan's definition. In these cases, "expert and development workers respond rather than dictate [...]. The emphasis is on information exchange rather than on

persuasion as in the diffusion model.” (p. 89) By doing so, the point of view of the local groups would be taken into consideration before resource allocation for projects and changes in policy would be implemented (Servaes 1996, p. 105). The problem is that not all theorists of the issue agree with the understanding of participation as a subject of strategic implementation and thus some are even severely harsh in their criticism to this view.

Randall Arnst (1996) is extremely critical to the ways in which participatory research for development is performed. The author accuses these methodological procedures meant to increase the sense of participation of being “manipulative and therefore oppressive” (p. 110) and that they deny the dynamic nature of these phenomena. Arnst is even more emphatic when he states his position concerning the incompatibility of participatory cases and the development thinking. “As a process arising from the idiosyncratic contexts of those involved, genuine participation is not amenable to the tight, quick, and largely quantitative results so admired and sought by politicians, supervising bodies and funding organizations.” (p. 111) Colin Sparks (2007) also denounces that in spite of the democratic appeal of the theory of participatory communication, there has not been valuable commitment to participation within the multitude of development programs. In other words, the author means that “the participatory paradigm [...] triumphed in development theory, but has failed to command any substantial support in practice.” (p. 59)

For that reason, instead of determining and imposing what could be most appropriate models of participation, it might be more adequate to question *how* participatory the communicative actions of political subjects are and, from that point, develop and enrich the current theoretical thought about participation. Carpentier’s (2008) categorization of the ways to deal with the contingency of the notion leads us to either the unravelling of the chaotic attempts to provide an authentic meaning to the concept or to the reflection on the “significatory process that lies behind the articulation of participation as a part of a political-ideological struggle” (p. 107). The latter is clearly chosen here since participation is in the core of our argument concerning the discursive construction of social identities (see 2.2 and 3.2). In that regard, Peruzzo provides an interesting system of participatory measurement that may be applied in order to provide empirical observations for this kind of analyses.

In her work on community communication, Peruzzo (1996) describes three kinds of popular participation: *non-participation*, *controlled participation* and *power participation* (Peruzzo op. cit., 170–173), as it can be observed in Figure 2. The non-participation model is not as self-evident as Sparks (2007) interpreted it to be. Indeed it lacks “room for discussion, for the collective

formulation of aspirations or policies, or for anything other than simple obedience” (pp. 69–70). However, in addition to the subjugation to a prevailing power structure, it also refers to the passive behavior of individuals towards public actions (Peruzzo op. cit., p. 169). This aspect could describe the posture of those individuals who seek help from social and civic actors and, when their needs are fulfilled, they leave as if they liked to be patronized, as one leader of the Soldiers’ Mothers

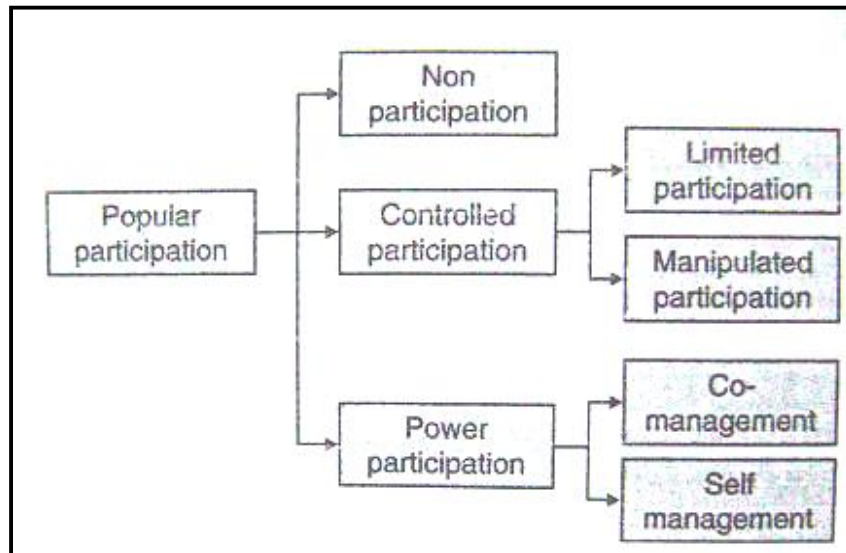


Figure 2: Peruzzo’s typology of participation (Sparks 2007, p. 70)

claimed (Zdravomyslova 2004, p. 36). Thus, non-participation is not only a top-down imposition, but also bottom-up inaction. However, it may be that blaming the people’s passivity for lack of active participation hides other reasons that, if considered, could be used to change this perception.

The controlled-participation model can be divided into two sub-categories: *limited participation* and *manipulated participation* (Peruzzo op. cit., pp. 170–171). In the limited version, participants may have the chance of planning the actions to be performed, but the final decision is made by the leaders or persons in charge. Manipulated participation is an authoritarian exercise of power disguised as democratic practices. Peruzzo describes it in terms of representative politics by claiming that this model is “generally used as a scheme to obtain political legitimacy aimed at electoral results” (p. 171). In this case, the power holders create a scenario where people participate by voting, but “without any guarantees that their needs will be fulfilled” (ibid.). From the perspective of communication studies, the manipulated participation resembles media channels that make phone lines and e-mails available so audiences can give feedback or content suggestions.

Power participation is the most radical of the models (Sparks op. cit., 70) because it is where “the exercise of power is shared” (Peruzzo op. cit., p. 171). It is also divided into two types: *co-management* and *self-management*. In the co-management model the participants may have an active role in decision-making, but not in all levels, since “not all decisions are shared (ibid.). The self-management happens when the participant has direct participation in decision-making within the organization. In the end, both cases of power participation “imply the exercise of power through shared decisions” (p. 172).

All in all, it should be noticed that these kinds of participation must not be regarded as determiners in a balance of values in which actions would be judged as being better or worse than the others depending on their participatory status. Instead, they should be considered different levels in a meter used for the measurement of higher and lower levels of participation according to the developments promoted by the groups in order to reach their desired participatory level (Figure 3). By doing so, we are forced to avoid the judgement of the actions. On the contrary, we focus on what makes these activities be on the levels they are rather than remaining on the policymaking level

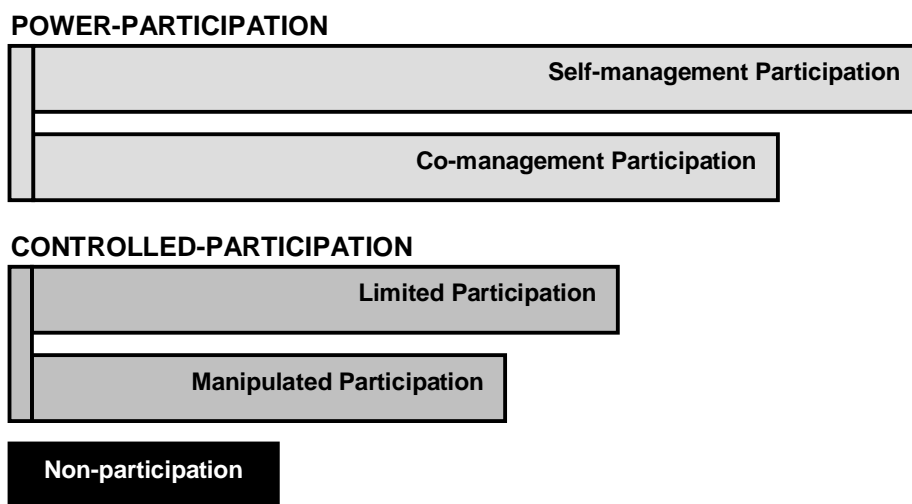


Figure 3: Popular participation meter based on Peruzzo’s categorization

imagining ways to implement participation through development projects. The Soldiers’ Mothers blame the people who seek their help for being passive. But as argued by Peruzzo “participation is not known from birth.” (p. 173) It involves a learning process in which the levels of participation could be used as a reference for gradual measurement. Thus, it would be sensible to evaluate how (or if) the Soldiers’ Mothers and other organizations deal with the passivity issue. In the chapter where the case studies are presented as illustrations, I demonstrate how the measurement of

participation can be executed in more specific studies. In conclusion, the participatory debate is relevant in the conceptualization of community media because participation is the source of the main features of this concept: the exercise of citizenship, as presented by Clemência Rodriguez in her notion of *citizens' media*.

#### **3.1.4. Citizens' media: active citizenship**

The concept of citizens' media was highly influenced by the radical democratic terms. The designating term to Rodriguez' conceptualization (2001) comes from one of its main features: the enacting of citizenship by active public participation (pp. 19–20). The author concentrates on participants of new political subjects whose active nature entitles them to merit their citizenship. Rodriguez agrees with Mouffe why arguing that citizenship “is not a status granted on the basis of some *essential* characteristic. Citizens have to enact their citizenship on a day-to-day basis, through their participation in everyday political practices.” (p. 19) As consequences, individual and collective identities are transformed, as well as social environments. Therefore, by participating in communicative actions developed by social and civic actors people exercise their citizenship by creating fissures in a dominated mediascape “by reappropriating a mediated communication technology as a vehicle for their own voices” (p. 62).

Examples of these media are promoted all around the world. Some of these communicative actions include aboriginal television and radio stations used for cultural preservation in North America; the use of video for public screenings in Brazil and Chile for the purposes of education and facilitation of communication among different social and civic groups, and so forth (pp. 27–47). However, against the assessments which claim that these media are small and invisible for society as a whole (cf. Dagrón 2007), or that they cause insignificant impact in regional and national politics, Rodriguez argues that the multitude of small and normally ephemeral communicative actions are like bubbles in a swamp. They may have short existence, but in the period they happen a constant negotiation between democratic and non-democratic forces happens. The role of these symbolic activities is to “strengthen the former, thus contributing to the – although sometimes ephemeral – swelling of the democratic” (Rodriguez, op. cit., p. 21–22). For that reason, Rodriguez also discards the label “alternative.”

I believe that, as a consequence of our entrapment in a binary notion of power, we miss seeing how multiple streams of power relations are disrupted in the everyday lives of alternative media participants. If we were to focus our gaze in the communities that develop alternative media, we could see the myriad of power

equations that involve anyone and everyone in the community; we could also appreciate how these power equations are not static but permanently shifting and changing, that is, how power relations are permanently re-constituted. (ibid., pp. 16–17)

The evidence of the power relations that occur within these small-scale media processes corroborates the need for a more in-depth observation of their participatory levels. Therefore, we must magnify and observe the procedures by which the communication actions not only to see how participation happens, but also to understand how the individual and collective identities are shaped (p. 19). After all, as it will be disclosed in the next section, the concept of community media that is being constructed here is a combination of both participatory engagement and the identification of the participants within their group.

### **3.1.5. Community media and the construction of community**

So far, I have established that I will not concentrate *only* on the usage of radio, television, newspaper or internet as communicational instruments for symbolical actions of new political subjects. In addition, the idea of participation appears as a fundamental element for the achievement and practice of citizenship, in this case, exercised in the development these communicative activities. The question now lies on how community media has a central role in the formation of collective identities, essential element in the constitution of these groups. Kevin Howley's comprehension of community media (2005) grants us a suitable understanding of this process.

There are many similarities between Howley's approach to community media and the ones described above. Together with Downing, Howley is influenced by Martin-Barbero's notion of active audience (pp. 33–35). However, when it comes to the empirical examples of these media, Howley follows Rodriguez and focuses on how citizens make an effective use of the mass communication instruments for the encouragement of political participation and civic engagement (p. 268). However, his most valuable contribution for this work is his definition of community media *per se*. For him, these communicative actions are “popular and strategic interventions into the contemporary media culture” (p. 2). Popular because of the participation of local populations in the process of symbolic production and strategic due to the construction of local autonomy and collective identity in times of media ownership concentration and transnational media flows (pp. 2–3). The duality of Howley's conception of community media interestingly merges two well-established social movement theories that have for long been dealt separately.



Scholars (Cohen 1985 cited Escobar & Alvarez 1992, p. 5) had distinguished an Anglo-Saxon theoretical group from its European/Latin American counterpart. The former focuses on how resources would be mobilized for the functioning of the activities. It would include approaches to strategy, participation, mobilization and so forth. The latter concentrates on the processes by which collective identities are constructed so that democratic spaces for political actions are created. However, I believe that Howley's unification of these theoretical trends is the most adequate for the investigation of new political subjects from the communication field. After all, as claimed by Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez in their anthology about the making of social movements in Latin America, "[t]he strategies of the movements under consideration and their contribution to democratization processes entail an underlying collective identity that the strategies themselves help to construct" (p. 8).

There has been a reasonable amount of criticism against the employment of "community" for the investigation of the communicative practices performed by political subjects. Downing (op. cit.) claims that due to its complexity and large variety of meanings, the term ends up raising an array of questions and answers that make it difficult to give it an exact sense (pp. 39–40). Regarding the purity implied by the term, Dagron (op. cit.) claims that instead of being places of rightfulness and compact unity, communities have revealed themselves as being "complex social universes" (p. 201). Against the geographical sense that ties community to a specific locality, Raquel Paiva (2003) argues that many examples of community media do not have their roots developed by the involvement of local communities. Therefore their communitarian nature does not originate in their territorial belonging, but in how it values local cultures (pp. 144–145). On the other hand, some media channels of this kind can be so detached from its audience's reality (e.g. by reproducing commercial cable channels, for instance) that they can barely be considered community media (Medrado 2008). All that to say that community does not determine who its members are; neither does it establish the ways in which they are going to act. Instead, community happens when "by participating in these symbolic practices and investing meaning in them, individuals define themselves as members of a particular community" (Howley, op. cit., p. 06).

On the whole, the theories and concepts described in this section contribute towards the construction of a suitable conceptualization of community media for this specific work and future projects. In this thesis, these phenomena are understood as a set of strategic practices of symbolical nature developed from whatever forms of media so that a social identity may be constructed. This conceptualization allows the investigations of the communicative procedures that

may generate the collective identification and the mobilization necessary for the construction of an active communitarian environment. Thus, all arguments presented above confirm the viability of community media as an alternative to the majority of approaches in Russian communication research. This section provided a certain theoretical flexibility for me to deal with the uncertainties that may come along the way. I acknowledge that this conceptualization of community media may seem a bit loose, especially from the perspective of the dominant paradigm in the communication field. However, I believe that communication scholars are also responsible for problematizing social relations and the social formation as a whole from within their field and not only wait for other disciplines to do the work (Hall 1989, p. 43). Thus, a closing remark by Rodriguez grants the certainty of being on the right path. The following section is based on the assumption that

as communication academics, we need to develop theories and methods that break away from the usual routine of freezing and dissecting communicative reality – theories and methods which enable us to follow and study-in-accompaniment these media-practices-in-motion (Rodriguez 2001, p. 64)

### **3.2. Communication as a process of articulation**

One of the most central arguments presented in this work so far is the critique of the predominant traditional approaches to media in contemporary communication research. Therefore, this work is sought to be a rather socio-cultural contribution to the field than another analysis of the working procedures of mass media. The reasons are quite clearly disclosed before, where arguments suggest more attention should be given to the human aspects of the process of communication. In that sense, the notion of community media alone would not guarantee the accomplishment of these intentions. After all, it is also possible to apply instrumental approaches to the understanding of these phenomena. One may be interested on how new technologies can facilitate democratic environments by describing how radio stations (or other technologies) are used in determined localities by local populations with similar intents, for instance. However, I believe it is about time communication researchers concentrate on the people's role in these activities. In that sense, the notion of articulation appears as a source of inspiration for more in-depth analyses.

In this section, I present the influences I have had from the British Cultural Studies, especially through Stuart Hall, from whom I borrowed the theory of *articulation* for approaching these processes of communication. I argue that approaching community media from this perspective is a chance to explore these phenomena's constitutive features through a number of different approaches. The adoption of articulation as a theoretical framework for community media

approaches was inspired by Jennifer Slack's (1996) analysis of Stuart Hall's work. The author argues that the notion derives from Laclau and Mouffe's contestation of class reductionism, but she also asserts that Stuart Hall's contribution was crucial for the evolution of it into a theory. According to Slack, Hall "elevates the importance of articulating discourse to other social forces, without going 'over the brink' of turning everything else into discourse" (p. 121). Such argument becomes clearer when discourse is understood not only as a linguistic term related to writing and speech, but as a combination of language and practice (Hall 1997, pp. 44–45). With this in mind, we could then suggest that community media are a result *and* a space of discursive construction. This duality is best comprehended if we analyze how social identities can be seen as articulated unities of differences and how the process of communication can be conceived as a circuit of articulations.

### 3.2.1. New political subjects and articulated identities

As described previously, the constitution of a new political subject happens through discursive constructions involving values, symbols, practices, and so forth. However, as observed in the case of the Soldiers' Mothers, these symbolic efforts do not guarantee that the results will be met in a way that a social identity will be successfully built. The lack of certainty regarding the outcomes motivates us to look more carefully at the actions *per se* rather than simply measuring their results. This argument reinforces the emphasis that should be given to the process of construction of collective identities (Escobar & Alvarez 1992, p. 11) and leads us to the urgency of questioning how a certain group of people becomes a political and social force "through the constitution of itself as a collective subject within a unifying ideology", as Stuart Hall explains to his interlocutor (Grossberg 1996, p. 144). Thus, the procedures by which social identities can be forged could be investigated from the perspective of articulation because the concept

[...] provides a useful starting point for describing the process of forging connections between practices and effects, as well as of enabling practices to have different, often unpredicted effects. Articulation is the production of identity on top of difference, of unities out of fragments, of structures across practices. Articulation links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics. (p. 54)

In this sense, as argued before, community media can be considered a space of articulation where the group's identity can be generated. However, in order to mobilize participation the articulated identity becomes a constituent part of a broader articulation process, as exemplified below.

In her examination of civic activism, democratization and gender in contemporary Russia, Salmenniemi (2008, pp. 103–107) describes the activities of the participants of the Center for Women’s History and Gender Studies (CGS) in order to build their collective identity. They promote education, research and publications for generating knowledge and engendering social change in Tver, Russia. In addition to these actions, Salmenniemi also mentions their contacts with the local community, but this is the less effective among their activities so far. In order to invite more participants to their courses, the group advertises via personal contacts in the region, especially among students. Still, they feel the group needs to broaden the activities so they are more appealing to general public and not only to specialists and other specific segments of society. In that regard, Salmenniemi concludes that “whether to increase community outreach or not depends on the definitions of collective identity, that is, on ‘who we are.’” (p. 105) However, based on the notion of articulation, we can claim that not only *who we are* matters, but also *how we say who we are; what we use to say so; who says who we are* and other aspects of this communication process. These questions arise if the process of communication is conceived as a circuit of articulations.

### **3.2.2. Stuart Hall’s articulated communication circuit**

In his critique of the television discourse (Hall 1973; 2001), Hall redefines the moments of the well-known informational process of communication from the embryonic stage of ideas to the time when the message reaches the public. The author argues that the moments of production, circulation, distribution and consumption, and reproduction do not happen in automatic correspondence from one to the other. Instead, each of these events is a relatively autonomous articulation (Hall 2001). Putting it briefly, the production encodes the message and translates it into televisual discourse based on what it is presupposed to be the public’s interest. In the end, it is expected that the message is effective enough to generate a set of expected reactions/effects pre-defined by the producers (pp. 167–169). In this brief summary of the circuit, we can hardly notice any novelty if we compare it to the mechanic formula of transmission of information. However, the moments of production and reproduction as well as the message have their own particularities that may cause the outcomes to be totally unpredictable.

According to Hall, the distinction between producers and telespectators in the television process is the access and the knowledge about the apparatuses for *encoding*, distributing and thus making circulate whatever message is desired. The only effective contribution of the public to the encoding happens remotely in the shape of different kinds of feedback and opinion polls. The message is then processed through technical procedures to fit the televisual language in

order to represent aspects of the society in a way that it would make sense to the ones *decoding* it (ibid.). The problem is that there is no guarantee that this process would happen so smoothly. Then, we find ourselves in a similar standpoint to that which motivated the Latin American research shift. After all, at the other side the circuit the individuals have their own ways of making sense of the messages depending on the social, cultural, economic and psicological aspects of life, among many others. Thus, a news Program aired by a state TV station (as it happens with major channels in Russia) cannot be compared to a needle injecting political or entertaining stimuli into the people's minds. Neither should we claim that these individuals accept and react passively according to how the ones controlling the means wish. What we see is a set of practices constituting the production, another concerning the messages, and one more regarding the audience. Instead of an automatic sequence of events, these moments emanate meanings whenever they happen, and negotiate with the other stages throughout the whole process. Consequently, because of their autonomy, "no one moment can fully guarantee the next moment with which it is articulated" (p. 167). Thus, a wide array of analytical possibilities rises when we dismember the process and scrutinize its pieces and their connections.

If we remain on the televisive circuit and remember the well-defined contours of the production, the message and the expectations towards the reception, we would be able to propose distinct studies in order to investigate how these moments are conceived and articulated. Obviously there is an existing multitude of approaches developed specifically to each of them, which would make of such a proposal a drop of water onto an ocean. Nevertheless, if we think of these moments in relation to the process of community media, the matter becomes very intriguing. Firstly, it would require assuming that when these communicative actions are performed by an active audience outside the boundaries of traditional media, they start their own circuit where the elements of production, message and reception can also be perceived, but with distinct characteristics from their mainstream counterpart. I believe that the lines that separate each of these stages in community media are much thinner, and in many times, non-existent. As we will see below, the communicative actions performed by new political subjects are complex enough to add another dimension to the communication field: How to think of production and reception when they may happen simultaneously and (sometimes) intertwined with one another?

### 3.2.3. Production, message and reception in the community media process

In a hypothetical situation, let us say that a group of individuals share a similar concern about a determined aspect of society and decide to create a group to engage in promoting social change. In order to identify themselves as a unity, they should define their objectives and start putting their ideals to practice. In this moment, we have a first kind of articulation developed in order to enable the construction of a collective identity. This is already a potential subject for communication research. Salmenniemi (2008) and Zdravomyslova (2004) refer to it through the notion of self-identity frames, for instance. At some point (exceptions seem to be rare), this new political subject decides to increase the number of participants. Thus, a communicative circuit is started.

The articulated identity of the group – *who we are* – will be inserted in a broader symbolic process that will be developed to reinforce the group’s identity among the participants and also to seduce external individuals to join in action. This duality would cause some problems to arise. How to build messages that may be effective in both ways? How to give them properties to enter the multitude of distinct relations in life and produce intelligible meanings among individuals so that these messages have the effect of organizing the way these people form collective consciousness (Hall 1989, p. 49)? These questions would grant the chance of approaching community media not only by its symbolical nature, but also by the process through which they are built. This reasoning discloses an interesting paradox.

We saw before how production and reception play determinant roles in the communication process from the perspective of traditional media. However, as briefly introduced above, in the community media case these two elements can be inextricably intertwined. If we recall the notion of active audience and the different levels of participation in these smaller-scale communication actions, we will be able to infer that the distance between those who produce the messages and those who receive them is drastically dissolved or even terminated since senders and receivers are part of the same context (see 3.1). As a result, we are faced with two distinct consequences. The first, again based on the terms of the traditional media process, refers to the efficacy of the encoding and the expected decoding. According to Hall, one of the reasons for “distortions” or “misunderstandings” lies on the “lack of equivalence between the two sides in the communicative exchange” (Hall 2001, p. 169). That explains the relevance of the message for the success or failure of the television communication circuit. Thus, we are tempted to determine that the proximity provided by community media may make it easier to reach the expected effects.

However, while the distance between production and reception may be extinguished in these smaller-scale media, other factors arise and re-affirm the lack of automatic correspondence between what is said, what is understood of it and what is done with that knowledge.

In addition to seeing the engines of the process and maybe even being part of it, the reception (both participants and potential-participants) is able to be very close to those producing these actions and messages. In other words, these people are not only aware of *who we are* and *how we say we are*. Their involvement in the routines, gatherings, and other situations also make them aware of *what we are like*, *what we do* and *how we do*. The “reception” can compare, measure, and evaluate if *what is said* corresponds to *what is done* in a way that the mass media system would never allow the great public to see. Thus, other aspects originated far beyond the reach of the messages appear to directly influence the outcomes of the actions. I am referring here to tensions occurring due to interpersonal conflicts, “lack of chemistry” with those coordinating the activities, ideological disagreements, economic distinctions between participants, and so forth. That is, the conflicting nature of community and participation that many scholars seem to ignore (cf. Arnst 1996; Sparks 2007) All that to say that the articulation of a discourse within a new political subject does not only depend on the message (*how we say we are*), but also on the practices (*what we do*, *how we do*, *who does it*, etc.). Therefore, given these general points we must realize that thinking these community media without considering the procedures the roles of the people involved may be as shallow as investigating the effects of mass media through behavioural analyses. On the other hand, a number of possible approaches that may be developed by communication researchers about these phenomena emerge. However, most of them would demand an amount of effort and time that would not be achievable in a Master’s thesis. For this reason, the next chapter presents the methodological limitations, objectives and other pragmatic outlines of this work.

#### 4. COMMUNITY MEDIA IN ST. PETERSBURG: METHODOLOGICAL PARAMETERS

The main goal of this thesis is the introduction of an investigative possibility for the symbolic actions performed by social and civic actors. For that reason, this work has been, for the most part, a theoretical and methodological journey in order to locate and merge new political subjects and communication in a single object of communication research. After conceptualizing community media and defining the theoretical framework through which they can be investigated, a more pragmatic posture shall be adopted in order to demonstrate the methodological perimeters within which the communicative actions of social and civic actors may be scrutinized. That is, based on the actions developed by Russian non-governmental political subjects, I will display how the process of construction of social identities may be identified and analyzed. Even though the objective of my proposal is to research the constitution and execution of community media, the previous chapter makes clearly evident the broadness and the complexity of such project. Therefore, I will reserve this ambitious goal as a lifetime pursuit, which I hope to improve, transform and be transformed by along the way. For the purpose of completing this Master's thesis on a satisfactory schedule, some limitations have to be determined. The first refers to the place where the observations will be made.

A great amount of literature on Russia makes use of the prefix "Russian" or the complement "in Russia" to refer to what has been developed in different research efforts about that country. Therefore, it is certainly tempting to refer to this work as "community media in Russia". But by doing so more room would be given to stereotyping and reductionism of such a diverse society. Thus, even though these labels have been used previously here during the general theorization parts, they will be avoided when referring to the current *corpus* of analysis. For that reason, I will limit the scope of this research to St. Petersburg. Another explanation for this decision has logistic motivations. The city is the closest and most accessible sample of an urban Russia, where I hope to have the opportunity of gathering diverse data considering that St. Petersburg has had a reasonably strong tradition in social and civic actions since the late Soviet years. The old capital of the Russian Empire is generally considered the most western city of Russia. Such aspect can also be noticed in the literature about new political subjects.

In their study about feminist organizations in the city, Brygalina and Temkina (2004) consider that "the resource base of St. Petersburg's social movements is extensive and the region has close ties with the international community" (*ibid.*, p. 208). According to Vera Sviridova, public relations manager of the St. Petersburg's CRNO (Non-commercial Organisations Development



Center) there are around 6000 organizations registered in the city, “but being quite optimistic half of them are really working” (personal communication, April 2009). Apparently, the financial difficulties to maintain social and civic activities in the city are similar to the rest of the country. When asked about the media produced by St.Petersburg’s social and civic actors, Sviridova described that some organizations that enjoy international, commercial or political support produce excellent-quality materials as public reports for sponsors and authorities. However, most of the groups do not have money to start their own communicational channels. Because of that, these organizations “want to improve their relations with the press [because] it is cheaper. They want to become popular, so they orient their messages more to media than necessarily to their own target public” (ibid.). Still, I believe that these groups also develop other actions meant to reach their own participants and potential participants. Thus, discovering and analyzing their solutions for the creation of this kind of communicational environment is certainly an enriching task. However, because it is also a complex proposal, in the next sections I will introduce the methodology and other practicalities meant to limit this work to an executable project.

#### **4.1. The factist perspective as a qualitative methodological approach**

The investigation of community media demands deep involvement of the researcher on the daily routines of the groups. It seems incoherent to suggest a closer analytical look at these actions without a more empirical methodological approach. Here, it is clear that methodologies like Ethnography would be most advisable so that deeper observations could be made, for example. The combination of participant observation methods and discourse-based analyses would certainly allow the production of data through which the symbolic construction of identity and mobilization could actually be scrutinized more adequately. Unfortunately, this option is impracticable at this stage for several reasons. In addition to the schedule limitations, there is also the language barrier. Since I am not a Russian speaker, it would be impossible to make the most of the situations that would arise during my involvement with the groups. For that reason, a solution for this dilemma could be found on one of the oldest techniques used by human beings to generate knowledge: asking and listening are still among the most efficient ways to learn about others’ experiences. In this sense, Pertti Alasuutari’s factist perspective can be considered a suitable methodological approach for this study.

According to Alasuutari (1995), the factist perspective uses data gathered via questionnaires, interviews, speeches and other sources in order to build awareness about the reality of an event, community or any other situation within a society (p. 47). Thus, even though the researchers do not necessarily see or get involved in the events, they work on the descriptions of

these situations made by sources that are somehow in a position to give testimonies about them. Therefore, for this research, hearing those who are involved in the communicative actions is a manageable manner to provide realistic descriptions of their procedures and reflect whether they produce community media. Because the factist perspective focus on a “pragmatic or common-sense notion of the truth and reality” (ibid.), the researcher is interested in the facts as they happen and not on what could be implied in speech or behaviour. In that sense, language pitfalls (verbal and body expressions, uttered sounds, gestures, and so on) do not affect either the value or the meaning of the data collected. Thus, since this methodological approach “only makes use of those subjects’ statements that are believed to reflect truth ‘out there’” (p. 48), in practice the interviews can be done in another common language or through interpreters, face-to-face or remotely, without jeopardizing the future analysis. The importance lies on what is said, which work as lenses that show us the object being investigated. That means the researcher would have to completely rely on the truthfulness of the sources. This is the biggest challenge of this approach: how to assure that the interviewees are not lying?

Even though the author claims that “there is no guaranteed method that ensures we get the truth” (p. 53), Alasuutari presents two different methods to improve the validity of the information collected. One is the humanistic approach, in which honesty is raised by the relational proximity between researcher and source. The other is the mechanistic approach, which refers to actions the interviewer performs so negative reactions by the respondent are avoided. The bothering with determined questions or requests can cause certain attitudes that may risk the factual value of the data. In order to prevent these from happening, researchers may provide limited awareness to the source about the study, not justify the reasons for some questions or even totally mislead the interviewees. (ibid., p. 52) In this research, I tried to improve the validity of the data collected by using some aspects of both methods and adding the selection of the sources as ways to reduce the chances of gathering non-reliable information.

Regarding the humanistic method, I did not intend to become acquainted with my sources. However, the interviews were made face to face. Since I asked about these people’s work, it seems reasonable that they know who I am personally. It would obviously be possible to provide this information even if an email interview was to be conducted, but having these personal meetings increased the chances of mutual trust and honesty. In relation to the mechanistic method, the terms used in the conception of the questions as well as the explanation of the aims of the research were simplified in order to avoid misunderstandings. Complex theoretical terms as “community media”, “new political subjects” and “articulation”, to name but a few, were avoided during the interviews.

They could have generated a range of confusion which would have possibly led to a need of clarification that most probably would have compromised the results. Instead, the questions were phrased with simple and easy-to-understand expressions related to the groups' activities. Alasuutari (p. 52) claims that the tendency of over-simplification and reduction of language is one of the most criticized aspects of the mechanistic method. However, in this case, it could have made the interviewees feel more comfortable by talking about what they know instead of wondering what the interviewer means. I will come back to this issue later.

The last action to improve the validity of the gathered information in this study was inspired by the journalistic criterias for selection of sources. Whenever a journalist needs official information about an institution, the first to be heard is someone assigned or in a position to speak in the name of the group. In this case, it is presumable that they are can be trusted since they would not lie openly due to their official positions (Wolf 2005, p. 237; Gans 1979, p. 130). However, this can still lead to different outcomes depending on the nature of the questioning. For example, if the reporter is interested in information related to a polemic situation involving that group, there is a chance that the answers (be them true or false) will have been rehearsed in order to build their version of the facts. However, when the interest is mainly on their activities, the information tends to be more spontaneous and truthful, since this can be a chance of publicity for the group. In this sense, if we refer to new political subjects in general, these organizations tend to have very little attention from the great public and the media. Thus, they may be very willing to introduce their own activities as opportunities to create more awareness about themselves.

Regarding the respondents, I only chose to interview those who are leaders or directors of organizations. Since they have a leading position in the group, I assumed they would have known most of the details concerning the procedures developed and put to practice by their group. I talked to only one or two representatives per organization even acknowledging the danger of inaccurate description (Silverman 1993, p. 91). The most advisable action would have been talking to different people within the same group and comparing their answers so a more reliable common denominator would be provided. However, since this research is mainly descriptive and illustrative to the theory of community media, a single account about each of the groups' actions was enough for reaching this objective. In relation to the practicalities of the interviews, I went to St. Petersburg accompanied with Dmitri Yagodin, a colleague who translated the conversations simultaneously when needed. For that reason, he was informed beforehand of the goals and the ways the interviews should have been conducted. In relation to the interviews and the questions *per se*, the following section below will provide more specific information.

## 4.2. Producing data: non-standardised interview method

Providing flexibility for producing the richest possible data is the main task to be fulfilled through the interviews. The respondents are expected to talk about the features and procedures of the communication activities performed by them and other participants of their organizations. For that end, the questions have to be clear and the topics should be comprehensive and also straightforward. In this section, I present non-standardised interviews as an appropriate method for making the most of the time spent with the respondents. At first, I will introduce its definition and then describe the details of my action plan for the field trip.

Non-standardised interviews are useful qualitative tools for researchers to make discoveries through a method that resembles conversational routines of social life (Fielding & Thomas 2008, p. 247). The interviewees are motivated to talk freely in their own words about a set of issues brought to the dialogue by the interviewer or even their own additional commentaries related to the main topics. This guidance makes the term *guided conversation* be an accurate definition of this process. (Lofland & Lofland 1984, p. 59) This kind of interview is suitable for a research being developed from the factist perspective because of its main objective. According to Lofland (1971, p. 76), non-structured interviews aim at eliciting material that are detailed enough to grant the researcher awareness about the kinds of things that happen rather than how frequent they are. In order to keep the central focus of the interview, the researcher makes use of an interview guide, which is more flexible than a set of pre-conceived questions like a questionnaire.

An interview guide is nothing more than a list where the interviewer writes down certain guidelines that will be useful during the conduction of the talks. Thus, instead of carrying a fixed set of questions to be read and asked, the interview guide works for the researcher as a “list of things to be sure to ask about when talking to the person being interviewed” (Lofland & Lofland op. cit., p. 59). However, that does not mean this is as simple as writing down some words and hope that the questions will come naturally during the interviews. The process of creation of the guide happens as soon as the researchers define the questions to be pursued and conclude that interviews are their best method for data collection. After having gone through this preliminary exercise, “the first step is thinking over what you find problematic or interesting about [your topic]” (Fielding & Thomas op. cit., p. 253). The researcher takes notes and organizes all the insights and thoughts related to the focus of the research since the embryonic moments of the project. These puzzlements (Lofland & Lofland, op. cit., 53–56) will then be written down, sorted and ordered as topics and then questions, especially considering how they will facilitate the communication with the

interviewees. This interview guide should allow flexibility both to the respondent as well as to the interviewer so additional questions are asked if necessary, in an action called *probbing*.

During the interview, the researcher should be attentive to what the respondent answers and also to what is not said but can be considered as indispensable for the development of the research (ibid., p.56), even when tape recording. It seems like an obvious recommendation, but there are cases where people do not listen to the interviewee because they believe that it does not matter since they are taping anyway. Such behavior may cause the researcher to miss opportunities of asking further questions in order to generate additional explanation or clarification of what is being said. (pp. 60–61) These follow-up questions are called probes and are totally acceptable in non-standardised interviews (Fielding & Thomas op. cit., p. 250). They are interviewing skills meant to encourage respondents to expand their responses (p. 251) and may be previously added to the interview guide or happen spontaneously during the interview (Lofland & Lofland, op. cit., 56–57). As an illustration to what an interview guide is and how it is developed, I will present my own process to reach the guidelines that were used when I met those who live the reality of social and civic action out there. Before, however, it is important to remember that the factist perspective and the non-standardized interviews are cautiously suitable for this work only because the goal here is to support the theoretical discussion for future community media investigations. Asking questions and having an idea of reality by the answers of a couple of individuals limit the understanding of concrete events to the point of view of the interviewees. Thus, as mentioned previously, other methods of data collection and analysis should be adopted for more in-depth research on the theme.

#### **4.2.1. To the Field: Developing the Interview Guide**

When I affirmed above that the development of an interview guide is not a mere intuitive task, I mainly referred to my own experience while preparing myself to meet the representatives of political subjects in St. Petersburg. Even though the list of guidelines and questions looks compact and clear now (Figure 4), its process of creation was a challenging exercise of creativity, adaptation and, above all, reflection. In the next paragraphs, I briefly describe the logics and details behind the production of this interview guide. I shall present the motivations and thoughts that shaped its features from the embryonic ideas to the practical rehearsals before finally going to the field.

When the theoretical argumentation and the research questions were resolved and the non-structured interview method was defined for the data collection, I had already gathered a

number of ideas for topics to be explored during the field trip. For my research to have a considerable amount of data, I would ask the respondents about the general characteristics of the groups (origins, objectives and activities), about their communicative actions and about their means to finance these actions. Based on the moments of the communication circuit, this set of guidelines is sought to support the questions proposed previously and also generate information about some aspects of general social and civic activity in St. Petersburg. The organization of the guide as presented above is not casual. Beginning the interviews with a description of the groups' general features fits two purposes: "breaking the ice" with a comfortable subject for the respondents to talk about, and solving the problem of lack of previous knowledge about the groups.

The only information I had about social and civic actors in Russia was acquired during the intense reading of literature on the topic. That means I only knew either about the overall conditions of these political subjects or about few specific groups that had been portraied more deeply previously by researchers of other fields. Statistical studies had given me the awareness about the multitude of organizations that struggle to maintain their actions ongoing. However, as

<b>TOPICS</b>	<b>Start-up Questions</b>
General Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describe the activities performed by _____ (name of organization).</li> <li>- What are the _____ (name of organization) objectives?</li> <li>- How many people are there?</li> </ul>
About the Communicative actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you inform people about your activities?</li> <li>- Who decides _____ (what is published, where to gather, etc)?</li> <li>- How did you start _____ (the media activity)?</li> <li>- Why this kind of activity?</li> <li>- Who do you want to reach through them? Why?</li> <li>- What are the objectives of this _____ (media activity)?</li> <li>- Why this technology (or kind of action)?</li> <li>- How can the people give feedback?</li> <li>- How can people participate?</li> <li>- What is done with the feedback? Is it published (or used some other way)?</li> <li>- Do you think (these actions) help increasing the number of participants/members ?</li> </ul>
About money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do you get money to get the activities done?</li> </ul>

Figure 4: Interview guide.

mentioned before, most of these groups do not have websites or other media channels. In addition, when they do have some media presentation, I have the personal limitation of not understanding

them because they are in Russian. For these reasons, the interviews would be my first actual contact with smaller organizations, the ones I am personally more interested in talking to. Later in this chapter, I will present the criterias for the selection of interviewees. For now, let us proceed to the second theme in the guidelines.

After talking about the characteristics of the organizations, it would certainly be natural to move forward and talk about their communicative actions. As a matter of fact, this distinction is made only to organize the interview guide since in practice the respondents would presumably consider them as a part of their activities. Thus, it may not be difficult to keep the pace of the conversations. Finally, I would turn the topic to the finances of the group in order to know if they are profit-oriented or not, and how these groups maintain their activities. The money issues were left to the end because they tend to be sensitive and could cause some uneasiness if perceived as an inconvenience. However, planning and ordering the topics do not guarantee the success of the interviews. As researchers, we have to put our skills and creativity to work and turn our theoretical ideas into questions that will allow us to collect productive data for the analysis. For that reason, I decided to leave the theories and concepts for the analyses and use the common sense try to make the questions to be as clear as possible.

The meetings and discussions with colleagues helped me measure and adjust the terms to be used in the creation of the interview guide. Those situations called my attention to the fact that terms like “community media”, “political subjects” and “articulation”, among others, could easily become unintelligible for the interviewees. After all, if students and some scholars were confused by those terms, they would probably make little sense for the respondents as well. For that reason, I engaged in a lexical exercise meant to simplify what I had defined as a research objective, and to increase the possibilities of getting more ellaborated responses. Regarding the notions of “new political subjects” and “community media”, the solution was to use the own descriptions provided by the respondents both of their organization and the communicative actions. The former is a general term for NGOs, ethnic groups, associations and other social and civic actors. The latter is very broad, as described in the first chapter, and could refer to activities that range from local meetings to newspapers and websites, for example. Thus, the questions were developed in a way that each specific designating label is adapted according to the flow of the interviews. The ideas of “articulation” and “identity” will not be mentioned during the interviews. Instead, questions about the functions and the goals of the activities will be posed so these issues can be drawn from their responses. “Participation” will be used during the interviews because the verb “participate” is clear in its meaning. At last, in relation to the finances and the relations of the group with the authorities,

I intend to ask about any support they might have from different sources and then, depending on their answers, try to go deeper on the issues.

Finally, in order to check the clarity and the coherence of the guidelines, I talked to some friends and asked them the questions. I requested them to give me their impressions about the issues being discussed. Since the results were satisfactory, I shared the information with Dmitri Yagodin, a doctoral student from the University of Tampere who would be my interpreter and translator during the field trip. He was very helpful in making some suggestions to improve the efficacy of the questions. After all the preparation, it was time to finally go to the field. In the coming section, I describe how the groups were found and how the interviewees were reached.

### **4.3. In the field: the way to the interviews**

In the initial moments of this thesis, I had barely had empirical information about social and civic groups in St. Petersburg. It is clear that the pragmatic terms of this research were deeply founded on the theoretical grounds provided in the first chapters. Therefore, I thought that any sample would suit this work if they fulfilled the supposed pre-requisites demanded by such broad theoretization: any group considered a new political subject would, then, be a potential case study. With this in mind, at first I tried to find information about St. Petersburg's social and civic actors through search engines online. However, as most part of the information was in Russian, I realized that such task would be a waste of time. Thus, I decided to contact people around me for possible contacts in Russia. In the end, I managed to schedule one interview from Finland and the other two ones were scheduled *in loco*, during my short visit. Below, I briefly describe how the three groups were reached and how different actions and a good amount of luck allowed me to provide the case studies for this research.

The talks and explanations about my research interests and objectives soon gave the first results. After a meeting with the members of the Master's Program, one of the colleagues said he knew someone who wrote for a magazine related to an NGO. He was referring to Mikhail Zelensky, who assisted his mother, Tatiana Pavlova, in the magazine "AIDS Sex Health". In this specific case, I was interested in the uses made of the magazine and if it could be considered a means to reinforce identity and improve mobilization among those who put effort in the struggles against the spread of AIDS in St. Petersburg. Thus, my colleague provided me with Zelensky's



contacts and, through the social network website Facebook<sup>6</sup>, we schedule the meeting. However, this was the only political subject I was certain to meet by the time of the departure to Russia. I had originally planned to meet four or five groups. Luckily, I was accompanied by Dmitri Yagodin who enabled me to find the other interviewees.

In our conversations during and after the train journey from Lahti (FI) to St. Petersburg, Yagodin was already aware of the objectives of this fieldwork. Thus, our first action was to return to the internet search engines together and try to find groups for the interviews. Soon, we discovered the website of the Ingrian Union<sup>7</sup>. I had read about the Finnish-Ingrians and their struggles in the Republic of Karelia to keep their traditions and culture in times of Russian nationalization (Liikanen 2008) and since they had a website and a newspaper, my interest in them was high. Thus, we contacted Aleksanteri Kirjanen and scheduled the second meeting in order to talk about their media and to analyse their usages. The same procedures to reach the Finnish-Ingrian Union were repeated several times. However, the last group was found in a different way.

Yagodin had worked in a TV network in St. Petersburg and, because of that, he still had some contacts of people he had interviewed. From his personal database, we reached Aliou Tounkara, president of the African Union, which is an organization formed by Africans and African descendents who live in St. Petersburg. Apparently, they did not have any website or publication, but the widespread existence of ultranationalist and neo-nazi groups made me wonder about the forms of resistance promoted by this group. In the end, it was obvious that a better previous organization would have been required in order to avoid the risk of not finding any contacts during the trip. If luck and a well-connected local were not on my side, the trip to St. Petersburg would have been in vain. Fortunately, the examples found fit the categorization of democratic struggles and were interesting enough for me to reduce the original plan to only three case studies, which will individually be described in the next chapter.

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<sup>6</sup> [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.inkeri.spb.ru/> Last accessed in June 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

## **5. THREE POTENTIAL CASES OF COMMUNITY MEDIA IN ST. PETERSBURG**

This chapter is a reflective account of my field trip to St. Petersburg, where I gathered the data for this research. During three early spring days in April 2009 I interviewed three representatives of local organizations. The results of these conversations will be presented in the following sections. In addition to having been a productive trip, it was also an enriching learning process regarding research procedures. For that reason, in the coming sections not only I describe the results of the interviews, but also disclose some situations that occurred during the fieldwork. I acknowledge that this chapter “is not the place for an account of the process of research, nor all the dead ends the researchers encounter, nor the disasters and difficulties [we] have overcome” (Gilbert 2008, p. 498). Therefore, these additional pieces of information will be presented as footnotes whenever it may have influenced the actual results.

There are three sections in this chapter. Each of them will be dedicated to the illustrative case studies, which will be presented in the order that the interviews were conducted. At first, I talked to Tatiana Pavlova and Mikhail Zelensky, editors of the magazine “AIDS, Sex and Health”. Then, I met Aliou Tounkara, president of the “African Union”. At last, I talked to Aleksanteri Kirjanen, current president of the Finnish-Ingrian Union and one of the members responsible for their newspaper “Inkeri”. In the end, analysing the cases from the perspective of community media supplied this work with a good amount of food for thought about those communication processes. Whether or not these actions fit as empirical examples for the conceptualization constructed throughout the previous chapters is described below. Nevertheless, it can be explicated in advance that the complexity and diversity of the symbolical activities performed by social and civic actors prevent the notion of community media from being a solid ground for researchers. Instead, the elements of these communication circuits are sensitive to the point of easily varying a lot from one another, even if they happen in a similar social context. Thus, in this chapter, I will engage in understanding and scrutinizing these three distinct case studies within the constraints described before.

### **5.1. A voice for awareness: “AIDS Sex Health”**

In the early hours of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, news reported that Russia would be soon facing an AIDS epidemic. "The main plague will start in five or six years because people are dying on average 10 to 12 years after contracting the infection and the mass epidemic in Russia started in the 1990s", claimed Vadim Pokrovsky, at the time director of the AIDS prevention center in Moscow

(Fitzgerald 2000). In 1998, one of the main problems described as having collaborated for the rapid increase and spread of the disease in Russia was the lack of awareness among people.

The majority of Russians in high risk groups have not been educated about safe sex practices. [...] Governmental support for treatment or prevention is essentially non-existent. We are unaware of effective prevention programs at work in the community [...] the dramatic rise in HIV infections in St. Petersburg, Russia is progressing without evidence of social intervention. (Meade et al., 1998)

In 2007, the problem was still reported as alarming. However, even though the numbers are considered extremely negative, St. Petersburg seems to have avoided a worse scenario due to the increase of public awareness about prevention measures (Nassor 2007). In that sense, one of the channels through which information about AIDS was inserted and spread in the public debate is the magazine “AIDS Sex Health.”

The publication was idealized by Professor Aza Rakhmanova, who in recent years has been the head St. Petersburg’s Infectious Diseases Inspectorate. The first number of the magazine was published in 1991, a time when AIDS was neither a case of general public concern nor a theme of social-political debates in the country. Thus, “AIDS Sex Health” is a pioneer in informing society about the disease and promoting the combat to its spread. Even though its founder has held an official position in the city of St. Petersburg, the publication has been produced rather independently from the local government. According to its youth editor Mikhail Zelensky, by 2002 the non-governmental organization “AIDS Statistics Health” was created and the magazine was re-registered to it. The NGO is active in promoting a number of HIV prevention projects in the city. Thus, the non-mainstream nature of the magazine “AIDS Sex Health”<sup>8</sup> and its current relation to a new political subject makes of it a potential case study for our proposal. In the following sections, I will describe of the publication based on the interview with Zelensky and Pavlova<sup>9</sup>.

### **5.1.1. Service and political influence: the goals of “AIDS Sex Health”**

“AIDS Sex Health” is a scientific-popular journal published four times a year. The dualistic definition is justified by the diversity among its readers. The topics presented in the pages

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<sup>8</sup> There is also a website related to the magazine, but due to lack of time and money, Zelensky and Pavlova explain that the site is mainly a reflex of the print version. The url is: <http://www.aidsjournal.ru/> (in Russian and English)

<sup>9</sup> Since Zelensky speaks English, he answered and translated Pavlova’s responses. Thus, Yagodin’s translation was not necessary in this case. However, the quality of the recording was very bad due to the distance between me and the interviewees. Therefore, while writing the sections on the “AIDS Sex Health” publication, I used my contact with Zelensky on Facebook to confirm some information or add some data in response to my follow-up questions.

of the publication, vary from medical and psychological articles to general information about HIV/AIDS. According to Zelensky, “[...] [There is not] much of social services for those people [risk groups, youngsters, etc.] in Russia in general. So, [they] have lots of articles on these things”. In the early years the magazine consisted of 32 pages, but now it presents 24 as a measure to balance the costs since it became fully coloured years ago. Each run of “AIDS Sex Health” can be acquired via subscription<sup>10</sup> or from one of the points of free distribution, which include libraries and health institutions as well as especial events, like conferences. These two last locations reveal the kind of public is targeted by the producers of the magazine.

Even though anyone interested can have access to the magazine, the publication is intentionally directed to “state officials, or NGO officials, or for people who are responsible for assigning or allocating money”, explained Zelensky confirming Vera Sviridova’s observations (see 3.2). This is one of the reasons for “AIDS Sex Health” to have part of its contents available in English. By providing translated and sometimes original material in English “people who pay money know what it is about and know what they give money for”, Pavlova described. In order to maintain the publication, Aza Rakhmanova constantly uses her personal relations and international prestige to raise funds inside Russia and abroad, since most of the funding is agreed to finance issue by issue. Among the supporters, there are the World AIDS Foundation and the Russian Ministry of Health. Thus, the publication makes use of terms that may decrease the readability for youngsters and the public in general, but look more official when showing the results of the investment to the sponsors as well as to attempt to influence Russian authorities to take measures to increase the combat against HIV/AIDS.

MIKHAIL ZELENSKY: Sometime ago, Tatiana and Aza were having some arguments about this... because [Tatiana] wanted to make the magazine easier to read, more oriented for teenagers, for risk groups or whatever...but now Aza decided...that they are to be made more complicated, more ... because now there are many issues that address teenagers, in quite easy language and there are no issues for the sponsors. As weird as it may seem, the people who make decisions, for example, in the State Duma, in the St. Petersburg government department for combat of HIV/AIDS and prevention and so on...they get information about the epidemic and about what is done from the pages of the magazine.

So far, we have observed that the publication “AIDS Sex Health” contributes to the public debate by providing information and knowledge about HIV/AIDS. It is also dedicated to generating political actions from policymakers; the increasing of the cooperational relations among non governmental organizations, and to reporting to sponsors. Zelensky and Pavlova’s account of

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<sup>10</sup> According to Zelensky, people interested in receiving the magazine order it and pay a fee used to cover the post costs.

the objectives of the publication and how these goals reflect on its contents leads to an early conclusion that denies one of my initial beliefs. Before I claimed that any communicative action generated by or related to a new political subject is a potential case of community media. However, it is noticeable that “AIDS Sex Health” resembles the classic print media and the logics of press in providing social service information and influencing governmental actions. In addition, it reminds of advertising in the appeal it wants to cause on funders. However, despite of the distinct features between the magazine and the concept being pursued here, it does not mean that “AIDS Sex Health” should be discarded as an example of community media yet. Before, we should observe how the practical procedures of discursive production take place and analyse if the actions that make the magazine fit the theoretical framework developed for this work.

### **5.1.2. “AIDS Sex Health”: an example of non-commercial press**

The structure of the group involved in the production of the magazine is very similar to the mainstream newsrooms. Aza Rakhmanova, as a chief-in-editor, is responsible for articulating most part of the issues. Pavlova and Zelensky are responsible for the layout, the publishing and also produce content. In addition to them, the editorial board includes doctors, academics and others who contribute to the issues of “AIDS Sex Health” by writing articles, reports and editorials. However, the magazine does not only look like a commercial publication in the editorial structure, but also in the restrictions to popular participation.

Although the publication is not targeted at the general public, the free distribution increases its range of readers. When asked about their responses, Pavlova and Zelensky exemplified how people from outside the organizational boundaries participate. As an illustration, Pavlova showed me an article about an academic conference on HIV prevention.

TATIANA PAVLOVA: [...] every year students fill in some blanks asking questions and sharing their opinions especially about our magazine. And of course they write things that they want to see here, and remarks ... and request articles they want to use on boards... they express their will that we should have more articles and columns with topics and writers who are interesting to them [...] written by people they know and trust. And that’s what they want to read.

In a similar way, Zelensky explained sponsors and supporters can also influence what is published in the pages of the magazine by making thematical requests: “[...] the people that give money for a certain issue of course they give a hint of what they want to see there.” At last, another type of interest appears when readers contact the magazine producers in order to speak out about their

personal difficulties. “Once, Tatiana was reading emails from readers [...] the questions are not addressed to the magazine as such, but about their own problems that should be addressed to specialists”, described Zelensky.

This brief description of the practices at “AIDS Sex Health” reinforces the initial impression that the magazine is similar to a commercial publication. It is noticeable that there is a separation between production and reception: a sense of “us” who inform and “them” that read, gain awareness and use the new knowledge as effectively as they can. Therefore, “AIDS Sex Health” could be an interesting object of research in the communication field, but not an example of community media. If analyzed from the perspective of press theories, for instance, the magazine could be a fruitful case study. One possible approach could be the investigation of how it acts in order to affect policies and provoke political actions by providing relevant information about a problem of general concern in the society. However, concerning the objective of this work, the publication has been developed in a way that it seems to have a gatekeeper who controls who can and who cannot access its production and decision-making spaces.

The interviewees did not mention any activity that could represent a sign of active participation in the publication’s routines, except in situations that reaffirm the similarity of “AIDS Sex Health” to mass media. In addition to the fixed staff of the magazine (including Zelensky and Pavlova), the admission to the production processes seems to be limited to a selected group of experts who write in accordance with their own knowledge or with the theme of the issue to be published. Readers can only influence the content of the publication via feedback and suggestions to the editors. Even the sponsors’ opinions, which are said to be taken more into consideration than the general readers’ input, are still hints and not actual content. Thus, the closed structure seems to assure that the production remains distant from the other end of this communicative circuit. Equally important is how the content of the magazine seems to reinforce this distance.

At first sight, one may be confused by the notion of participation and how it can have a double sense when cases like “AIDS Sex Health” are observed. There are situations in which the magazine cooperates and promotes events where there is public engagement. Nevertheless, it should be noted that not all actions developed or supported by a social and civic actor will generate identification and mobilization with the group. When someone reads the magazine, for example, and becomes aware of an AIDS Memorial happening in the city and wants to participate, he/she goes for what the occasion means, and not to be part of the group who produces the magazine. Similarly to a newsmaking company, “AIDS Sex Health” is a channel of information that

contributes to changes in society, not a space within which social transformation would happen. Their messages conduct to knowledge and events, but do not bring people into their own routines. That is, “AIDS Sex Health” is meant for informing, not building a social identity through communicative actions. A different scenario can be observed within the next case to be described. In the following section, about the African Union, it will be possible to have a different idea of participation and how communication is actually in the center of a community construction, even if no mass media devices are used.

## **5.2. The situation of Africans in St. Petersburg**

It is not news that Africans have for a long time left their home countries in search of a better life in different regions of the world. Some may leave the continent because they have the financial condition to do so; others risk their lives in dangerous illegal immigration journeys, while many others seek for asylum in safer countries than their own. Thus, individuals from different nations and backgrounds have in common the will to find prosperity and well-being in faraway lands. However, they also share a range of difficulties and problems in their new social environment. In St. Petersburg, the general situation of the African people can be considered extremely adverse.

In 2005, St. Petersburg was a stage for a series of racial assaults in which two Africans were brutally killed and many foreigners were injured by extremist groups (Nassor, 2005). Unfortunately, the happenings of that year are not isolated cases. The situation got so critical in recent years that the Amnesty International released a document describing racism in Russia as a problem “out of control” (Amnesty International 2006), in which St. Petersburg appears as the city where the racist attacks are considered notorious. “Some media reports put the number of attacks on foreigners during 2005 as high as 800, with a further 12 beatings of foreigners in the first three months of 2006” (ibid.). In addition, the police is also a source of violation of human rights against ethnic minorities, where many cases of extortion, abuse of power and even racism have been reported. Such scenario leads to dramatic testimonies of those who have suffered with these problems. A Senegalese student of the State University of St. Petersburg, affected by the attacks he had suffered and the murders he had heard of, gave a very strong assessment of the situation: “No black man should come to this country” (Judah 2006). However, thousands of Africans already live in the city and face discrimination on a daily basis. It is within this environment of prejudice and socio-economic difficulties that the African Union was founded in St. Petersburg in 1999.

Registered in the Department of Justice of St. Petersburg one day before Wladimir Putin became acting president of the Russian Federation<sup>11</sup>, the non-governmental organization describes itself as:

[...] a self-governed organization, based on voluntary membership, created as a free-willed union of people, wishing to join efforts in aiding African people and their families, and people of African descent living in St. Petersburg, to exercise their social, cultural, economic and other rights, freedoms and lawful interests, that are in force on the territory of St. Petersburg.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, this chapter will be dedicated to analysing the group's activities to reach their aim of gathering forces for the execution of their mission. In comparison to the previous case study, we now see a group whose objectives of building a unity brings it closer to the fundamentals of community media. In the next paragraphs we will see whether these possibilities are put to practice or not by presenting the results of the interview with Aliou Tounkara<sup>13</sup>, president of the African Union. He has been in St. Petersburg since the early 1980s, when he left Mali for studying in the city. He is one of the founders of the organization.

### **5.2.1. The social role of the African Union**

On the occasion of the foundation of the African Union, there were around 700 people from different countries of Africa known to be living in St. Petersburg. A great part of these individuals were from Nigeria, Cameroon, Rwanda, Sierra-Leone and Sudan. Nowadays, the organization has around 2000 members, including students as well as legal and almost illegal immigrants who struggle within the complicated legal system in the country. “[M]ost of them face the problems of residence registration, the lack of employment and proper accomodation and money to fund their return journey” (Tounkara 2003)<sup>14</sup>. In addition, there are also generations of kids who

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<sup>11</sup> Putin was acting president between December 31, 1999 and May 7, 2000, when he was elected president. Read more on: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acting\\_President\\_of\\_the\\_Russian\\_Federation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acting_President_of_the_Russian_Federation) .

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.africa.smolny.nw.ru/Petersburg/African\\_Union/](http://www.africa.smolny.nw.ru/Petersburg/African_Union/) Last accessed on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the information regarding the African Union presented in this chapter was provided during this interview (any other source will be identified as such). However, I will not use any direct quotation here because of the way the interview was conducted. Since Aliou Tounkara preferred the conversation to be in Russian, Yagodin needed to translate his responses. However, we agreed he would not do it word by word and in many times this decision led to very summarized versions of the responses. Since the research is based on factual accounts of happenings, I do not believe Yagodin's filtering will harm the quality of the collected material. However, it would not be truthful to present it here as having been directly said by the interviewee.

<sup>14</sup> This newsletter article was produced by Aliou Tounkara and found online after the interview was conducted. Thus, I have decided to use it as additional information to the data collected since they provide extra details on what had been described by Tounkara during the conversation.



were born of the relationship between Russian girls and African students who are abandoned by both of them. “In the child house or the orphanage, which has become their place of residence, they have become easy targets of discrimination from their Russian mates” (ibid.). The violent events and an environment of prejudice that have constantly surrounded ethnic groups in St. Petersburg worked as fuel for these people to unite and meet in order to find ways to face the adversities.

In the first moments of the organization, the people used to meet in Tounkara’s club (he is a nightclub businessman), where they talked about their living conditions in the city. From those occasions, a network was developed. Nowadays, the union has a small center where general information is provided to individuals and smaller groups of students, or representants of dormitories and so forth. The leaders of the Union also go to different places and spread the word about their activities. Later, I will return to the ways in which these reunions are articulated. For now, we shall see that even though the treatment given to immigrants by the police is still inadequate to these days, the organization has managed to build productive relations with the authorities. Those gatherings made the organization evolve and nowadays the African Union is a reference commonly addressed to when cases of racism and discrimination happen in St. Petersburg and also in the country. The NGO has a database in which they hold information about all the known African inhabitants of the city. Whenever there is an incident involving Africans, the police contacts for them in order to have information about those individuals. Thus, the African Union can reinforce the cooperational ties with the local authorities and track the cases involving Africans in the city. Such situation is possible because the African Union works on persuading the city government to put actions against discrimination to practice.

Tounkara described that one of the biggest problems they faced ten years ago had been the lack of public debate and mentioning of racial crimes in the criminal law. For that reason, the African Union decided to act in order to somehow cause change. At first, they tried requesting information from the federal government as well as from academic institutions about the situation of racism in St. Petersburg, but those efforts did not generate any response. Then, a survey conducted in association with the St. Petersburg Union of scientist groups showed that “the authorities are indifferent to racist attitudes or are even permissive.” (ibid.) With those results at hand, the organization started sending emails and letters to the city’s government calling for talks about the issue. Soon, the African Union was invited to participate in round tables with the authorities where agreements were reached. As a consequence, lectures were given by the Union to policemen and vice-versa in order to increase the knowledge about their different socio-cultural and

political background. (ibid.) The successful outcomes are still small compared to the number of problems to be faced, including the lack of money to maintain the activities.

Toukara describes that it is very difficult for them to get funding in St. Petersburg. Sometimes they get some financial support for participating and organizing annual cultural events. They also get occasional funds for participating conferences abroad, which may also lead to foreign funding. However, financial difficulties encountered by the organization make it difficult to resolve many problems (ibid.). Yet, the organization is proud of having been influential in inserting the matter of racism and discrimination into the public debate, and also in being one of the reasons for the implementation of changes in the legislation on racism and discrimination. Still, the question that is being pursued here regards their communicative activities in order to mobilize and create identification among the Africans who live in St. Petersburg. Whether they produce community media or not is the main subject of the next section.

### **5.2.2. The communicative actions of the African Union**

Communication is among the main concerns of the African Union. In addition to having educational development for local children to know more about the ethnic groups, “people from ethnic and racial minorities should be more active in promoting their culture, and be more open to communication” (Toukara 2003). From Toukara’s accounts of the Union’s activities, it was possible to notice that the organization has two distinct kinds of actions of communicative nature. One of them is dedicated to informing the society about the activities and the difficulties faced by the Africans in St. Petersburg. The other is directed to members and potential participants of the NGO so these people are aware of the activities and participate in them. The communication circuits started by the African Union seem to be more open for active participation in the production of the messages if compared to the previous cases. Also, the notions of internal and external publics seem to be, in some aspects, totally interrelated.

One of the concerns of the African Union is to inform the society about the problems faced by Africans in the city. In order to reach broader publics, the group counts with the dedication of Ali Nassor, a student and journalist who constantly reports on the incidents and the events involving Africans in established local papers, like the St. Petersburg Times, and in international channels as the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) and the German Deutsche Welle<sup>15</sup>. According to Toukara, the African Union has had a project to start its own newspaper. It has

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.africa.smolny.nw.ru/Petersburg/African\\_Union/](http://www.africa.smolny.nw.ru/Petersburg/African_Union/) Last accessed in June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009.

already been registered, but because of the lack of money the plan has not been executed yet. Currently, they are considering the possibility of starting a web page since there are also other journalists who would be able to contribute towards it. Thus, it is assumable that in case the project is started, there would be a professional-minded structure which could lead it to a situation similar to the magazine “AIDS Sex Health”. However, there are also examples of actions promoted by the Union that may also involve other people than a selected and closed group of journalists.

As mentioned earlier, the African Union organizes different forms of protests in which some of them present different kinds of symbolic actions. Once, when an African man was hospitalized after being attacked by a neo-nazi group, they decided to protest against the way the local police was conducting the investigation. The authorities claimed that this man was actually responsible for the incident, in spite of the extremist organization having already claimed responsibility for it. Thus, in order to express their disapproval and denounce the unfairness of the situation, the African Union organized a demonstration in front of St. Petersburg’s city hall. There, they showed placards with images of the injured man. Nowadays, the group is responsible for organizing the annual “Russia against racism” march, which is also part of their actions to increase the society’s knowledge of the discrimination and prejudice suffered by Africans in Russia.

At first sight, these actions resemble regular non-governmental protesting procedures. However, when we look at them from the perspective of community media, our focus lays on the little details that happen in these activities. For example, we look at who builds the posters and what is considered to be important to be portrayed. Therefore, these protests and demonstrations, which are generally regarded as something small and ineffective by passers-by and outside observers, tend to hide rich cases of cooperation, creativity and participation of different people. For this reason, the African Union is a strong possible case study for in-depth research on community media, especially for their internal routines in which these actions are generated.

The issues debated by the African Union are raised in meetings mainly organized via interpersonal communication. The information about the gatherings is released and the members of the organization spread the word among other people. Lately, emails have been used for the same purpose, but their network can still be considered as based on face-to-face conversations. In addition, the leaders of the group go to different places where they know Africans live (e.g. dormitories) and talk about the organization, promoting and inviting for their activities, which do not only consist of protests and demonstrations. The Union also promotes exhibitions, spectacles, parties and cooking days when members of the African community and other social groups,

including Russians, are invited to make and try food from different regions in Africa. There are also celebrations of the Russian calendar – like Christmas – where parties are organized for the small African children to know the local costumes and improve their integration in the society. Yet, Tounkara claimed that it is complicated to make people participate more actively since whenever there are problems chances are they will not appear for the events. According to him, Africans in St. Petersburg are very poor and cannot be so active. In a similar complaint as those found in the case of the Soldiers’ Mothers and the “AIDS Sex Health” leaders, Tounkara explains that many people are waiting (and willing to be active) if they want their individual problems to be solved. In general, they want help.

All in all, it is possible to affirm that the African Union activities have the prerequisites to be considered a case of community media. Unfortunately, interviews are not enough to provide deeper information about their communicative actions. Yet, we are able to observe that even though all the Union members have in common the fact of being from Africa and sharing similar constraints, it would probably not be possible to build a strong sense of community without the symbolical activities promoted by the leaders of the organization. The diversity in their actions (from rally posters to inter-cultural gatherings) increases the chances of more people contributing for the success of the events, as well as the broadening of the reach of these activities. Thus, the African Union puts to practice a number of different communication circuits (the call for the meetings, the meetings as such, the preparation and execution of the happenings, to name but a few). That may add up and form one single idea of the identity. For all these reasons, their actions would certainly deserve being approached from a more profound methodology in future community media studies.

So far I have described two distinct cases of communicative actions within two different organizations. Even though it uses a traditional media technology in its development, the magazine “AIDS Sex Health” does not fit the notion of community media because of its organizational tight structure and the apparent lack of interest in articulating its message to build mobilization and identification for people to participate in their routines. On the other hand, the African Union does not make use of any regular media devices, but seems to develop symbolical actions through which the identity of the group may be forged. One may claim that the ethnic ties allow the African Union to have a predisposition to building a unity than the “AIDS Sex Health” publication. Thus, at last, let us take a look at the Ingrian Union, an ethnic group that publishes a newspaper and a website for its members in the region. The fact that the group bears the main features of the previous cases (a media channel and the ethnicity bond) may make of it a clearer

example of community media. Let us analyse and answer to this question in the next and final section of this chapter.

### 5.3. Ingrian Finns: a dispersed nation

One of the main goals of the Ingrian Union (in Finnish, *Inkerin Liitto*) is to act for the conservation of the ethnical richness of the Ingrian Finn community in their own homeland: Ingria (in Finnish, *Inkerinmaa*)<sup>16</sup>. If one is aware of the struggles of minority groups all around the world to keep their own traditions and cultures alive, it will not be difficult to realize that the Ingrians' objectives are not one of a kind. However, the configuration of the environment they have lived in for centuries makes of their case an interesting subject of observation. Therefore, in order to understand the socio-cultural significance of the organization, it is essential that the historical events that shaped the Ingrian Finns (*inkerinsuomalaiset*, in Finnish) as a nation are overviewed. In the end, it will be possible to think of the word "union" not only as a designating term for the group, but also as a symbol of the struggles to bind a disperse nation together.

It is commonly said that history is a set of stories told by victorious sides of events across time. However, in the case of the Ingrian Finns, we are able to have a clear account of the geopolitical conflicts and transformations that happened over the centuries in Northeastern Europe through the eyes of those who have been dramatically affected by them. This people's genesis and apocalypse were marked by historical disputes in the region. "The Ingrian Finns were the victims of an unfortunate geographical location", argues Ian Matley (1979, p. 16) while concluding that one of the main reasons for their suffering was that they were in the way of Joseph Stalin during his defense strategy of the Soviet Union's Western borders. However, it was an earlier empire – the Swedish – that can be considered the main responsible for the origins of the religious, linguistic and cultural heritages which have defined the Ingrian Finns to this day.

Ingria is located by the Southern shore of the Gulf of Finland, in a region that comprises the left and right banks of the Neva River, where St. Petersburg was built in, and that extends as far as the Estonian border<sup>17</sup>. Although there are registers of the area having been populated for almost one thousand years (p. 2), it was only in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that the ancestors of today's Ingrian Finns moved to Ingria. The area was attached to Sweden after a peace treaty and

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<sup>16</sup> <http://www.inkeri.spb.ru/inkerinliitto.shtml>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.inkeri.com/english.html>

soon after the Swedes unsuccessfully tried to convert the Vots and Izhortsys – original inhabitants of the land – to Lutheranism, but these people evacuated the place so they would keep their orthodox traditions. Thus, Lutheran Finns were encouraged to enter and settle in the region (p. 2). The flux of Finns to the region slowed down when, in 1721, Russia re-gained control of Ingria. However, the migration soon restarted at full pace after Finland was annexed to the Russian Empire about a century later (p. 3). By the early 1900's, the Ingrian Finns population had reached almost 130 thousand people living in the region. More importantly, they managed to retain their individual character in spite of the increase of the Russian inhabitants in Ingria and the growth of the nearby St. Petersburg (p. 4). The Ingrian Finns had a very active cultural life. The Lutheran parishes provided good education and organized folkloric events; books and newspapers were published in Finnish; radio programs were also broadcasted in their language, and so forth<sup>18</sup>. By the end of the 1920's, the Ingrian Finns were granted a “national district” by the Soviets, where Finnish would be the official language for educational and administrative purposes (p. 9). However, a few years later, the tragic fate of the Ingrian Finns was drastically initiated as a consequence of Soviet territorial concerns.

In the 1930's, the Soviet Union started executing a plan to ensure the protection of the borders with Finland and Estonia by turning the region into military zones from where all non-Russians, considered unreliable, were to be banned (ibid.). A concise description of the consequences of the Soviet actions on the Ingrian Finns is provided by the Ingrian Union's website. According to the organization,

During the 1930's, the Ingrians suffered from Stalin's regime. A majority of the farmers were deported, the use of the Finnish language was prohibited and the Finnish speaking intelligentsia was annihilated. Ingrians were shipped off to prison camps or deported to Siberia and to central Russia. Very few remained, outnumbered by Russian population.<sup>19</sup>

Later, in the occasion of the World War II, Ingrian Finns started being literally pushed back and forth to different places. At first, a number of refugees from Ingria were evacuated to Finland. However, when the war was over, those who had been forced out were allowed to return to the Soviet Union (p. 12), but “the Ingrians were promised by the Soviet authorities that they could return to their own region, but instead were deported to different parts of the Soviet Union”<sup>20</sup>. As a result of those events, Ingrian Finns have been dispersed around different regions of Russia as well

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<sup>19</sup> <sup>20</sup> <sup>21</sup> <http://www.inkeri.com/english.html>

as Sweden, Finland, Estonia and other parts of the world.<sup>21</sup> It is in this wide scenario that the Ingrian Union works for the survival of their ethnicity and culture. In the next section, I will describe the organization's structure and activities performed as attempts to build unity of such a fragmented nation.

### **5.3.1. Ingrian Union: actions to keep the nation alive**

In comparison with the organizations analyzed previously, the Ingrian Union<sup>22</sup> is the one that displays the most institutionalized structure. This group was created in October, 1988 and registered three months later. According to its current president, Aleksanteri Kirjanen, the Ingrian Union is composed of 29 local associations spread in an area that ranges from St. Petersburg and the Southern border of the region. Altogether, these local organizations amount around 25 thousand people. Each member of the organization pays a membership fee. The group also has other sources of finance. "One or two times a year we receive some money from St.Petersburg or Leningrad region for preparing our folk festivals", explained Kirjanen. Since the Union presents a rather fragmented composition inherited from the historical dispersion of the Ingrian Finn nation, the administrative body was apparently developed to reduce the geographical distance among the localities.

The local associations can be regarded as independent branches of the Union. They manage their own organizational structure and administration issues, from the registration of the group to the management of the membership. These groups are also responsible for handling their own local matters and events. However, the general features of the Ingrian Union as well as its common actions are centralized in St. Petersburg, where the main office of the organization is located. The decisions that shape the activities of the organization are made by a central body of leaders chosen through a voting system. An assembly is held annually with all local representatives where the activities of the Union are decided. Every two years, the participants in this meeting vote and select the next president and the ten members of the Council, which is responsible for choosing a vice-president and appointing the executive board. Different tasks are distributed among these leaders. The president, for example, leads the meetings and represents the Ingrian Union in its public affairs. On the other hand, the executive board is responsible for the finances and the planning of the activities which, as we will see below, can be diversified.

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.inkeri.com/english.html>

<sup>22</sup> The data about the organization is available on their website, in Finnish. <Http://www.inkeri.spb.ru/inkerinliitto.shtml>

For fulfilling its objectives of preserving the Ingrian community and its cultural heritage, the Ingrian Union provides a number of different activities and services. The association has courses on Finnish language and culture and also organizes leisure and folkloric events, like the midsummer festivities. In addition, the group keeps a partnership with the Lutheran Ingrian church for maintaining today's Ingrians religious roots. Their social actions target different generations of Ingrian Finns. For the elderly, the Union provides shelters; those on working age have assistance to find jobs and also enjoy professional training programs. There are also rehabilitation programs and a number of activities for youngsters and children to become more active in their social environment. All in all, this brief portrait of the Ingrian Union discloses a well-planned administrative structure and crucial actions to promote their culture and provide well-being to their people. In addition to these activities, the organization also publishes the newspaper "Inkeri", which is freely distributed to all the locations where the Union is represented. In the next section of this chapter, this publication will be analyzed based on the description provided by Aleksanteri Kirjanen<sup>23</sup>. As we will see, differently from the "AIDS Sex Health" magazine, a tight decision-making structure does not necessarily imply the lack of possibilities to promote participatory community media.

### **5.3.2. The newspaper "Inkeri"**

The Ingrian Finns have had many attempts to produce their own publications at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, before they were torn apart as a people by the regional conflicts. According to Kirjanen, the first Ingrian newspaper was produced in 1897. However, it was only ten years after the foundation of the Ingrian Union that the "Inkeri" was first printed. Previously, the organization had published articles in local newspapers in St. Petersburg. However, the lack of a communication channel made exclusively for and by the Ingrian Finns was fulfilled only in 1998.

Each year, the Ingrian Union publishes six numbers of "Inkeri". The number of copies per edition can range from six hundred to one thousand. The newspaper is distributed for free in the places where there are offices of the organization and it is also sent abroad to Ingrian communities in Finland, Estonia and Sweden as well as other places in the world, if requested. In order to pay for the costs of the publication, the organization uses part of the money gathered from the membership

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<sup>23</sup> Even though the organization also has a website, it will not be included in the analysis. It will be used, however, as an additional source. As it will be clarified in the text, the printed newspaper is the media used with communitarian objectives. For that reason, the online page has been opted out.



fees. In some occasions, like festivals, the newspaper is sold. Kirjanen explains that the decision to start the publication was also made by vote in one of their annual assembly and, nowadays, it has been subject of discussion about its usefulness.

ALEKSANTERI KIRJANEN: Well, we have such a question at the hour. [In the assembly], there was a question: “Is it necessary to have a newspaper? Maybe internet...” Most people voted: a newspaper is necessary because [in the villages] they have no internet, they can read only newspaper. They go to schools, clubs, the organization offices...we can send and they read. [We could] prepare online, but a newspaper is very important for us.

At the moment, Kirjanen is the one responsible for the publication. He explains that there are five or six people of the Union who write for the “Inkeri” as well, most of which are volunteers. The main subjects of the publication are the Ingrians’ festivals, celebrations, traditions and so forth. None of those involved in the production of the paper has journalism as a profession. Every two months, they gather in a small meeting and plan the next publication. The participants decide on the subjects to be written, review the material that is already available, and other preparatory activities. They also check the responses from the readers to previous issues and discuss what should be done with them. “[...] we leave the pages for everybody and sometimes there are such articles that are speaking: ‘it’s not correct, it is better to do so...’ [...] we publish these opinions”, explained Kirjanen.

The concern and relationship with the readers do not only appear as remote feedback. Aware of the fact that many of the Ingrian Finns today do not speak their original language, different contents of the “Inkeri” are available in Finnish and Russian. Still, Kirjanen claims that the organization would like to have more articles in Finnish, but the problem is that they do not have so many authors who can write in the language. Thus, in order to supply the paper with more authors, the Ingrian Union invests efforts within their own social environment. “That’s why we learn and teach Finnish. We have special seminars for potential journalists: how to write, what can be said about our origins, traditions...” Kirjanen explained<sup>24</sup>. All in all, the “Inkeri” provides us with another interesting case study in this quest for examples of community media in St. Petersburg. Whether or not it fits the conceptualization proposed here is a subject for the next and last paragraphs, where I intend to cross the impressions granted by the three cases analyzed here.

At the end of the section dedicated to the African Union, I suggested that the fact of having both ethnic features and a media device could make of the “Inkeri” an example of

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<sup>24</sup> The organization has an agreement with a central office for educational activity in Finland so the teachers are trained.

community media. The description of the activities performed by the Ingrian Union confirms that idea, but some of the arguments raised in comparison with “AIDS Sex Health” should be re-evaluated. The “Inkeri” newspaper is a result of collective efforts of members of the Ingrian Finn community. Thus, the producers of that medium are also part of the public considered as targets (or audience, or reception) of those activities. Thus, we are able to notice the close proximity between those coding and the ones decoding the contents that circulate on the pages of the “Inkeri”. Regarding the messages, it is also observable that the newspaper’s main goal is maintaining the symbolic ties of the Ingrians alive among themselves. Thus, by publishing their traditions and culture, among other similar themes, the “Inkeri” reaffirms their commonalities in each edition. The promotion of events invite (or shall I say mobilize?) individuals to put their Ingrian heritage to practice. Therefore, in response to an assumption made earlier (see 5.2.2, last paragraph), it is possible that community media is produced even if those producing the actions are inserted in a hierarchic organization that resembles the closed walls of the mainstream newsrooms, as observed in the “AIDS Sex Health” case.

Claiming that the organizational structure affects the existence of community media is an erroneous and, to certain extent, naïve argument. After all, means are employed in determined processes and structures in obedience to pre-defined objectives. The same can be affirmed about how these activities are performed as well as the definitions of the roles of those involved in them. Thus, it is a mistake to expect that the magazine “AIDS Sex Health” would never be an example of community media because only a limited group of pre-selected producers are allowed to write. Similarly, it would be wrong to say that the African Union would fit that conceptualization simply because it lacks a more traditional and restricted media structure. These aspects do have their importance for the level of participation in the activities, as I argue in the closing chapter of this work. However, the case of “Inkeri” shows that these elements are not determinant factors for the definition of community media. Instead, our attention is directed to the mentality of those who are responsible for those communicative actions. That is, what comes to focus is how the means, the processes and the expected results are articulated in order to ensure that the objectives are reached. Thus, the case studies lead us to believe that the central aspect of community media is not *who we are*, *how we say we are*, but the *strategies* that generate the whole communication circuit. In the next and concluding chapter, I will return to the debate proposed in the literature review and think of new political subjects and the concept of community media once again, now with the experiences and knowledge granted by the analysis of the case studies presented here.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this work, I suggested that community media would be an interesting alternative for Russian media scholars. For that reason, I have introduced a number of theories and concepts so that we could enter the discussions, abandon the most traditional perspectives to media studies, find an underexplored terrain, set the methodological tools, observe some cases from the world outside the academic walls and finally scrutinize the communicative actions of those organizations. Therefore, regardless of some drawbacks along the process I accomplished at the task of providing different samples of communication activities and determining whether they could be considered examples of community media or not. However, those cases should now be employed for the development of more elaborated and specific theoretical discussions that can be granted relevance in the field and become source of inspiration for future explorations of social life. With that intent in mind, this last chapter will be organized as follows.

At first, I will review the key arguments of this thesis as a brief re-introduction to the conceptual foundations that assured the appropriate base for this work. My aim was to seize *democracy* from broader politico-ideological debates and conceive it as a discursive instrument for social transformation. In that sense, the concept of *community media* could be conceived as a result and a source for these changes in society. After summarizing that process, I will describe how the notions of *articulation* and *communication circuit* were used as a framework for the analysis of these communicative phenomena. Then, I will return to the three illustrative case studies and develop a more argumentative discussion about the analytical possibilities allowed by this theoretical venture. Even though it does not concern the communication debate proposed here, some remarks must be made on the characteristics of social and civic groups in St. Petersburg. These considerations should be regarded as complementary data to what has been presented earlier, especially concerning their relations with the official authorities.

In relation to communication, I will attempt to categorize the levels of participation in the groups according to the scheme based on Peruzzo (see 3.1.3) and also to describe how each communicative action could be observed within an articulated communication circuit (see 3.2.2). At last, I will directly refer to the questions that were raised to be pursued in this work (see 4.1) and describe my impressions regarding the empirical observations. All in all, as I will disclose at the end, the most crucial constitutive feature of community media lies beyond the elements for a possible construction of social identity and participation. The last considerations of this work will

be dedicated to outlining the importance of the *strategic* element for increasing the chances of a successful accomplishment of community media.

### **6.1. The relevance of community media studies**

The first part of this thesis was a theoretical quest for a firm but flexible foundation that would allow the exploration of *community media* as an object of research in the communication field of Russian studies. For that reason, the argumentation was widened to the levels of socio-political debates of *democracy* and *civil society*. Such a detour was necessary due to the problematic adoption of concepts rooted in the Western literature in Russian academic and policymaking discourses. These notions are part of long-lasting disputes and accusations caused by disagreements over the efficacy of a transitional democratic project in which Russia would be regarded as an apprentice of liberal capitalist manners. In addition, growing in an underdeveloped country always made me question this limited comprehension of democracy as an intrinsic part of economic development. For that reason, I am indebted to Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe for providing a way to think both democracy and the actions of social and civic organizations through discourse, even if we acknowledge that there are problematic aspects concerning their *radical pluralistic democracy*.

Their proposal of a chain of equivalences among a multitude of different social forces seem to be a difficult task to be accomplished, especially considering the apparent fragmentation in the social movement landscape. There seems to be a growing individualism in which groups are more concerned about their own interests and difficulties that it may be difficult for a new hegemony of the Left to leave the level of ideas. However, some features of their reasoning were very prolific contributions for my efforts to avoid the conflicting transitional debates within Russian studies as well as the adoption of civil society. I believe the merit of their thought is that it allows communication scholars to be worthy of their title of interdisciplinary (and not only *media*) academics. Laclau and Mouffe's theory invites minds from the communication field to contribute for changes in the very basis of socio-political life.

My interest in the notion of radical pluralistic democracy was boosted when I realized that it creates a connection between communication and studies of social and civic actors because of the relevance of discourse in their constitution. It is about this linkage that the first part of this thesis consists of. At first, I describe how the authors move from the old-fashioned Marxist notion of class to the spread of antagonistic social forces that rose against the problems caused by the consolidation

of capitalism as a dominant hegemonic force. Then, I present their reasoning to understand how these *political subjects* (social and civic actors) constitute themselves as *democratic struggles* by employing the *democratic discourse* based on equality and liberty to fight in defense of human rights, welfare and so on. In this process, the individuals involved would exercise their *citizenship* by participating in the collective actions. In this scenario, we – communication scholars – have a single opportunity of investigating the process that may lead to the formation of a *social identity* among distinct people as well as what makes these individuals become participants of the groups. However, in order to do so, the most traditional conceptualizations of the communication field concerning mass media must also be abandoned.

Thus, another detour had to be taken, this time to the Latin American studies of the reception, namely represented by Martin-Barbero. His reasoning to reach the notion of *mediations* could also be applied to Russian media studies since both regions suffered processes of *transnationalization* (the imposition of liberal-capitalist values) and *nationalization* (efforts to reduce the social plurality to the idea of a national identity). However, Latin American scholars have already built a tradition of investigations concerning the capacities of media audiences to produce their own media symbols and systems. Meanwhile, their Russian colleagues still concentrate on the logics and consequences of the power relations between governmental authorities and businessmen for the control of communication apparatuses. For that reason, I proposed the investigation of *community media* as an alternative to the predominant *ideological-instrumentalist* approaches in the Russian communication field. Thus, the communicative actions of new Russian political subjects would be my solution to approach society and individuals from a communicational perspective without reducing them to respectively stage and audience for a game of symbolical power between the state and media enterprises. Nevertheless, the question regarding the meaning of community media remained open and consequently providing its answer became the following step.

The vast terminology related to community media phenomena could be regarded as a theoretical trap of innumerable ramifications. Nevertheless, the fact that the majority of these approaches essentially refer to empirical objects of similar nature enabled me to create a single conceptualization by combining features of distinct notions. Downing's notion of *radical alternative media*, supported by Jensen's *degrees of media*, allowed me to conceive media as a wide-ranging set of communicational practices of daily life instead of a mere synonym to means of mass communication. The *participatory levels* of these media activities would be measured based on Peruzzo's typology of popular participation in community communication. The relevance of

participation in community media is justified by Rodriguez' idea of *citizens' media* in which individuals would acquire citizenship by participating in the production of communicative actions. Howley corroborates the previous statement by defining community media as *popular* for its participatory nature and *strategic* for the implicit symbolic construction of identity, that is, *community* results of meanings and practices developed by the participants of these communicative actions. Based on these approaches I proposed the investigation of community media as a place and a result of strategic and symbolical procedures performed by social and civic organizations in order to reinforce or build social identities and also to mobilize more participants to the group. Nevertheless, I still needed to define how these phenomena would be approached.

The notions of *articulation* and *communication circuit*, coined by Stuart Hall, were useful for me to understand community media as an articulated process divided in three main elements/moments: the production, the message and the reception (closely related to or part of the production). The parts of the circuit are clearly interrelated, so the ways in which they are autonomously created, constituted and executed may affect their effectiveness and jeopardize the purpose of the circuit. In addition and most importantly, there is no guarantee that the expected results of the communicative actions of new political subjects will be met. Thus, each of these elements should be individually observed as well as their connections and negotiations so that the whole process is grasped. In this thesis, I used the notion of *articulated communication circuit* to analyze three distinct cases of communicative actions produced by organizations in St. Petersburg and question what makes of these activities community media. In the next sections, I will review the results of these analyses and reflect on them in relation to the questions and assumptions raised throughout this work.

## **6.2. The empirical illustrations**

This analysis was empirically illustrated with cases based on the descriptions given by representatives of different non-governmental groups in St. Petersburg about the communicative actions of their organizations. The interviewees belonged to the publication "AIDS Sex Health", which promotes the combat to HIV/ AIDS in the region; the "African Union", an organization that acts for the defense of human rights and well-being of Africans living in St. Petersburg; and the "Ingrian Union", which works to maintain the Ingrian Finns' culture and traditions alive despite of the dispersion of their nation. Before entering the communicational description of the case studies, some remarks about the general conditions of new political subjects in Russia must be made. The interviews allowed me to confirm the financial difficulties faced by these actors. With the exception

of the “Ingrian Union” – the organization has a well-functioning membership fee system – the other groups do not have a regular source of financial resources. “AIDS Sex Health” gets funds on issue-based agreements. That is, the fact that one issue of the magazine is published does not guarantee the following edition to be printed. The “African Union” is the one that mostly struggles without any regular funder. However, when it comes to the relations with the authorities, the scenario did not seem as harsh as the literature on the topic had led me to believe.

In all these cases, the relations of the organizations with the local authorities of St. Petersburg appeared to have more co-operational and supportive features than the descriptions of oppression through legislation previously made (see 2.3.3) would imply. The three groups mentioned receiving eventual financial support from the government of St. Petersburg so that they can promote events (festivals, seminars, etc.) in different times of the year. In addition to this sporadic contribution, the representatives of “AIDS Sex Health” described the connections of their leader with the authorities and how she is praised for her service to the society. A similar situation happens with the “African Union”. Regardless the unacceptable regular racial offenses by officers to the members of the organization whenever a problem needs to be dealt, in the institutional level the group became a reference for the authorities to consult whenever there are incidents involving Africans in the city. I acknowledge that these are very few specific cases and cannot be used to make generalizations about a changing tendency in social and civic activism in Russia if compared to previous literature on the issue. However, they should definitely be regarded as fruitful exceptions that may generate interesting observations if approached in analyses of the relations between non-governmental actors and the state. Nevertheless, in what concerns the communicational aspects of these groups, they will receive specific evaluations below. In the coming paragraphs, I will present more in-depth accounts of their communicational activities based on the articulated communication circuit framework. As a reminder, it is still urgent to reinforce the illustrative rather than analytical nature of this work. Unfortunately, the factist perspective does not allow deeper discursive or symbolic investigations. For that reason, I will mainly focus on the participatory measurement as concrete observations allowed by the chosen methodology and use the different levels of participation to raise complementary suppositions about mobilization and the possible construction of collective identities.

The publication “AIDS Sex Health” was the first to be presented and soon classified as not being an example of community media. Their production procedures and structures resembled those of the mass media enterprises. Therefore, despite of its small-scale characteristic, there does not seem to be any interrelationship between the encoding (production) and decoding

(reception) spheres except for the remote influences via remote feedback from readers and the opinion polls promoted by the group. In addition, the articles and the reports published seemed to reinforce this distance. Their goals of reporting to sponsors and passing their knowledge along with little interaction with the readers distance them from the fundamentals of community media. Consequently, one level of participation observed in the “AIDS Sex Health” communicational activities was the *limited-participation* kind due to the few controlled openings to popular participation allowed into the content and decision-making spheres of the magazine. Cases of *non-participation* were also described during the interviews when the respondents argued that people are more interested in having their own problems solved than participating in the activities. However, nothing was mentioned as a solution for this lack of popular and active interest. For these reasons, there are no signs of community media features in any of the moments of their communication circuit.

The second case described was the “African Union” and it seemed to have an interesting dualistic potential for being both community media and another case of resemblance to mass media. In one process, different events were described to be articulated via interpersonal communication. Cultural events like spectacles and exhibitions, to name but a few, are organized and assumedly display different levels of *power participation* since these events unite representatives of different cultural backgrounds. Consequently, a number of negotiations might take place so an agreement of how their plurality will be portrayed is reached. Meetings are also organized through direct conversations. However, in these cases it seems that the level of participation is *limited* since the leaders control the themes and discussions based on a pre-established goal. Another circuit produced by the “African Union” happens in their production of demonstrations and protests. In these cases, they may also present *power-participation* features since they might need as many people as possible producing posters and other kinds of symbolic actions. In these two processes, there appears to be no separation between producers and reception. The messages may cause considerable impact on the perception of the members of their own ethnic group, even if in the occasion of the protests, their main targets are the society in general and the authorities. By participating in those activities, the participants’ sense of belonging to the group may be increased as well as the motivation to participate in other similar events promoted by the group.

Yet, the organization complains of cases of *non-participation* observed in the passivity of individuals whose poor living conditions and concern with their personal issues stop them from being more active. Again, there were no descriptions of specific activities to motivate



these people to be more participative regardless of their personal problems. On the other hand, a paradox of the communicative actions of the “African Union” can be perceived by analyzing their plans for future activities. The union plans on publishing a newspaper which would be organized by journalists who are part of the organization. If executed as an informative channel, these plans will possibly generate a similar situation to that of the “AIDS Sex Health” publication: an elite who has access to the techniques of production informing the society about the conditions of the Africans in St. Petersburg. In that case, the participatory levels would also be low. Nevertheless, such variety of actions demonstrates how the communicative actions of new political subjects can be a source of distinct communication circuits.

At last, the case of the “Ingrian Union” and their newspaper “Inkeri” can be considered a genuine example of community media and can certainly be explored in future research. Their communicative actions display two different participatory levels: *co-management* and *limited participation*. The former can be observed on the fact that leaders keep control of the publication as such, but the decision-making roles and responsibilities are shared with the volunteers in the meetings where the planning for the issues to be published is made. The latter refers to the readers in general, who participate by giving remote feedback to what has been published similarly to the “AIDS Sex Health” case. However, the “Ingrian Union” attempts to increase this level of participation by promoting the preparation of potential contributors from their own ethnic group to the newspaper. Thus, it is observable that there is a concern to reduce the distinction and distance between those encoding and decoding the messages in order to increase the community ties among participants. Such goal is also noticed in the description of the content printed in the pages of the “Inkeri”. The organization uses the newspaper for describing the Ingrian Finn culture, celebrate traditions and promote their ethnic events. That is, the messages are meant to circulate and reinforce the collective identification of the members of the Ingrian Finn society, as well as mobilizing more people to participate in the Union’s activities – including the production of the “Inkeri”. After reviewing each of the cases, let us now return to the questions proposed for this investigation and disclose the final impressions concerning the conceptualization of community media constructed in this work.

### **6.3. Analytical and normative community media**

I had defined that the goal of this thesis would be presenting cases of communicative actions performed by social and civic actors and analyze whether they could be considered community media or not. What is implicit in this objective is the attempt to employ the theorization

proposed here against samples of activities from, in this case, Russian social and civic actors. As I have been constantly mentioning, the limited illustrative nature of empirical section of this work has to do with linguistic, temporal and methodological constraints. However, I believe that even though the portrait of the three communicative cases above were slightly superficial especially regarding the complexity of the theme, it was possible to draw meaningful conclusions that will hopefully generate further and more in-depth investigations of these phenomena. One of the most significant was the confirmation of the number of possibilities that the comprehension of community media as an articulated communication circuit may generate for different kinds of methodologies.

Through this theory, it is possible to explore discursive, symbolical and routine dimensions of those communicative actions either separately or – as I am most interested in – as a whole process of distinct stages and procedures. In some way, this framework allows the scientific dismemberment of these social activities in a way to question and search for solutions for some of their common descriptive terms: small-scale, ephemeral, of utopian nature and, as some disheartened voices would claim, ineffective. This understanding of community media opens the communication field and welcomes the Anglo-Saxon positivism and the European political-symbolic concerns to join their distinct features in order to think, understand and enhance the chances of more successful cases of identity and mobilization construction within distinct political subjects. Consequently, that would contribute for the increase of knowledge about democratic practices that rise from the midst of independent popular action in different societies around the world. In what concerns specifically the analysis performed here, the point that needs to be highlighted is the discussion about the distinct levels of participation from which some inspiring observations could also be made.

One of the questions I proposed suggested the inquiry of how participatory those communicative actions would be and how the different levels of participation would affect the effectiveness of these activities. I suggested during the construction of the theoretical framework that the discourse through which the sense of community may be built would be a combination of meanings that spring from the messages as well as the procedures, routines and practices that originate and maintain this communication circuit functioning. As justified before, it was not my aim to measure the symbolic constructs in this work. For that reason, I could only suggest that the analyses of the cases above indicate that *different levels of participation do not by themselves define what community media are*, in spite of the acknowledgement that this is still an open issue to be approached in future research. The evidence for this assessment appears in the different possibilities of participation displayed in similar situations or even in the same scenario, as observed in the case

of the “Inkeri” newspaper. Therefore, the ways in which participation happens should be regarded as important theoretical and pragmatic diagnostic instruments. That is, we must not claim that a communicative activity by a social and civic actor is not of community nature because it is not participatory. However, it was possible to demonstrate that the analyses of participation may provide fruitful data about the functional routines of community media. Thus, researchers should focus on how participatory these media are and what causes the levels to be as they are.

By measuring the participation within communicative actions of a new political subject, observers have a chance to reflect on the causes of determined situations that may affect the people’s involvement these groups. If we return to the case of the “Ingrian Union”, we will see that the group presents high levels of participation in its decision-making processes. Nevertheless, it still shows limited participatory rates when it comes to allowing more popular participation in the production of the newspaper. That may be explained by the fact that the usage of a mass media technology with limited physical space for publication (in their case, a newspaper and not a website, for instance) reduces the chances of higher participatory levels. On the other hand, the “AIDS Sex Health” and the “African Union” representatives regretfully described cases of non-participation and blamed the people’s characters and personal problems as the reason for their passive posture towards the actions of the group. The question here would be: what is done in order to combat the popular passivity by these organizations? From this brief analysis of the participatory distinctions among the groups, we can draw two important conclusions regarding these communicative actions.

The first rises from the intriguing fact that the “Ingrian Union” was the only one of the groups that did not complain of non-participative posture among the participants and potential participants of their organization. The difference between the publication “Inkeri” and the others is that the “Ingrian Union” presents a set of different activities developed to increase the active participation in the activities of the group and consequently improve the chances of a community environment. The “AIDS Sex Health” members complain of passivity by the readers regarding the production of the magazine, but still keep it functioning as a unilateral channel of information. The “African Union” resignedly blames socio-economic difficulties for many people’s lack of action without apparently developing solutions to remedy this situation. Meanwhile, the “Ingrian Union” displays concern in promoting active decision-making participation and also improving the skills of participants who may become writers and thus also responsible for their media activities. This argumentation could be useful for both practitioners and academics.

In the level of the practices, we can conclude that the measurement of participatory levels would allow those responsible for those actions to realize that participation is not something innate, but a learning process to be meticulously developed, put to practice and constantly refreshed to fit possible social changes. Such conclusion answers another question proposed for this work regarding my interest in discovering what would be necessary for the communicative actions performed by new political subjects to be considered community media. I have already implied throughout the text that these phenomena are constructed through the combination of distinct practical and symbolical elements. The latter refers to the messages and how they may affect the manner in which people are mobilized and feel themselves as part of the group. Again, I acknowledge that the way in which these messages are symbolically constructed can only be critically assessed through a better developed methodology. The same can be admitted about the ways in which messages and other signifying moments of the routines of production articulate. However, it is safe to affirm that if these moments of the circuit are conceived and executed strategically, their chances of accomplishment will certainly increase. Therefore, by understanding the nature of participatory levels and measuring them, these organizations would perceive the importance of well-planned actions and use their knowledge to increase their participation rates.

From an academic perspective, the comprehension of the relevance of planning leads us to my second most meaningful conclusion. The main distinction between the “Ingrian Union” and the other organizations that directly affects the participatory rates and may determine the success or failure of community media as a project is the presence or absence of *strategies* in the development of these actions. Such perception leads to the reflection on my question concerning the objectives of the organizations in performing their communicative actions. As a matter of fact, by removing the interrogative sense of this sentence we reach the matter that may be turned into an object which may guide future researches about the community media articulated circuit. That is, we should abandon approaches that reinforce the debate about their size or their apparent minimum impact for greater socio-political transformation. Instead, researchers should accept that the communicative actions of social and civic actors are complex socio-communicational phenomena and think of them without a necessary confrontation either with more institutional political forces or other kinds of media activities. In that sense, one possibility is investigating whether and/or how the objectives of the groups are developed through the employment of strategic pragmatic and symbolic planning. The relevance of strategy for the construction of community media is not a novelty as we could see in the symbolic actions promoted by the Soldiers’ Mothers (see 2.2). However, the theoretical framework proposed here can be seen as a scheme that allows the investigation of how

each of the moments of those communication circuits are planned and executed. A last example of how this analysis could be performed is provided below.

One common goal between the groups described here seemed to be informing about the events, happenings and general issues related to their social environment. Still, as described previously, two of those social and civic actors seemed to expect that their stimuli alone would cause people to participate. It is in this aspect that the “Inkeri” appears as the exception: the newspaper was created and is still developed to increase the sense of community among the Ingrian Finns not only by *what is said*, but also by *what is done, how it is done* and *who does it*. Most importantly, each of the moments that shape the Ingrian Union’s newspaper seem to have resulted of strategic planning to reach the unification of the dispersed Ingrian Finns as a nation. Whether they are successful or not cannot be answered here. Yet, if their actions are thought as an articulated communication circuit, it is possible to see how many questions would arise and fuel a number of distinct research efforts.

The “Inkeri” was started when the group voted and decided to start a newspaper because a printed publication could be sent to remote regions where other Ingrian Finns could read. Here we already have a potential object for research. Among other possibilities, we could investigate the argumentative process that led the group to this decision and how the interpersonal relations, divergent opinions and consequent conflicts shaped the format of the newspaper. Such an approach would be important to display with empirical evidence the relations of power among the participants of these groups, which would also be observable in what concerns the production of the newspaper. In this scenario, a question to be raised would be: How does the Ingrian Union deal with the conflictual nature of a community?

Regarding the production, the content of the “Inkeri” is decided in a meeting and produced by volunteers and leaders from within their own social environment. Ingrian Finns are trained to participate and contribute for the improvement of the quality of the newspaper. In addition to the power and decision-making struggles, we have a unique opportunity to analyze the effects of the intertwining relation between producers and readers. In this case, we could ask: How does the mixed relation between senders and receivers affect the actual production of the newspaper? It would not be an exaggeration to state that such self-supplying hybrid would be practically impossible to be observed in the mainstream media processes.

In what concerns the content as such, their messages consist of information about their own traditions and culture. In this case, we could focus on the symbolic construction of the message and analyze the purposive employment of symbols that may build or reinforce the feeling of being an Ingrian Finn among those who read the newspaper. Here, one possible question could be: What are the symbolic criteria used by the organization while producing the content of the “Inkeri”? These questions are tentative and certainly not the only possible ones. My main point is what this scenario represents: a possibility of conciliation between development enthusiasts and their critics. Through this kind of approach, participation would not be reduced to results of pre-designed projects of implementation. Instead, it would be conceived as a way to gain awareness from its genuine manifestation (or lack of it) within distinct social environments. The practice – which some claim that is never understood or reached by the policymakers – can and should be seen as a source of academic and practical knowledge in a two-way learning path. Not only would the effects of participation within democratization processes be observed, but also the effects of the execution of these processes on the participatory levels presented by the groups.

Let us review the structure of a communication circuit and return to the cases that presented non-participatory levels. Even though they were not proven to be samples of community media, their complaints of little participation show that they would probably be interested in improving those levels. For that reason, they are qualified for being in this demonstrative illustration. As I have claimed, there are three main moments in the community media process: the production, the message and the reception. However, these elements can be thought separately, but not completely detached, from one another. The hybrid production-reception chooses a means, produces and receives a message which can reinforce their collective ties and promote participation. In addition, people who receive the message (be them participants or potential-participants of the group) may have personal (friendly or conflicting) relationships. Under these circumstances, we may ask: why is it that these groups present non-participatory levels? If we are not blinded by the automatic reaction of blaming the non-participants for their passivity or lack of public concern, we will certainly have a lot to explore around the elements of the communication circuit and their interfaces.

Since we are talking about community *media*, we would probably be tempted to follow the same steps of the early researches in the communication field and think: is it a problem with the message? In this case, we could apply discourse-analysis or semiotic methods to scrutiny its symbolic construction. The problem here would be the same that the traditional approaches to mass media have for long identified. We cannot explain a determined pattern of behavior by

concentrating exclusively on the message. Thus, it would be necessary to think about it not only as a single element, but also in its relation to the reception field. In other words, we would need to question non-participants about their thoughts and ideas about what is produced by the group. Again, this is not a novelty since reception studies are also part of the range of attempts to understand mass media. Let us suppose then that the non-participants claim that they are rather interested in the messages, but still they do not participate. If it is not a problem with the message, so there could be something problematic about the production.

In this case, we would be intrigued by what in the procedures of the group could be repelling individuals from participating in their activities. One possibility could be that the means employed does not facilitate participation. In the case of a magazine, for instance, the non-participants may be so used to being readers of what someone else has written that they do not even consider the possibility of joining it. In another scenario, it could also be that the non-participants are so modest and shy that they think they would not be useful in the meetings or in the demonstrations promoted by the group. In these circumstances, we would be able to think about the nature of these means and how/if they actually affect the participatory rates. Another issue in the level of production is rather paradoxical if we remember one of the problems of mass media procedures: the distance between production and reception. Here, as we have seen, there would be very little or no distinction at all between these two moments. That may not necessarily be good: what if it is exactly this close relation that disheartens non-participants to join? What if it is a matter of interpersonal relations? In this case, we would not have a model of inquiry that could be borrowed from mass media studies. Thus, it may be that the interdisciplinary communication scholars would need to broaden their knowledge of social psychology and other sciences to search for an answer for the groups' failure in mobilizing more participants.

In conclusion, these mere illustrative and rather simplistic argumentations demonstrate the range of complexity that could be found if the notion of participation is used as a gateway for the understanding of the communicative processes within social and civic groups. I believe that ultimately it is all a matter of *how* things are done: how the messages are symbolically produced, how the procedures (the choice of means, the conception and circulation of messages) are executed, how issues that may jeopardize the process (like interpersonal conflicts) are handled, how all these actions are articulated to form one single circuit that may cause the participatory levels to rise and reinforce the collective identification of people with the struggles of the groups. In this sense, these examples show how the idea of community media as an articulated circuit could be applied both in academy and in real life to emphasize the importance of strategic planning.

If performed, investigations of this kind may generate enough knowledge to seed the communication field with even more fruitful possibilities of studies. That would not only increase the diversity of research, but also allow more communication scholars to leave their comfort zone of traditional media studies and become more active in providing scientific awareness for the improvement of democratic practices. I hope that this thesis contributes for the increase of community media investigations, which if flourishing could someday help these actions not to be considered mere ephemeral happenings, but long-lasting spaces of social transformation that effectively result of well-developed strategic plans.



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