Article for Interface:

Class and Voice: challenges for grassroots community activists using media in 21st century Ireland

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Abstract:

This paper considers the purpose and functions of community media operating in Ireland today and the challenges posed by the neo-liberal environment. Community media organisations proclaim the fight against exclusion as a primary goal and promote our processes as the means to facilitate inclusion. As the community is dismantled by the current government, we now face an acid test: can we hold together in solidarity, and will our structures and processes support the real needs of working class people? What knowledge has been developed that enables community production, affording access to broadcast media and a voice to the excluded? Will it support the effort to deal with the ruling class attempt to pass the burden of the economic collapse onto workers with all the social destruction this will mean? Whose voice and whose needs are being heard in the media we produce and by whom?

We don't have all the answers to these questions yet, but in trying to address them we have been forced to keep in mind the effort it takes for working class communities to develop and maintain the knowledge they need to both survive and to achieve. In this article I firstly revisit the emancipatory aspects of community media in its community development context; secondly review the historical context of the emergence of community broadcasting in Ireland; then present issues emerging from my research done within the Community Media Network (CMN) and with community groups using media; and finally map the process of the CMN's strategy development to deal with the issues.

1. Introduction:

Communication in all its forms is basic to human development. Tools and means that enhance our capacity to communicate effectively around our needs and interests are also fundamental to wealth production in contemporary society. A capitalist system allows those who have money to buy what they need – and also to control

access to powerful communication tools. Those without wealth and power therefore have a *need* to gain a voice so they may influence decisions that impact on their lives; those without wealth and power are also excluded from access to mainstream media, be that so-called 'public service' or 'independent' media that control the airwaves[1]. How do the excluded get heard in a media saturated 21st century?

This article draws on my experience of working with grassroots community development workers in Ireland who have engaged with media in their effort to have their community's needs recognised and to influence policy so that these needs would be met. Their engagement has taken place on a variety of fronts: with mainstream media; with commercial production groups brought in to support productions; by producing their own media themselves or by working with community media organisations, including broadcast media. They have also engaged with Community Media Network (CMN, whose activities I have co-ordinated since 1996) in an effort to identify and address the many difficulties and challenges they find in using dealing with media to address their need for voice. I refer to conversations with community development workers recorded over a five year period.

Robbie Byrne works in participatory forms of community-based drama using what is known as legislative drama and the forum theatre techniques of Augusto Boal. The participants are people from the community who are living with the effects of drug use – either as users, family, or friends, and their involvement is voluntary. The purpose is to address issues that are difficult for the community to deal with in an open manner due to stigma, prejudice or hostility, ultimately meaning they cannot speak. He explains the approach thus:

> the way that we have incorporated the arts is not so much for people to have an experience of arts as if that was something very profound, it's to use story-telling and creativity that reflects the social situation that people are living in. It's using drama and that creative process more and more as a community development tool, and more and more as something that really gets to the heart of the story that people want to tell, rather than it being analysed in terms of research or any methodology. It stands alone and is unedited. I think the more work that's done like that at the local

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[1] The existence of the access channels in the US is an example of what can happen when channels exist – but the access channels franchise is continuously under attack and their become occupied with ongoing battles and campaigns to protect their right to broadcast and the resources that allow them do so. This situation is also a clear indication of the determination of the mainstream and commercial carriers to be rid of access channels.

> level the better; this way people seem to get a great sense of empowerment and ownership of their own work. (Interview 3, 2004)

The groupwork develops support networks and critiques of mainstream interventions on the drugs issue. It aims to bring the voice of those experiencing the issue to the policy makers in order to initiate changes that will bring real benefits to those most in need and who are most affected. Using media can amplify and extend the reach of work such as Robbie's; the question is how to use media in ways that keep the essential nature of the activity. Kate Harris (2010) describes the problem thus:

> "community based drama . . . often does not have access to the resources needed for professional production values. What it does have is the ability to speak directly to the experiences of people in a particular community, by locating the performance in the bodies of people who live there. This is especially powerful when the physical bodies performing are those that are often seen as part of the city's landscape with no individuality or agency" (p.1)

The need to work in this way to enable voice has important implications for how media may be used; the condition of being unable to speak with which such work engages is also a central issue that community broadcast media must address.

Groups such as those Robbie Byrne works with have a range of issues in dealing with broadcast media, but see promise in community television in a number of ways:

> But I think community television would be extremely useful because it's directly into someone's living room; people are living in isolation and fear in relation to support so it's a very good way to get information across to them. It's also very good in terms of the parents participating in the creation of a programme which would make it easier for people to access support; or for people to see people like themselves accessing support - and hopefully that will make it easier for them (Interview 3 2004).

This kind of value has been verified by community organisations in Chicago working with Community Access Network channel (CAN TV), who report that a high percentage of people who contact them have found their contact details on the channel whilst channel hopping alone late at night (Popovic, 2006).

The approach taken by groups using Boal's methodology is described by Kate Harris as

> "giving the public the skills to become the artists. This approach located the performance in the bodies of people in the community, performing for the community. The objective . . . was not the performance itself but could only be accomplished through performance."[2] (Harris, 2010, p.5)

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[2] "Beyond the Aesthetic: Applications for Community-Based Drama". This paper, written by Kate Harris, was presented at a seminar as part of the Irish Society for Theatre Research (ISTR)

The difference between community drama and taking the step into broadcast media lies in moving out from the particular and the local, and involves engaging with another set of issues. A range of benefits are perceived in the use of community television: e.g. documenting the drama, bringing it to a wider audience, avoiding the expense of touring a drama production, engaging people in media production skills, and establishing a base in which the transfer of these skills can take place. But how all this may be achieved demands a closer look at the context in which community activity takes place.

Historical context

Community development – the context in Ireland

After the social movements of the 1960s failed to deliver changes in working-class communities a large community organising sector developed in Ireland, catalysed by anti-poverty activity in the 1970s and 1980s. While this sector has been recognised as a social movement in its own right (Geoghegan, 2000; Powell and Geoghegan, 2004; Varley, 1991; Curtin, 1995), acute problems have evolved from its relationship with the state.

The framework of Social Partnership launched by the Irish Government in 1987 was widely accepted to be due to a crisis within the political elites (Allen, 2007; Larragy, 2006). This involved the Trade Unions, Employers, and Farmers, and while this was seen to be unusual, it became even more so when community organisations were invited to join this process as the Community Platform in 1996 (Larragy, 2006). However over a decade of this kind of community representation culminated in little more than the Community Platform leaving the Partnership process in 2003, returning again in 2006, and now in 2010 facing the dismantlement of the sector's infrastructure by a neo-liberal government in crisis that is determined to quell all opposition.

While the Celtic Tiger boom 'rising tide' was lauded by the right as 'raising all boats', the subsequent bust has marooned workers who face losing their homes with their mortgages in negative equity, and spiralling job losses. However all throughout the

conference, held in Trinity College Dublin, on April 23rd, 2010.

boom period another aspect of this reality was being impressed on those who worked to address the gap between rich and poor: far from being reduced, it was in fact widened:

> Even though we're in the middle of the Celtic Tiger era we haven't always been in that position. Some people haven't experienced the Celtic Tiger anyway, and they are really second or third generation from a series of disadvantages, and people internalise that. So we'd still be working with the internalised oppression of people even though there may be more material things about, people have more access to material things, but there is that sense of exclusion which is intergenerational poverty and lack of education. Because some people are searching for these stories as if they're not present, that they couldn't be at this point in Irish history with the level of economic success. But it is there and people are struggling with it on a daily basis. (Interview with working class community activist, 2005)

The community development movement sought to gain negotiating power in the structures established by a neo-liberal Government who claimed their de-regulation and free-market agenda would ensure that 'all boats would rise'. The reality of Irish society in the boom years was the swift widening of the gap between those who had and those who didn't; the emergence of even more critically excluded groups; growth in trafficking of all kinds from drugs to people; and a swift rise in social tensions and racism with the arrival of new communities. Community development projects were stretched immeasurably by the problems they were meeting at their doorsteps.

Developments in community broadcast media since the 1970s

The need for voice was never stronger, but the engagement of community development projects with community broadcast media was weak. The new community television channels of the new millenium, whilst having verbal approval from the sector[3] found it difficult to maintain active community involvement in the building of the organisations, and this was complicated by the kinds of funding that became available.

The production of small scale media has been a regular activity within community development projects over the past twenty years. These products – and the process of their production - have served important functions in meeting the groups' objectives on a range of levels and support their social networking and information dissemination. This was made visible in Ireland through a range of publications and

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[3] See Feasibility Study and Needs assessments for CTVs Gibbons, 2006; O'Siochru and Mulcahy, 2007

fora including: Community Radio Forum website – now CRAOL; CMN's website; Node – the journal of the Community Workers Coop (CWC); and in more general and international fora such as AMARC, Videazimut, and CRIS. There is now also a range of literature coming from the field and from academic interest in addressing this kind of production. The growth of what has become known as 'community media' in Ireland is marked by difficulties and tensions that demonstrate similar problems to those that have emerged within the community development movement. Much of this is instigated and exacerbated by the conditions imposed by state funding such as corporatism, managerialism, etc, the danger being that these trends lead to a separation of the technical organisation from their base[4].

Community Broadcasting

In the broadcast media environment initiatives aiming to create access and voice for those on the margins of society emerged in media specific formations and involved coalitions that included various ideological positions (Day, 2003; Horgan, 2001). Community broadcast media place activists in close engagement with the state - negotiating licences, operating under contract with the Broadcasting Regulator, and subject to state monitoring. However the community television channels have had little or no funding to support core operations. The funding streams that exist are constructed to support the independent production sector and while those involved in community television channels have accessed this, little if any has filtered through to enable production based in the community where a transfer of skills can take place.

Activists now struggle to establish and maintain the new community television channels in a context that becomes increasingly difficult amidst economic crisis. Transmission has been launched at a moment when the neo-liberal property bubble has burst and therefore operates in a field of conflicting forces; the internecine conflicts that arise as organisations face closure due to lack of funds also form a part of the instability.

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[4] The extent of the problem these issues pose for the process of knowledge production in working class struggle is more than clear within the Trade Union movement in Ireland where Leadership is facing strongly voiced criticism from membership that has surfaced through public media –"the leadership has been in craven collaboration with the Government" (TU conference delegate broadcast on SixOne News). The TUs have suffered membership disaffection over the years of the Celtic Tiger when workers faced ongoing restrictions through partnership while the wealthy shipped money out of the country.

Irish activists have campaigned for access to all broadcast media including television since the early 1970s[5]. Their movement bases included: civil rights activists developing local voice, influenced by the Civil Rights movements in the US and in the North of Ireland; the Irish language rights movement which was absorbed by the state ultimately producing Radio na Gaeltachta and TnG (Hourigan, 2001); and those for whom media diversity was a primary aim – which included commercial interests. Community television was first legislated for by the 2001 Broadcasting Act; the first CTV licences were issued in 2006 and now three channels are transmitting on cable[6].

The community television channels came into being under the neo-liberal regime that emerged in Ireland in the 1990s and at the height of the Celtic Tiger boom: the 2001 Act was designed to introduce digital broadcasting, reform the State Broadcaster and essentially privatise the broadcasting sector. Whatever the intentions of the state, this provided an opportunity activists had been seeking for a long time. Slipping in between the lines in one way or another is nothing new - community radio stations have broadcast since 1995 via a loophole in the 1988 legislation that legislated for commercial (so-called 'independent') radio[7].

The 2001 Act made no provision for funding mechanisms, so channels received little support in the process of developing organisational structures from institutional bodies[8]. The 2003 Broadcasting Funding Act spawned what was probably the deadliest blow to community media – the Sound and Vision Scheme, which demanded art-house independent production industry conditions and criteria from community production; conditions which oppose the kind of processes proven useful and effective in challenging exclusion in the community sector. The impact of this has yet to be acknowledged, but a community radio sector which was run and controlled by volunteers has seen an influx of independent producers, i.e. for-profit or art-house media makers, since the scheme started, and this has affected production standards and values.

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[5] Despite only recently being afforded legal recognition in the 2009 Act, Irish community radio stations are seen as providing good practice models amongst EU community radio broadcasters and have been broadcasting successfully under relatively favourable regulatory conditions.

[6] Dublin - DCTV http://www.dctv.ie; Navan -P5TV http://www.p5tv.com; Cork - CCTv http://www.cctv.ie

[7] The 1988 Act was followed by a period made infamous by the swift growth of media empires, the Flood Tribunal, and the corrupt activity of Ray Burke, then Minister for Communications and Justice.

[8] Initial support was in the form of BCI (Regulator) funding for Needs Assessment; this has been used to form the basis for the Regulator's agreement to award a contract, and outlines the applicant groups, the constituency and the facilities available – or not available.

Those who most need a voice- those excluded from society - have no resources, in either their material conditions or their skills, to help them access the channels. The challenges posed by both these opportunities and constraints are not debated widely - whilst being the focus of activists' efforts little research is available, with a few exceptions emerging from community radio[9] .

Theoretical issues

Community development principles and processes emphasise the involvement of those affected by the problem in finding the solution; CDP practice draws on the theoretical and field work of Paulo Freire (1996) and his participatory methodologies[10]. This is also where the theoretical underpinnings of Robbie's work are situated.

However there are weaknesses in community development theory that promote participatory methodologies as desirable in their own right but separated from material and class struggle (Facundo, 1984)[11], uncritical usage of terminology such as 'participation' and 'empowerment' for example. These serve to fudge the meaning and drop the emancipatory intent of the work. Those who seek to resist the challenge that these processes put to existing power structures have also used the terminology of community development to place the responsibility for their situation back on the shoulders of the oppressed (Mayo P., 1999; Mayo M., 1974). This is nothing new, but it is surprising that as a tactic it still has currency.

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[9] See Rosemary Day, 2003; Niamh Farren's 2007 MA Thesis addressing the issue of quality "**An Inquiry into Values: Towards a Definition of Quality in Community Radio**" available at: http://www.craol.ie/cms/refdocs/niamh_farren_quality_thesis.pdf

[10] Also as developed by practitioners such as Hope and Trimmel (1995) in South Africa. The principles of this approach are given expression in declarations such as the Community Workers Co-op (CWC) statement of principles (Appendix 1), many similar statements can be found around the world.

[11] Blanco Facundo's impassioned critique highlighted ways that Freirean methodology ignores social contexts and fails to assess the possibilities within their social contexts for the participants of Freirean programmes; the fact that Freire's achievements were rooted in a revolutionary context is key to the success of his methodologies.

A recent comment in 2009 by the new Irish Minister for Community, Equality, and Gaeltacht Affairs exposes another difficulty in how community development is understood:

> I don't see why community development has to always be linked to disadvantage; community development is necessary across all areas of society[12]

Now, the statement that community development is necessary across all areas of society does not pose a problem per se, but that it should have no relation to disadvantage certainly does. The principles professed by organisations such as the CWC are to change the nature of society from one that produces disadvantage to one that provides not simply static and intermittent opportunities to some excluded people but one that builds structures to support all of society's members. This means the processes of community development must challenge existing power structures and expose the underlying dynamics that cause exclusion. This is part of the conscientisation process which demands what Freire called 'naming the world' and reflective action as emancipatory process for the dispossessed. However there are considerable problems that people must deal with if they are to engage with their realities in this way.

Issues of voice and re-presentation

Those struggling to live their lives under conditions of extreme deprivation and oppression and who are vulnerable to exploitation are often unable to voice their needs, let alone influence the decisions that impact on their lives. Freire named this the 'culture of silence' that perpetuates people's domination; Gayatri Spivak (1988) holds that this also means that the issue of representation remains a problem. How the working class can produce their own organic intellectuals, as Gramsci (1998) insisted was necessary to counter the hegemonic control of traditional intellectuals and enable them to speak in their own right, is a core problem for emancipation. How representation is achieved and what dynamics operate in the 'empowering' process employed determines whether poor people continue to be exploited in the interest of those in control of the process (and their conditions therefore remain the same), or whether poor people gain by acquiring social capital that changes their

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[12] Pat Carey – in Dail session quoted in the Irish Times; also noted in Dailbrief 2010; note Dailbrief also disbanded along with the Combat Poverty Agency)

subaltern situation - thereby achieving material changes in their circumstances and assuming the power to re-present their own needs.

Similarly to Freire and other proponents of participatory methodologies[13], Spivak works on parallel programmes of literacy and postgraduate teaching, maintaining that one is not enough without the other and that those who teach must enter into a relationship dynamic where they understand that they are learners and teachers and that these roles are interchangeable.

This premise recognises the problem for those who have left the subaltern state and have therefore undergone transformation – how do these people now re-present the needs of those who cannot yet speak? So Spivak understands there to be a need for a dynamic of engagement where the conditions of the excluded are kept present. Robbie Byrne describes an approach that facilitates learning; sees the 'learner' as the centre of the activity; and places editorial control in the hands of those whose story is being told:

> **Margaret:** We talk a lot about training, and about skills, and training 'the people': do you think training goes both ways?
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> **Robbie:** I think so - what we say quite a lot is that we create learning events. We have skills – practically for myself working as a drama facilitator, I'm working on a piece on hepatitis. Basically I ran a series of workshops but the people have the story, you know. I showed them some skills about how you might go about presenting the story. We recorded what they said, what people were saying in the improvisation, so I don't have any special position in it, even though I have skills (I have gathered a lot of skills over the years)- that group of people are creating something together.
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> I haven't got some skills that they have, but we create something together, it's a collective creation, it doesn't have the individual stamp of a director or an author or anything, I facilitate it. That's what I say I do: sometimes when scenes are particularly difficult I will write something for it, but I'll give it to the people whose story it is and say 'what do you think of that? you try it out and change it in whatever way' There is a learning in that, yeah. There's a thing about you know keeping it simple in a way, Inside Out would have said, and I'd agree, that we're involved in telling stories that otherwise wouldn't be told. That was it. You enter into that situation as openly as possible and to produce something collectively to the highest standards that you can. And the standards have been very high. (Interview 3, 2004)

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[13] Including for instance Illich, Foote-Whyte, Greenwood,

Maintaining the primacy of the excluded experience poses a difficulty when we want to negotiate with the powerful, since the powerful demand that we speak a language that has no words for the experience of the excluded and whatever words do refer to it denigrate that experience. The constructed modes of communication that allow access to those who have the power to change things (if they want to) are also controlled and moderated by various gateways. There are also tensions between strategies developed to address different needs – for example those about 'telling truth to power' and those that are about working class people acquiring their own sense of self and ultimately creating situations which are not dependent on the goodwill of the powerful.

Media has been used by movements in a range of ways and probably the most comprehensive strategic use is that developed by the Zapatistas (Halkin 2008). This employed two approaches – "talking with" which was use of video for communication amongst themselves; and "talking to", when they faced the world's media and conducted an event that they themselves controlled. This clear approach to media use has been developed in the context of a popular emancipatory movement (similarly to Freire's methodologies). Finding ways to use media to support a popular movement is part of an emancipatory process that needs to be informed by a critique of media practice.

To get simple about it: what the Zapatistas and many others have demonstrated, and what we all know is that media production is not rocket science and if we need the benefits it can bring then people must be enabled to engage with it. A lot of people drive cars, operate machines, learn to use computers – the technology of media cameras, microphones, editing, and transmission software, comprise another technology. But it is more than just technology: being able to use media is a powerful way of communicating, and whoever controls it determines what it can do. Robbie Byrne saw possibilities in people's involvement in production, but particularly in relation to understanding how that power is constructed:

> **Margaret:** So the power is in being able to tell the stories in the first place, then record then, then distribute them?
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> **Robbie:** Yes, I think that if people are engaged in addressing the power imbalance between who have control over the media and the technology, if people gain a sense

of strength or solidarity through firstly the expression of it and the recording of it and the performance of their story - but then they're involved in seeing how that story might look on screen, how it's edited, and deciding an approach to editing, you know, and an opportunity to say if they want to use community television how would they use it.

That understanding then provides opportunity to critique what that power can do:

I know that locally people would say that Prime Time[14] can come in and do a programme on poverty and they come and go and they have they have their airspace filled with the stories of the people they leave behind, and in the wake of it they leave literally pain and hurt and embarrassment and shame that people have to deal with and it can be a terrible knock to the community and to the development work as well when that happens and they don't have any way of addressing it. . . . and where does it go to? And people would like to have the opportunity to respond to that and if they had access to community television, I think people would be screaming to have a programme and to bring people back from Prime Time and ask them why and how and who do they think they are . . .

Margaret: This is to respond to be able to use it [community television] as a response . . .?

Robbie: Very much so, and with newspaper coverage as well. Because the level of internalised oppression is quite extraordinary, and I think we all have it in one way or another, but when your area is constantly branded by the media, when all the young people in your area are constantly branded, as having no value…. 'they're areas to be frightened of, they're people to be frightened of', when that's continually thrown up in your face, day after day throughout your life . . . it has a deep, deep, rooted effect which is very bad. And I suppose to use the community TV, it's almost like a form of celebration, of a social analysis of people's lives and by their ability to claim that by telling their stories, it's to share it. (Interview3, 2004)

The problem with media and control of the mode of intellectual production

It is often said that communications and media are controlled by those in power; and those in power can change. However such a statement needs to be elaborated – left as it is, it creates an illusion that media is an inert entity that may support any given power structure and will unproblematically switch with whatever revolution. The problem however is that the organisation of any of the media is ideologically driven in relation to its structures, divisions of labour, access routes, and content.

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[14] Current Affairs programme on state broadcaster RTE One

The capacity to use media tools for voice is also classed, within a media industry built by capitalist society that creates hierarchies of privileged workers who work to their bosses specifications. These workers' interest is to further their skill within a particular mode of production. This means that the exclusion of those who cannot speak is copper-fastened by a cultural hegemony that determines values and standards across labour and product. Chomsky and Herman's (1994), amongst many others[15], analysis of the political economy of the mass media depicts no less than a fortress containing carefully constructed corridors of power and effective threads of control.

An effective thread of control is the media worker's self understanding as 'objective', 'unbiased', and therefore as having some authority – similar to Gramsci's traditional intellectuals. The 'objective' status is the criteria for the right to speak and denotes the removal of the worker from the subaltern state; yet it also sets controls on what 'voice' they actually have; furthermore it seems to remove any capacity to understand the impact they really have as Robbie Byrne pointed out; and they *move on* to the next piece of 'news'.

A wide range of media workers who operate at various levels across the hierarchical labour force structures may control representations. Near the top, the self-assuredness of the 'objective adjudicator' allows media 'anchor people' to bypass questions about what and whose interests they represent, and so ignore issues of how they create representations when they engage in constructing programmes (and therefore controlling meanings). High profile anchors now have a platform that places them in a similar position to priests and professionals - Gramsci's traditional intellectuals who control how we understand our situations and the world we inhabit.

The reporter who interviews another reporter when 'the Summit' is in session - or the politician unavailable, or when the scandal blows – is all too familiar; and it's more impressive when it's by satellite or video link since piling technology on top of technology creates more holy of holies; more demonstration of how much it is owned; more spectacle; more inaccessible holders of 'sacred' or 'insider knowledge' that is drip-fed through the radio speaker or the box in our living room. The media

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[15] Badigian; McChesney, McNichols

can be everywhere; they are inaccessible; buttressed by a technology industry that draws demarcations between domestic and professional 'markets' – the consumers and the producers.

Some have argued that media are collectively the main site of 'the public sphere' – i.e. a site where ideologies can be contested and discourses gain dominance and so are 'heard'. However the criteria required for access to any site where such contestations can happen are in themselves highly exclusive and clearly inaccessible to those already excluded from society. Sites where contestations are possible are very often accessible only by having particular attributes including education, wealth, and social standing (and not necessarily in that order). These sites are therefore enclosures and criteria for access to them are the accessories, the club cards, of elites.

The fact of the matter is that achieving voice is a difficult task. When people sit down to discuss how they can go about changing the conditions in which they live they have lots of good ideas – the most frequently voiced idea is to get the issue debated in the mass media, preferably on 'the news'. Yet getting exposure proves problematic: talk shows put them in conflict positions with the opposition and they don't get a chance to state their case, so the situation is worse than when they set out; they have half a page of the newspaper in one week and then nothing for the next ten years[16]; "the most important part of the word newspaper is 'new'",[17] so the same old story of oppression and exploitation is obviously excluded; they don't get to have editorial control on the content they provide; in order to extract 'human interest' content, interviewers break agreements and focus on the individual and emotive content rather than the issue as soon as they go on air – and so it goes on leaving the kind of destruction Robbie Byrne spoke of in its wake.

The recourse of the excluded who do get organised is often to orchestrate photo-opportunities or media events as the Zapatistas did - this is display, much like rattling spears and shields from the hillside; launch occasional forays to raid the enclosures and retreat; or invade with intent to occupy and take over. Examples of

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[16] A disability action group showed me their newspaper files: most were examples of prejudice, ignorance, and dismissal of issues, the space given to positive coverage in their terms was miniscule. They were very proud of the half page they got in a national newspaper, but this had to be weighed against the dominance of negative coverage.
[17] Journalist interviewed in Kerry, 2005

the latter include UK anti clause 28 lesbians absailing in the House of Commons or their taking over the BBC news room in the 1980s, and the kind of event we have also seen recently in Greece. While some impact may be achieved by these tactics, it is often short-term and generally results in retreating again to the 'neighbourhoods' to get on with the survival plan. This is where the Zapatista strategy worked well, since they continued with their 'talking with' media strategy to support the development of communication amongst their own people.

Turning to seek help from those with the skills to make media revealed more problems for community groups. The hope is that when they pay independent producers they will get a successful product that is useful and will hold its own alongside other media products – i.e. within the media environment in order to be good enough to be noticed by that elusive 'mass audience'.

Whilst acknowledging that many independent producers are well-intentioned, even committed to fighting inequality, community organisations in Ireland have reported to CMN a range of problems they experienced when working in this way. These problems include issues around copyright and ownership of material and programmes; a mode of production that does not fit with community development processes; timeframes for production which are geared to commercial and fast turn-around production schedules; emphasis on the quality of media production rather than producing media in a community development framework.

The kinds of funding schemes that are available such as the Sound and Vision Scheme[18] in Ireland are equally unsuitable, demanding production ready scripts; art-house criteria for production values; team/crew with media production experience (cameraman, sound engineer, etc). All of this ignores the volunteer nature of community production, the community development processes that are necessary, and which also relate to media use in this environment.

Media are means to tell or re-present experience; in a capitalist mode of production these media products are owned by the producers, who are not necessarily those who have the experience. The need to control the use of one's own story forces people to

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[18]See http://www.bai.ie/funding_sound_vision.html

become producers of their own media, and therefore the owners of their media product. Very often this can beat a track back into the realms of capitalist production and away from the initial emancipatory purpose; and so there is no impact on the original conditions - they persist, if they don't get worse. To add to the problem – consider all the time and effort that has gone into it and still that elusive 'mass audience' either blinked or went out for a cup of tea when the programme was screened - once.

It is hardly surprising then that those struggling against oppressive conditions avoid engaging with media and want to leave it to others. But the underlying problem of how voice is constructed persists, and the need to establish means to amplify the voice that speaks the experience of the excluded must drive the effort to establish community broadcasting.

Striving to establish such a voice means maintaining critical awareness of the impact the kind of practice employed has on the conditions we wish to address. What is needed is a reflexive activity in which media is used to serve a purpose. What is needed is for 'media' to be subject to, and formed by, voice, rather than the other way around. Essentially we need to include media in our movement praxis.

When we ask how we do this with community television, the issues that arise very quickly after the technology barrier are around the processes and relationships that come into play:

> **Margaret:** How do you see the problems you will face if you want to engage with community television, what are the key issues there?
>
> **Robbie:** On a very practical level it's about the technical stuff, having access to people who have technical skills, that's one thing. But also the other kind of thing is trying to develop some kind of partnership or understanding with people who have enough sensitivity or humanity to work with groups of people that are under them. I just have terrible fears, constant fears about people, about some sort of an abuse of power in terms of people having information and not having information, having skills and not having skills. So it's trying to develop that kind of partnership with people that can work. And whether this is idealistic or not, those people have to trust one another in a different sort of way than they would do working in other areas. A lot of the time, the people we're working with are quite vulnerable and have a hard time of it, to say the least. They might be at a point in their lives where they're claiming something

back, so somebody entering into that has to have an understanding or humanity about that sort of situation.(Interview3, 2004)

Community media researchers tend to focus on producing work that places community media within a media framework as a counter-balance to global media monopolies, emphasising that it has different purposes and values from mainstream media (O'Siochrú, 2004; O'Siochrú, Girard and Mahon, 2002.). Peter Lewis (2004) has stressed the importance of research to raising the profile of community media, releasing information on community media from its locale into the wider community, into schools, and into general consciousness. Some of this work re-affirms the kind of relationship that Robbie feels is necessary: for example, Farren's (2007) study of quality in community radio projects also included values such as "honesty, sincerity, collective action, trust, personal development" (p.69).

Yet whenever we agree to contextualising community use of media within the context of the mainstream, we deny the very issue that is at its core: the voice that is needed from the experience of exclusion. It is not the voice of those on the margins of mainstream media.

The context of 'voice'.

Where and how is community media made?

Defining either 'community media' and 'community development' is a difficult task the problem is reflected in the diversity of the kinds of groups, activities, and allegiances they encompass, the fluidity and difficulties in mapping a community and voluntary 'sector' where groups grow and disintegrate at immeasurable rates.

However it is the capacity of both terms to encompass diversity that many activists understand as a strength; demanding from them an ability to deal with difference which makes them tolerant and flexible. Very often the difficulty in defining the term fades when the opportunities it provides are understood. Some sociologists (Geoghegan 2000; Varley, 1991) have proposed that a more useful understanding of community development is as an activity rather than as a constituency. Similarly, understanding community media as an activity where people use communication

tools with an objective in mind makes much more sense of the kind of practice we are talking about.

This discussion is not new; the problem for those who want to address the inequities of our society is whether the term community media describes an activity which is in opposition to oppressive forces in society – and some community/ community media activities may not be that. Just as calls for the recognition of the 'incivil' and 'uncivil' aspects of society (Jai Sen, 2005) highlight the artificiality of affording legitimacy to any sphere of social activity rather than questioning the legitimacy of what is done through it, so the problems with defining community and community media force us to ask more key and fundamental questions about how we do what we do. Specifically 'how do we make media in community?' And therefore, what dynamics and learning/learner opportunities and relationships exist that allow community media to accomplish its objective of providing a voice for those who don't have it?

How to move on?

Activists do not choose the ground to fight on; opportunities are taken when they present themselves and may not happen again for many years; a wide range of alliances are formed and may disband as quickly. In CMN, underlying differences and competing interests that emerged over the years have caused splits in the organisation but a core group has always re-emerged to carry on the CMN agenda of supporting and promoting community media activity.

However what is significant is that each time a split occurs, the focus or aim of the group is re-aligned with slightly different emphases as the core group refines its understanding of how it can achieve the CMN aims. The table in Appendix 2 roughly describes the kind of focus and emphases as they evolved over a ten year period in relation to the changing profile of the Steering Group. The trajectory shows a mixture of community activists and organisations, NGOs, and independent producers at the founding moment. The independent for-profit media producers and NGOs dominated when funding levels were high; this presence drops and community organisations re-appear when the funding disappears.

The focus on community television adopted by CMN in 2000 produced its own dynamic. CMN devoted all its resources to developing community television and in particular to building a community television channel –DCTV- in the capital city, Dublin. In 2008/9, after DCTV had established its own organisational structures, CMN reviewed its aims and began to develop a new strategy. The initial 2008 review identified a gap in support mechanisms for community organisations to engage with community television. We developed a proposal we felt the CMN project could undertake within the resources available and we put this to a number of community groups working in those areas we felt should be engaging with the new community channels. As we engaged in discussions with groups about approaching the work, our review developed into a process of engagement that now directs the project. The emphasis in the proposal shifted from making television programmes to documenting the groups' own processes, working to identify the learning opportunities we can create together, and through these to support their community develop the skills to make programmes.

One activist put their community's needs in relation to community television this way:

> the thing that needs to be fulfilled in that [meeting requirements for community television] is the training process. Identifying what the training needs are, what the skills deficits are, what the people need. . . . . And you're hoping that there's one central group if you like through which that's available . . . and it would be channelled through local community groups. So I suppose what I'm talking about is not so much the pyramid but certainly the spider's web, that you have Community Media Network in the centre and then that would be spread out to likeminded community groups that would then link to the more local community groups, and to the voluntary groups too, like the local women's group. The community media network becomes something that is *in* the community. (Working-class community activist, interviewed 2005)

CMN's role is here understood to be animating community media activity, supporting the transfer and development of skills; once the organisation has attained a self-sufficient level CMN's purpose there is complete. We have two people working on the CMN project with technical skills; we have been able to up-grade our equipment this year; the groups have provided us with a small room as a workshop base. We have located other supports when needed from other community media organisations through our network and we have managed to co-ordinate media supports when asked. Our funding could be cut this year, and if that is so the project

will then become totally voluntary. We are experimenting because we don't know the outcome, but we are thinking long-term and deepening solidarity is a primary requisite.

Developing community broadcast channels is a long-term project that demands engagement with those who need a voice. It must be based on their needs and operate with their trust – that means on their terms and in their base.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - CWC understanding of Community Development
Community development is based on certain principles:

It enables people to work together to influence change and exert control over the social, political and economic issues that affect their lives.

It is about a collective focus rather than a response to individual crisis.

It challenges inequitable power relationships within society and promotes the redistribution of wealth and resources in a more just and equitable fashion.

It is based on participative processes and structures which include and empower marginalised and excluded groups within society.

It is based on solidarity with the interests of those experiencing social exclusion.

It presents alternative ways of working, seeks to be dynamic, innovative and creative in approach.

It challenges the nature of the relationship between the users and providers of services.

It is open and responsive to innovation from other countries and seeks to build alliances with organisations challenging marginalisation in their own countries and globally.

It involves strategies which confront prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender, ethnicity, class, religion, socio-economic status, age, sexuality, skin colour or disability.

Appendix 2 – Community Media Network: Activities, Focus, and composition of core group

Phase	CMN activities	Emphasis	Nature of core (steering) groups
1994-1996	Established C.E. Project; ran "Alternative Video Festival"; produced first issue of "Tracking" magazine; starts survey of community media groups in Ireland	Promotional activity; research; networking; Lobbying and Advocacy; internal prohibition on CMN to engage in production or training since this was the work of the member groups.	A number of NGOs; community video makers – individuals and organisations; community development groups.
1996-2000	Co-ordination of EU funded projects – training in production; Further issues of "Tracking" produced; 3 per year; Development of the website takes the place of the survey; small but active community media resource established.	Building the organisation and network through co-ordination of EU funded community media projects; Supporting the network of CMN member groups to do the training and support community production on the projects; Visibility for community media; lobbying and advocacy for resources;	Community video makers, community media organisations including community radio, one NGO, some individual community video makers/independent film-makers
2000-2003	EU Funds end in 2000. CMN engages with Dublin Community Forum and City Development Board; Founding of Dublin Community Media Forum in 2001; Lobby for and development of Community Television and in particular DCTV; Dedication of resources and provision of Secretariat to DCTV; Merger with Open Channel in 2001 Maintained small media resource centre dedicated to provide subsidised resources and training for community	Focus on community television - lobby and advocacy on local and national levels; Building structures and platforms for community media in Dublin; Networking in Dublin to develop DCTV – organisational development; workshops; Move from a total emphasis on advocacy, visibility and networking to include provision of resources and training to build community media within the community sector.	After funding ends core groups shrink. CMN SC now consists of five groups most being community video, one NGO.

	organisations; "Tracking" goes on line in 2000, no issues produced after 2002 Co-ordinator begins research process to parallel and map the development of community television after the 2001 Act	Merger with Open Channel in 2001 marks the beginning of production activity within CMN	
2003-2007	CMN premises and C.E. closes in 2003 due to high rents and lack of funds. Temporary premises used for Independent Media centre in 2004 shortly before closing. Secretariat continues to support development of Dublin Community Television until its' first broadcast 2007; CMN resources now also dedicated to supporting community organisations developing their capacity to produce and equipment and technical worker deployed and housed by community organisations– "Production in the community" project is unfunded.	Supporting activity for community television and resources dedicated to DCTV; Supporting capacity building within community organisations means ongoing engagement with production; Research focussing on community organisations' needs. Research and development of materials to support community television activity; CMN struggles with homelessness, but this means that its activities are embedded in its participant groups.	CMN almost, but not quite, subsumed into DCTV: % of Technical support worker time dedicated to DCTV becomes 100%in 2007; CMN Co-ordinator is DCTV Secretary; CMN Chairperson is also DCTV Chairperson CMN co-ordinator resigns as DCTV Secretary in 2007 as DCTV goes on air;
2007-2009	Production in the Community project ends first phase with production of "Men At Work" in 2007/8. Work expands to provide documentation and programme production support to community organisations. CMN networks with community television groups	CMN technical support to DCTV finishes in December 2008; new worker employed in early 2009; CMN finds new base for workshop activities in Clonsilla. National networking	CMN Chairperson (also DCTV Chair) resigns from CMN in 2008; Two community development projects join the two community media organisations and one independent film-maker on the CMN SC in 2008. CMN core group is stable since.

to form a training Network (2006-2007) and subsequently a national representative organisation the CTA (Community Television Association) incorporated as a not-for-profit company in 2008.	continues through CTA	

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About the Author

Margaret Gillan, CMN Co-ordinator

As Coordinator of the Community Media Network (CMN) in Ireland Margaret Gillan has co-ordinated all-Island training projects to build media capacity in the community and voluntary sector and to gain visibility for community media in general. She served as a community representative on the Dublin City Development Board; was a founder member of the Dublin Community Media Forum; founder member and Secretary of the Dublin Community Television Co-op (DCTV); and has been chairperson of the Community Television Association (Ireland) since its inception in 2007.

Margaret has recently completed research for a PhD in NUI Maynooth charting the development of community television in Ireland. A joint project of CMN, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) programme in Maynooth, and the Royal Irish Academy's Third Sector Research Programme; this project used a PAR approach to focus on the involvement of community organisations in the development of community television. Her ongoing work in CMN aims to reinforce sustainable knowledge sharing networks within communities.