Class and Voice: working class communities making media in Ireland

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This paper, drawing on doctoral thesis, considers the purpose and functions of community media (CM) in Ireland from the perspective of activists within the Community Media Network (CMN). The intention in this paper is to raise some questions around methodology, in particular research methodology in community media, and how participation in knowledge production is enabled.

CM organisations promote CM as an effective means to address exclusion and as linked to the work of the community development (CD) movement. In Ireland the CD movement is an important manifestation of self-organised working class activity; the 2008 crash has intensified the neo-liberal efforts to annihilate community infrastructure built by the CD movement over the past twenty years.

Community broadcasting has been slow developing in the midst of this struggle; pirate broadcasts have been active since the 1960's, since mid 1990's twenty licensed community radio stations are now broadcasting, since 2006 three licensed community television channels (CTVs) in the Republic, and since 2004 one CTV in Northern Ireland.

CMN uses participatory action research (PAR) methodology to support community organisations' engagement in CTV channels and to explore issues found in the space between need and access. The theoretical framework employs the social conditions of working class knowledge production (Karl Marx); the need for the working class to produce organic intellectuals (Antonio Gramsci); and the process of conscientization (Paulo Freire). Media is a key means of knowledge production and re-production; the relationships of producer to process are therefore determined by the power relations in society. It is not surprising then that most working class communities experience media as a violence done to them.

Challenges for CM activists are to develop approaches and uses of media that turn the power relations built into media around. This paper presents CMN's work in process in working class communities in Dublin; our purpose is to contribute to a community media practice that is built directly from working class experience.

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Introduction:

The intention in this paper is to raise the issue of "community media" as an area needing research that is at one and the same time a part of what is called 'the media landscape' yet demands means of investigation that belong to other disciplines. In Community Media Network, we find we need to employ "a web of strategies" in our efforts to identify needs and sustainable solutions for community organisations' engagement with media.

John Downing (2001), a major contributor to research and theoretical study in media that operate on the margins of the mainstream, said what is needed is a sociological approach to this work. In a recent defense of pluralistic approaches in Sociology Michael Keating and Donna della Porta (2010) say:

> "we consider the true believers in the supremacy of a single ontology – epistemology – approach – methodology - method as pernicious for the development of the social sciences. This also means that the pluralism we advocate is not yet another consistent ontological or epistemological approach. Rather, it is a statement about the legitimacy of different points of view, that however remain open to dialogue with the others." (Keating, M. & della Porta, D. 2010)

This discussion on methodology concerns us; CMN has been working within a Participatory Action Research (PAR) mode with community organisations over the past ten years; our main challenges in research activity have been methodological and the dynamic has forced constant review and innovation. In respect to the doctoral study, Michael Burawoy's development of an extended case study method provided an additional framework that supported aspects of our longitudinal case work (Burawoy, 1998). PAR provides a methodology that can encompass change, but it also means that conceptions of what successful outcomes actually are will need to be kept in constant review amongst the research contributors. Engaging the 'subjects' of research as a self-aware contributor to the research problem demands a revision of the place of the researcher/ author in the research dynamic. It also demands re-thinking approaches and raises issues around how the "subject/s" are placed in research fields. Pierre Bordieu's call for an engaged research ethic (Bordieu, 2002) also constitutes a recognition of the capacity for exploitation in research and the need for accountability towards 'the researched'.

In current work we take the community organisation as the starting point and seek an engagement with groups that encourages conversations addressing their perception of their media needs. What has evolved is an ongoing dialogue and a demand for CMN to respond to needs that sometimes arise quickly on the ground from community organisations. These needs may arise from their

practice, e.g. documenting events, activities, and developing ways to record their ways of working; they may also arise from their need to be heard – lobbying authorities, funders, and engaging with the mainstream.

None of this is unusual in community media activity, and I don't claim it as a unique approach on the part of CMN. However I am positing that we need to put this forward as primary activity that takes priority over 'media production' in how community media concerns are presented. Demands from community organisations on community media operators means that our activity takes place between 'normal' defined boundaries. For example we will find our questions in CMN concern the positioning of community activists in society, their perceptions of their world, and their intentions in their activities and their use of media[1].

The ground in which community media grows is diverse and yet there is a common need for voice that would seem to be an achievable democratic demand. Behind that drive to communicate - to "grab the microphone', the camera, or to occupy the TV newsroom - is the need to communicate around a burning issue. Efforts to establish 'free media' that people can access 'without fear or favour' to meet their information and communication needs take many forms, yet despite many years of media reform and activism we do not seem to have developed one straightforward way to provide this essential means of communication. And we have not succeeded in establishing the right beyond threat – we fight to hold onto franchises long awarded, we lobby for funding to enable what we have in principle, but we struggle still.

I am writing from my experience as a community media activist working with community groups responding to problems arising from drug use in Inner City Dublin. These groups have prioritised the production of information and developing culturally acceptable means of disseminating that information through their communities. This has resulted in a range of strategies, but in so doing these groups are exposing a number of areas and issues that need to be addressed and understood if we are to develop suitable media that will meet their needs. This is core to the problematic of community media – whose needs do we as community media activists meet? Are we only embroiled in a struggle with mainstream/commercial interests for control of the airways? How do these struggles engage with the struggle of communities engaged in life and death issues? In the words of one sceptic who accosted me – "how will community media be any different?"

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1 As a result of this, we find authorities and funding bodies equally 'distant' – for example the 'community' side of our remit operates outside the bounds of the Department of Communications; the 'media' side of activity outside the bounds of the Department of Community. Our efforts to get cross-departmental initiatives, despite White Paper recommendations, are contested by the departments differences – officials often quote conflicting internal cultures as stumbling blocks to collaborations.

The other side of it is the question that community media activists ask – why do community organisations choose to work with independent/commercial media when community media activists are struggling to build another form and a different egalitarian democratic media?

I want to approach these questions from the needs of the communities I work with, starting with how they decided they should deal with 'information'. The paper is in two parts –

- ⚞ Part 1 discusses the ground in which community media grows and the problems as we see them in our practice, inevitably set in our context in Ireland - but with wider implications.
- ⚞ Part 2 outlines CMN's current activity and the ways of working we use that seem to best facilitate our work with community organisations.

Part 1 – The Ground In Which Community Media Grows

CMN in Ireland and Information poverty.

Community Media Network (CMN) has evolved since 1994 from being an organisation that sought to establish community media centre's to one that now operates to develop media strategies on site with community organisations[2]. The core of the CMN Mission is to increase access to media as a tool for social justice and to that end CMN has focused on media needs in community organising. In Ireland, the aftermath of the failure of the 1960's social movements and the gap left by the national developmental plan gave rise to working-class self-organising in the form of community development projects, or CDPs as they became known. This has more than twenty years of activity behind it, so it could be expected that in this time a strong movement for 'voice' would emerge, but this has been a struggle. Community radio began broadcasting in the mid 1990's, and community television started broadcasting in 2007. Overall the community media sector has remained small and the community media operators found it hard to bridge a gap with the community sector to address their information and communication needs. The current crisis makes these needs critical.

Whilst CMN's membership spans the breadth of the Island of Ireland, the numbers of involved organisations and individuals has been small, growing sporadically when campaigns are very active or when funded projects encourage engagement. CMN's activity has encouraged a network that can become active in response to national circumstances, but can also remain local or dormant. For the past few years our operations have been centred around a small number of groups based in Dublin, the capital city. At the heart of these groups' concerns is an effort to build a national autonomous network that provides supports to families dealing with the effects of drug use (see http://www.fsn.ie/)[3]

Context of groups currently working with CMN:

Communities in Dublin were hit hard by heroin in the 1980's and the impact left people shocked and stunned; early efforts to protect themselves and their families took the form of vigilante action due to the inaction of authorities. Communities underwent a learning process that directed their attention to the knowledge gap that left their people vulnerable. Activists began to tackle an

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2 (see www.cmn.ie)

3   The FSN describes itself thus - "The Family Support Network is an autonomous self-help organisation that respects the lived experiences of families affected by drugs in a welcoming non-judgemental atmosphere. The Family Support Network primarily supports the development of family support groups and networks throughout the island of Ireland. Through this work the Family Support Network raises awareness of the difficulties faced by families in coping with drug use while recognising the important role that families play in supporting the recovery of the drug using family member."

important need of their communities – information on how to deal with the effects of illegal drug use on their communities – HIV, AIDS, Hep C. As they pushed for authorities to meet these needs they met with a series of barriers. It was only after convincing authorities of the need for information campaigns that the extent of the ideological hurdles became evident.

Material produced by the Government at the height of a drugs awareness campaign in the mid 1990's proved problematic, some publicity containing information that was not only misleading but also prejudicial to those most affected by the problem. For example posters that depicted a set of rotting teeth as a result of heroin use were not only incorrect but promoted a perception of recovering users that denied their struggle to rebuild their lives. The misuse of the information is that it is the treatment for heroin addiction, methadone, that rots teeth; not heroin. So *recovering* addicts who were undertaking a methadone programme were used in an advertising campaign that purported to show the deadly effects of drug addiction; this not only denied efforts to take control of addiction but left recovering addicts vulnerable to additional gross misunderstanding, prejudice, and stigmatisation.

Added to this was the serious difficulty of getting drug related death and disease acknowledged by authorities and media alike. It's proving to be a long battle. Poverty and disadvantage are notoriously consolidated by the with-holding of important information and the propagation of misinformation. Groups struggling with the problems in their communities tackled media influence as a serious campaign focus.   It is clear that the issue of what and how information is – or is not – disseminated is not simply a local problem, and it is a problem that is classed. Access to information and how (once obtained) that information is analysed constitutes power; those who hold it determine how it may be used.

"Information poverty" is on the global agenda – the NWICO launched by the Non-Aligned-Movement in the late 1970's exposed the lie behind the "free-flow of information" as promoted by the Northern First World countries, where the 'flow' went only one way and contributed to the exploitation of the 'third world' by the richer 'first world'; imbalances in access to communications media were highlighted by the United Nations in 1997 as a matter of grave concern; organisations such as PANOS have focussed on information poverty as a primary cause of suffering. Yet as I write we see more and more reports emphasising that information is not prioritised even in *disaster* areas where information about how to access aid is clearly the difference between life and death.

Strategies to bring vital information to disaster areas are often dismissed as "not a priority" (Girardet, E. 2005), yet communities struggling to deal with pressing issues must very quickly begin to address their information needs. Papers addressing these issues are regularly found in the

communication initiative, (http://www.comminit.com) many concerned with major disaster areas like post-quake areas, floods, epidemics, war, and famine. Reading these reports it is clear that mainstream media operations and approaches are understood to be damaging, exploitative, and obstructive to relief and rebuilding efforts (Fernando, J. 2010[4]). In these scenarios the eternal contradictions that exist for people facing excruciating scenarios reach unbearable tension. What can they use as a means to call for help? Who controls aid? The neo-liberal promotion of philanthropy has 'progressed' aid strategies to become the conscience of the elite.
Media moguls feature amongst the richest people in the world, the links between governments and media is well documented, and as governments hand over vital resources to private commercial control (de-regulate) we find that these people may now control aid programmes.

The irony of Denis O'Brien emerging as a "philanthropist engaged in Haiti's recovery" is cutting given the media empire he built on corrupt payments to politicians[5], and the perpetration through his media outlets of the very problems identified by those working to tackle information deficits in disaster areas. In Dublin, where a number of his commercial media outlets operate, community development workers report that journalists still contact them looking for "two people who have lost a relative to drugs to come on air tomorrow evening" (communication with community worker, May, 2011). This kind of exploitation is cross media - seeking the human story that can be exploited, sensationalising the issues, and then dropping it and moving on to the next piece of 'news'. The most horrific of this kind of exploitation targets children (UNICEF 2010[6]). The key element of many critiques is that media *ignore* the wealth of information and experience that is available through advocacy organisations, professionals, and self-organised groups dealing with their issues on the ground.

In Pakistan organisations mobilising to replace damaged equipment in local media found that:
> *"two weeks into the crisis humanitarian information still did not figure in the United Nations "flash appeal" for support".*

The inability to act on the need for local media as vital sources of information was also evident in other relief organisations, even if it appeared that they did recognise it in their public statements and published reports (Girardet, E. Nov . 2005)[7] . One of the reasons given for this was that
> *"donor governments are increasingly eliminating their mass media departments as part of their humanitarian or development contributions".*

The papers I am drawing on come from media analysis in the global South, and the case for information and access is clearly stated, however many do not appears to get to the root of why

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4   http://www.communicationforsocialchange.org/mazi-articles.php?id=416
5   Moriarty Tribunal Report 22nd March 2011
6   http://www.comminit.com/en/node/319595/36
7 http://www.csmonitor.com/2005/1121/p09s01-coop.html

this is happening. To some of us working to democratise access to media in Northern 'first world' countries it is clear that governments are eliminating their public service media due to neo-liberal and privatisation agendas. The problems created by neo-liberal policies need to be highlighted.

Political elites in Ireland did not delay in taking up the neo-liberal agenda; one of the clearest examples is in the activity of Minister Ray Burke, who held the portfolio for Communications and Justice in 1987, a combination that has not been repeated since. He spearheaded the privatisation agenda in media and the legislation he put through the Dail was tainted by his corrupt dealing and bribery[8]. A circular relationship between the world of media corporations, legislation, and access to wealth is evident in the following statement by Tony O'Reilly, Irish media mogul, as he explained his acquisition of gas field blocks for exploration

> "Since I own 35% of the newspapers in Ireland, I have close contact with the politicians. I got the block he (the geologist) wanted" (Allen, 2007)

We have seen this trend develop to the point where Denis O'Brien with his media empire Communicorp and Michael O'Leary with Ryanair vied publicly for top place as neo-liberal warlords; the role of operators like O'Leary has been to eliminate trade union activity in their industries and cripple workers collective power; O'Brien also bleeds the country with exploitative work practices and moves from one tax haven to another; O'Leary assumes moral superiority since he pays taxes in Ireland, but he has single-handedly done more to destroy regulation of industry and strip the state (and the people) of their assets. The impact of the kind of de-regulation these two espouse has brought the country to economic ruin; now the lie of the Celtic Tiger is exposed, with workers straddled by a debt brought about by reckless financial speculation on the part of private operators.

Some years ago I spoke with a community development worker involved in a community health project focussing on drug-related health issues. His comment at the time holds:

> 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)

So now the struggle intensifies in a 'crisis'; the media that are the only means to disseminate information are the very source of misinformation; many high-level reputations are at stake; and

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The Second Interim Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into Certain Planning Matters and Payments; p139-140

the far right and far left propound the same solution – let the failed banks fall. The role of the government is to implement austerity measures to squeeze the cost from workers and above all they are concerned to prevent the flight of capital so there will be no tax on wealth – it is assumed it will just leave the country. Denis O'Brien is only one example – Ireland has many tax exiles!

But these issues are so intertwined it seems that until we address the issue of what to do about our media needs – i.e. the means by which we distribute vital information – the grotesque merry-go-round continues. Media still tell us that it is we who are being bailed out – rather than the reality that we are being forced to bail out the banks – and all this goes on while big bonuses and obscene salaries continue to be paid out.

In the US, Eric Klinenberg's "Fighting for Air" (2007) documented the negligence of Clear Channel's commercial networks due to their profit-driven systems – which meant that fire and rescue workers could not use local radio to warn inhabitants of a chemical cloud and resulted in thousand of injuries and one death, the downstream effects of chemical pollution in this case will have to be assessed in the future. This kind of media constitutes information <u>blocks</u> – not <u>channels</u>; they <u>compound disasters,</u> and the results are cataclysmic.

Death and misery would appear to be enough of a lousy reputation for any industry as a result of its the way it does its business, but the effects of mainstream media go far beyond something that could be seen as – and often is described as - simply operational; it can and often does invade the psychology of whole communities.

Consider this statement by the same community worker:

> I know that locally people would say that Prime Time[9] 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 . . . . 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. (Interview3, 2004)

There is widespread recognition of the fact that mainstream media operates in a way that is exploitative and damaging from paparazzi to 'human interest' tabloid journalism, and the recent exposure of News of the World phone hacking confirms what we already know about journalistic

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9   Current Affairs programme on state broadcaster RTE One

practice that is not only intrusive but illegal. However, it is another thing to try to build a new way to use media that will serve to amplify the voices needing to communicate and support their interaction. Some community activists have a vision of what it might be:

> And I suppose to use the community TV, it's almost like a form of celebration, 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)

That is a vision many community media activists would laud. Another community activist posed a vision of how it could work:

> "its more the structure of the spiders web I see, that the community media network is in the community (Gillan, 2010. - Interview 13)"

However it would seem that the media that dominate our world are so powerful that we both, community media activists and the community activists we work alongside, have been unable to ignore it and build an autonomous media sphere that we control and that meets the sustainability needs of communities.

Globally accepted media practices

Some will say that to point to how media operates in disaster zones is to use an extreme example – but many people have been existing and dying in disaster zones in the midst of so-called 'first world' booming economies *and the media operates in the same way as they do in disaster and third world areas.*

It is important for me to say here that I do not deny in any sense the global system of exploitation that exists, but I am asserting that *it is the the same media system in the Global North and South, operating in the same way.* People move against the problem this presents, groups such as "Headline" (www.headline.ie) monitor media reportage on mental health and suicide issues and lead a campaign to develop ethical standards in journalism; disability organisations in Ireland confronted the media for publishing the fascistic views of a top-ranking journalist – and successfully ended her tenure.

But the problem is not 'media behaving badly' – this is 'business as usual' .

The problem is the standards that *are operating*; and until we not only recognise those for what they are but connect them to the political forces that spawn them, we will be unable to do anything. 'The problem' is fundamental to how mainstream media is constructed.

Antonio Gramsci's contributions on "The Formation of the Intellectual"[10] speak very clearly to us in this regard, and particularly his analyses of the 'traditional intellectual', educated and maintained by the dominant class, who works to maintain the dominant ideology. He also speaks of the 'organic intellectual', identified as those intellectuals developed by social groups - and the capitalist class has it's own kind such as managers and time-and-motion people. Gramsci asserted the need for the working class to develop it's own intellectuals to contest the ideological hegemony that 'manufactures' our consent to oppression.

While Gramsci pointed to the traditional intellectual from what is a past society, we now have the media personality who becomes the adjudicator, the 'Anchor' a kind of priest that presides over a communications ritual that is distorted, manipulated, and manipulating. These now take over from traditional intellectuals and form a phalanx of 'experts' who re-present every issue to us on our screens, through the radio, on the web. The Newsreader interviews the reporter at the summit, the election, the event, and between them they analyse what is going on. Those involved or those affected are simply fodder to this machine and we never seem to find those responsible for the way things are to ask them how they made their decisions and why.

So people (we) talk about the talk-shows run by these anchors, because it is the only place where peoples' voice emerges and can be heard. Those people who call these shows have to pass the filters in the media infrastructure that back these shows up and vet all the "callers"; a veritable army of researchers, journalists, and backup workers – down to the exploited runners, operate this system which arranges the show from beginning to end. People wanting to get on the shows to air a viewpoint know well they have to strategise around this system.

But the voice that occasionally does get heard across the airwaves - goes off then into the ether. The communication stops when the show ends and media move on to the next piece of 'news'. The 'priest', the new intellectual of the dominant class controls the flow of communication/ information.

The audience does 'negotiate' what it confronts: emails in response to the media circus around the recent Queens visit castigated Pat Kenny, the highest earner in Irish media, for the obsequiousness

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10 Gramsci, A. (1998). The Intellectuals. In Q. &. Hoare, Selections from the Prison Notebooks (pp. 5-23). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

of the reporting. One of those Pat read out said "get off your knees, Pat!", the immediate comment from the person sitting next to me was "if he read that one out on radio, what did the others he didn't read say?". We see the reality of the circus, but what can we do about it in the 'belly of the beast'?

It's worth remembering that if we are so positioned then we, as community and community media activists, are the alien within. What is appropriate action to take when and if this is the case? In terms of how we approach research we may well ask – whose questions do we address, who is involved in the query, and who provides the analysis?

D.I.Y. And Owning Media.

When the mainstream proved so undependable, as activists we turned to doing it ourselves – and this direction has a proud history. The quest for forms that support the release of a people's voice has provided new knowledge, has helped turn round problems that people face, develops skills, etc, etc, - and some of this is due in itself to the fact that people 'find their own voice'. It is when we want to bring that voice to bear on decisions and to direct the action that real problems emerge and this is also where censorship, and self-censorship arises. In the middle of all this the commercial media machine finds fertile ground. People's need is so great that they will learn to use iPods and Androids and the various developing technologies, to tell their stories and pass on information; much can be achieved in this way – until, that is, we want to use these media to act.

The media industry develops strategies to direct people's use of media to commercial spheres of activity and to increase this they also appropriate forms used in non-commercial (not-for-profit) spheres. The owners of social media – BILD Zeitung's citizen journalism, You-tube, Web 2.0, etc – exploit people's need to communicate in order to develop advertising markets for profit. People needing to communicate will use whatever is available to them – so we get social movements, political organisations, campaigns, and community groups using social media to promote their issues and using these media as communication tools[11]. While this brings benefits and is seen by some as a training ground in communications, unequal access poses difficulties in using 'social media' as communications and liberating tools. This is uneasy territory too since authorities have demonstrated that social media are within their control; mobile networks are shut down to disrupt

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11 In Ireland the Wheel – a company set up by Government to 'facilitate' community development and organisations promotes training in 'social media', employs commercial companies to deliver the training and bypasses the whole community media sector, despite our protests. Pobal – the government agency that controls the funding for the community and voluntary sectors also employs commercial operators to deliver not only media products, but also many kinds of training and services. Alongside a policy to enforce corporate governance structures that are cumbersome and inappropriate for community groups, this sourcing of skills from a commercial sector simply undermines the tacit knowledge of communities, their experience, and stunts the development of sustainability based on their needs. Information must be conveyed using culturally acceptable media and materials. Commercial media don't engage with this.

demonstrators' communications, or media networks disconnect individuals (and countries) to assuage political masters. So those who need to communicate must either be versatile with new technologies, maybe use older more stable ones, own them outright, or - not be dependent on them at all. We are not in control.

Community media and particularly broadcast community media emphasise the need for community *ownership* of media. This notion demands some exploration, it's problematic – how can communities own media? Community media organisations struggle to develop democratic processes and organisational forms that release voice, but are tied to license conditions and platforms that are under either commercial or state control.

'Community ownership' may fall between many stools, failures have been due to a number of reasons, the following are only some examples:

- ✍ allocation of inadequate power as happened to Derry Access Media in 1996 precipitating an internal hostile take-over and turning the community channel into a commercial station (Gillan, 2010);
- ✍ restricted license conditions as in the UK's RSLs;
- ✍ a station's reach; as has happened for community radio in France where stations cannot transmit content from another region;
- ✍ corralling community television channels onto limited distribution platforms thereby undermining their reach to their own communities and also undermining any idea of universal access.
- ✍ structure of funding schemes to enforce art-house/independent production programme standards and values – taking production out of community – and community media – hands and into those of commercial companies as the Sound and Vision Scheme has done in Ireland.

The idea of a "free press" as Karl Marx[12] defined it is not easy to achieve in terms of modern media:

"In order to defend, and even to understand, the freedom of a particular sphere, I must proceed from its essential character and not its external relations. But is the press true to its character, does it act in accordance with the nobility of its nature, is the press free which degrades itself to the level of a trade? The writer, of course,

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12 "The press of this country is the press of precisely this country. There is nothing more to be said about it. At the same time, however, a free press transcends the limitations of a county's particularism . . ." (Karl Marx, Rheinische Zeitung, No 128, Supplement. May 8, 1842)

must earn in order to be able to live and write, but he must by no means live and write to earn." (Rheinische Zeitung, No. 139 Supplement. May 19. 1842)

The need for voice together with the now acknowledged idea that people should participate in decision making processes around issues that affect them, raises the problem of how we deal with media onto another plane. The need for voice constitutes a challenge to the control of media by both state and commercial entities.

Voice is inextricably linked to knowledge production, the need for theoretical activity is felt by both community (and community media) activists who are constantly pushed into a reflexive space. Cox and Nilson's (Cox, L. & Nilson, A.G. 2006) work provides affirmation that activists need to and do theorise[13] but this function for activists operates in a distinctly different mode to the academic. Activists operate under pressure of time and demands that mean reflexivity must happen in ways that are possible, sustainable, and this does not often reflect academic – or even industrial research modes. Much "wisdom"[14] is a luxury for those in struggle and learning from our mistakes is 'bitter experience'; activists must operate under stress and they do not chose the ground they fight on. Bernadette McAliskey once said "I'm used to thinking on my feet"[15] to emphasise the lack of time and the urgency experienced by those struggling to represent nationalist and working class interests during the years of war in Northern Ireland. But this does not mean that activist theorising only happens 'on the hoof' – lessons may take some time to draw out, as the effort to release tacit knowledge has proven time and again. But we need to draw on what works, so how do we find out about what works and how we can do it better? Research that affords reflexivity, that taps the tacit knowledge of living communities is vital to developing communications media that support sustainability for our people.

Dirk Koning, a global champion of community media, told a story of discussing a community media system for a tribe with their Chief. The Chief told him that bells would be useful - one for breakfast, two rings for lunch, five for an emergency . . . Dirk went away wondering how to deal with this one when he had gone to talk with the Chief about proposals for a community media centre. He then had a 'eureka' moment and thought – "yeah, we can do bells!" I think this is a keystone piece of understanding for a community media kind of query, it is so often quoted by community media activists - it is clear that it resonates.

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13 (*eprints.nuim.ie/445/1/activist-needs-theory.htm)*

14 Gabriel Garcia Marquez once wrote – "wisdom is the result of failure"; T.S. Eliot displayed similar cynicism, neither really addressed the needs for information or how to sustain essential knowledge production.

15 Bernadette McAliskey speaking in Harringey, 1987

What Dirk was concerned to show by this story was the necessity to listen to people's needs, their understanding of their own circumstances – and that they probably have in their minds something that is already very close to the answer.

What are we doing with research in community media?

Much media research has been directed at the mainstream media industry and therefore has failed to develop many tools with which to address the research needs of community media. The development of suitable research tools is important but apart from the recent work of Taachi, Lewis, etc, (Tacchi, 2003) [16]little has been achieved. Given the dearth of funding available it is unlikely that this will change. And as long as we frame our queries in media industry terms – in particular seeing producer and audience as detached and opposing rather than elements of a dynamic of engagement – we will never find the answers, or new questions, that open up channels of communication that people can use to find solutions to problems.

In much the same way as people must be involved in developing the solutions to their issues, those who need community media must be involved in the research that aims to identify key issues and explore avenues to develop access to facilities, production capacity, and sustainability for initiatives. One major problem is that the purpose of most research is to release funds in some form or other, in as much as it aims to prove the viability of entities (potential for returns/profits, value for money, educational value, social benefit, etc,); the commissioners may then know that their money is well invested and fits their remit. What kind of research and what kind of research tools can be used by those whose aim is to release voice - given that they are excluded from any control over these very arenas?

Developing media skills within communities does not happen in mainstream media schools that are dominated by a need to send qualified students into an industry; nor will research skills be developed while research funding is controlled by those whose underlying interest is profitable research markets; who see no value in the concept of voice; or whose aim is to domesticate oppositional voices.

While community media organisations aim to support their community's media needs and build capacity to produce, very often, due to lack of funds for training and to sustainability issues we depend on parachuting middle-class graduates to deliver media services to working class communities. We know this is not a solution. To bridge this gap we need to see a significant part of

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16 The authors (Taachi and Lewis, et al have acknowledged that the work has its limitations; it is difficult to deliver a model for evaluation and the size of the project and the funding necessary mean that it is unlikely to be repeated. Despite this it stays an important work and we hope to draw more lessons from it for our work.

our activity as research – so that we can identify what is needed, how to build capacity, what fundamental supports people in struggle need in order to engage with media, and how to sustain them. Does this mean parachuting research skills or can we network to develop the skills in place? Whatever we do we need to do it in tandem with those whose voice we understand to be so necessary, and this is the challenge.

CMN has taken a long-term approach to its media activities with community organisations and tries to document the process, this paper is an attempt to present some of the issues we encounter. Some researchers have tried to raise issues around the ethics of social research and research into activism (Cresswell and Spandler; 2010); similar questions may also apply to community media work where it is engaged with social activism and self-organised community activity.

But if our research is to mean anything to those who suffer from information poverty, then we cannot continue to develop research methodologies that rest on the assumption that they are sitting in front of a television; able to listen to a radio; or chatting on social media. People are seeking information for their lives and the need is for research that addresses their exclusion and how media can be used to change the situation. Does this ring a bell?

CMN's Premise:

We take as a premise that community media (CM) actually means something particular – at a simple level it is "media produced by and for a community". But even this simplistic definition raises questions – how does this production happen? Even if we suppose that - as with the meaning of community – it is something held in common, we may still ask how can media (any of them) be "in common"? Why is it needed? Who makes the media? What difference does it make?

What CM are also raises issues - is it the technical entity – a community radio station, a community television channel, a community newspaper/broadsheet/bulletin, a community website – or is it what those entities do and how they do it? What is the relationship of the form to the content? Isn't having to put 'community' in front of every media term awkward and annoying? To paraphrase Professor Higgins - Why can't CM just be like 'media'! The answers to that don't rely on binary or oppositional positioning of CM and mainstream; CM isn't the media that we think we hear, see, and read everyday – but we do in fact experience our own community's presence in 'media'. Most people want to hear and know about what is happening in their own community; word of mouth sends wildfire messages about 'what's on' and where; we look for information relating to us and our surroundings in the 'community notes' in the local newsheet.

What, how, who, why, and the impact of CM are matters that those of us involved return to time and again, approaching them in different ways. All the answers to these questions revolve around, and return to, the activity that produces the thing, that engages people in its production, and that serves a purpose.

So in this vein one community radio station may use the slogan "your community radio station is listening" to emphasise its function for the community and that it is there to listen to the needs of the voice it broadcasts. CM exposes that media is <u>employed for a purpose</u>, it also exposes that media is <u>shaped</u> as it is developed and used.

CM arises in the absence of access to any other media form; it is constructed according to the needs of the community that builds it; its form reflects the kind of process that has been in operation. It therefore may be useful in a critique of the mainstream media processes that exclude and fail those who need voice.

So it is, perhaps, best to understand CM as an ***activity*** – an activity that people engage in when they use media to speak out, to communicate, to get other people to engage with the issue and ultimately to act on it. What we need to know, and what we need research for, is how best to support this activity *in all its diversity*.

Part 2 – Community Media Network's practice

CM activity and CMN's brief:

CMN's aim is to support media initiatives that:

- are produced in the process of community activity addressing issues around exclusion and disadvantage;
- have the purpose of supporting the community's activity itself;
- enable a group to engage with other groups involved in a similar activity;
- inform unaware people in the community of these activities and encourage them to get involved, and
- promote the ethos and aims of that activity to a wider unaware community.

Working in this way, we understand community media (CM) as part of a process of knowledge production; CM are in themselves also a form of knowledge, and may also reproduce themselves as well as being the means to reproduce whatever other knowledge that is needed. All of it is knowledge produced by and belonging to a community with a particular purpose in mind. In this way CM, and because it reflects an image of the community as well being as a means for reflexivity, is a tool that can help build collective self awareness.

This underpins CM actions, it is our view that any media that do not see themselves in this way cannot be community media – rather they are another form of media production, used in a different way. Yet what CM actually may entail can cross a lot of boundaries; it can use multiple forms and present diverging ideological positions. We also recognise that some products of CM activity may be CM in one context and not in another.

Relating to community television:

Dublin Community Television (DCTV) was launched in 2007; CMN had designated its resources to the development of community television in Ireland since 2000 and particularly to the young channel. Because legislation had given the right but not the means to establish community channels, the effort drained CMN's resources. The direction taken by channels to seek funds through the Sound and Vision Scheme proved difficult and also had the immediate consequence of generating a gap between community organisations and the new channel. In 2008 CMN undertook a review of it's activity and in 2009 issued a Strategy Document containing the following statement:

"Community television in Ireland is at an early stage in its development , but there are now three channels operating in the Republic and one in Belfast. While there are clear difficulties in building the technical organisations, it is significant that many of the community organisations that were part of the initial drive for DCTV, as well as many of those who took part in the Needs Assessment projects (S40) Programme Development Workshops, were unable to access the channels as producers, audiences or organisers. CMN / CTVN's position is that the community sector should take a significant role in steering the development of community television but this goal is complicated by two factors that need to be understood and addressed:

⚔ The difficulty the sector has in engaging with community television on all levels from production to cable networks.

⚔ The trend towards professionalisation that is funding-driven and excludes community organisations.

CMN / CTVN now needs to focus on building capacity within organisations to use television as an element in community media."

Controlling the Means of Production:

Here I want to explain CMN's current engagement with Dublin community organisations. Our understanding is that organisations need to use media to state their case in the face of increasing attacks as well as their primary purpose, and they may well see these as one and the same; it is also important that the work and time they put into developing these media in itself impacts on their everyday reality and can be seen to further their aims. Controlling the means of production allows control of intellectual production and the means to disseminate ideas, but it involves far more in real terms: – time, energy, and people. This process and the engagement must themselves be productive, and not simply a singular end product. This is why a participatory process is necessary, but there is also a need to put any process that claims to be such under scrutiny.

PAR methodology – used to develop the energy of participation

What is it? Participatory Action Research as a methodology is well known as an example of strategy used in Mondragon in the 1980's to unite a workforce and sustain an industry throughout a recession (Richard Foote-White et al, 1991), and has become a mainstay of many 'development' strategies worldwide[17]. However reasons for choosing PAR as a methodology may also count as seminal a number of strands of thinking that connect across quite separate spheres, including those of Karl Marx, Antonio Gramsci, and Paulo Freire (Mayo. P. 1999). These are useful to explore, particularly since the use of PAR is widespread and appears to be used to deliver for diverse ideological motivations. However the fact that some forms of PAR are very formalised in structure, and can be identified with particular 'brands' of developmental activity, means that we need to put the emphasis on working out how the principles of participation and action research can be implemented, and this means working out those principles in the specific context that we operate within.

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17 See www.parnet.org Cornell University's site designated to Participatory Research

It is important to locate the methodological purpose as one that seeks to liberate people's capacity to act in their best interest. The first question people usually ask is "Why should I participate? Who will this benefit? What will I have at the end?" so it's not that the issue is not raised in all our activities.

Critiques of PAR reveal how and why CM may be useful and also uncovers reasons for why CM may fall short of expectations, in particular Blanco Facundo's contribution is instructive[18]. Freire developed his methodologies in a revolutionary situation, and his most famous achievements are essentially due to the methods fitting the circumstance. Without the motivation to act and the will to develop critical assessments of what is necessary to improve a situation participatory methodologies can leave people worse off than before, institute a process that demands more than it returns, or diverts energy from dealing with real issues. Because of the way that the working class experiences media, there is a wariness of becoming side-tracked, getting involved in mirages, and dissipating energy. Wariness of participation in community media projects is common amongst community organisations.

However I contend that if we want to use media to empower then a PAR strategy is essential. The power relations encoded within mainstream media production process work against the kind of engagement that these groups need. Groups engaged with CMN have continuously asserted the need for a different way of working that leaves them more control; and they grapple with the core problem of how their message is constructed:

> "Once it is out there – it can't be taken back. It can be used, so it does matter. It cannot be taken lightly, what we say in this [DVD]" (Community Resource Centre Manager in meeting with CMN, 2011)

What power relations in media production do we need to turn around?

Keyan Tomaselli's (Tomaselli 1989) table of differences between community and mainstream media production is a very useful clarification of the divergent values in these processes. At the very least it clarifies the main distinctions between a hierarchical, authored system and one that aims to enable people articulate their need and find solutions to problems. While in reality a gradation may exist between the two systems, particularly given the political commitments of some independent media producers, the truth is that independent media practitioners are likely to be diverging from their normal practice and processes, often go way beyond budget, and give a huge amount of time and energy to projects they take an interest in. I find Tomaselli's table useful as a marker of the boundaries between processes and a guideline for practice.

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18 http://www.uow.edu.au/~bmartin/dissent/documents/Facundo/Ohliger2.html ; see also Heaney, T. (1995) for issues in Freirean philosophy.

Tomaselli's typograpy includes: Communication; Knowledge; Questions of Democracy; Coding; Production, Distribution, Exhibition; Power, Empowerment. These allow a discussion of media that to me exposes *intent* as a key element in defining differences between practices. In CMN discussions, activists have stressed the importance of the fact that groups engaging in community television need to have a clear objective – *they work from a clear intent*, and this needs to be *recognised through delivery of objectives*[19]. If there is no delivery of objectives then they have serious cause to review, and ultimately not repeat, the experience. If this winds up to be the case, these activists are lost to community media.

Profiles of groups working with CMN

Here I am simply concerned to inform the reader of the nature of the groups and their activities. I anonymise the groups because their work with us is in a formative stage, I also want to force a clearer focus on the nature of their work and exactly how we work together.

Group A is focussed on outreach and education around drugs awareness; it has spearheaded an initiative to establish a phone helpline and develops their own information distribution. In order to address local needs for accurate information on drugs and how to deal with drug related issues including health, harm reduction, detritus such as needles, and activity affecting minors, they have worked with local media to develop an annual Media Awards initiative. Together with a local newspaper group and the VEC*[20] they ran the initiative for six years and have recently involved a community radio station and a commercial television channel in the project.

A second organisation (Group B) has sought to expose the real needs of families affected by drugs by using drama to elicit the tacit knowledge within the community and to bring this knowledge to impact on policy formation. The aim is to affect how services are delivered, to empower community members to speak on their issues, to increase positive benefits to the community, and develop fora for debate and where appropriate action can be agreed. This work has a clear objective and successfully reaches policy-makers. The group has been using a range of media for many years.

A third organisation (Group C) employs an Open-Door and a Harm-Reduction policy; a drop-in centre supporting the needs of the people who have begun to use its facilities and are trying to re-build their lives having been drug-users or related to a drug-user. Group C based in a severely disadvantaged inner city neighbourhood that has been the target of waves of de-tenanting policies, the community struggles against fragmentation as well as on-going drugs-related activity. While

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19 Interviews with community activists 2009
20 Vocational Education Committee: Irish government agency which directs education services.

media use has not been a strong or persistent element of their work, they are now beginning to explore ways they can use media to support their efforts.

These three groups belong to a support network that is unfunded and operates on voluntary self-help (Group D). Group D seeks to support the formation of small groups across the country and to develop an advocacy capacity on their needs.

A fourth organisation (Group E) works again in the Inner city, is linked to Groups B and C through their locality, they run activities for youth in the area and use media as a training tool.
These five groups form the core of a network that CMN works with; other groups will, from time to time, engage with or seek help from CMN. These include groups working with ex-offenders, recovering drug-users, and youth projects.

CMN is also a member of a network for community organisations funded under the same government programme – Community Services Projects (CSPs). CMN engages in media projects in a similar manner with this network and its members as it does with the groups mentioned above.

Genesis of CMN projects:

CMN projects have arisen and been supported in the main through a small number of factors:

- ⚹ historical relationships;
- ⚹ CMN's engagement as a member of the community sector; and
- ⚹ maintaining a core funded project, even if small.

The current work with five groups originated in 2004 when their network approached CMN to ask could we provide media supports to an annual event. Now, seven years on, we can say that the kind of practice this has opened up has allowed CMN to produce documentation of their processes, documents and promotional videos for their events; support their engagement with community television; and to develop research with their involvement.

The kind of practice that has evolved has been shaped by exchange, mutual dependency, and need. CMN found itself homeless in 2004 and forged a way forward by working with other established groups on an exchange basis. These organisations housed CMN's operations: an administration hot-desk was housed by one CMN member group from 2005 until recently; the technical support worker and production facility was placed with Group B from 2005-2009, and with Group A from 2009 (this is ongoing); the sound studio has been placed with Group E from 2005 until recently. These parts of CMN provided resources to the host organisation whilst fulfilling the CMN brief and

supporting the development of community television. They are currently being brought together in one base to support a core project scheduled for Autumn 2011.

In essence we have become an organisation that accepts a certain nomadism as an important part of its role. CMN had always held that it should operate through its network and resist centralising its operations. This has not always worked; large funding, despite its benefits, can militate against this way of working as it requires administration and key personnel. Without the kind of resources that were available to Lewis, Taachi, et al, this usually means the centralisation of the bulk of its resources. This was the case for CMN from 1997-2000. Being so deeply engaged with the development of other organisations also means being prepared to withdraw when that organisation no longer needs the support. We work towards our own redundancy and this is also a vulnerability. This was the case with CMN's involvement with various coalitions including an IMC in 2004 and building Dublin Community Television (DCTV) from 2000-2007 – these efforts drained our resources without renewal. What we want to see now is a situation where this devastation of resources does not need to happen.

What we have built, particularly over the past five years since DCTV launched, is a practice that works on different and, it has to be said, sometimes opposing principles to the 'media centre' or the 'channel/station' studio – it is decentralised in nature and means firstly that we go to the groups and work with them in their base.

Working alongside Groups: our starting point is their understanding of what they need to do and the understanding they have of media and its use for their work. We work with them to enable their workers and volunteers become familiar with media in their environment and what media processes demand. Generating a capacity to engage with media *in a manner that suits their need and their capacity* is a primary concern and is what guides our activities. We work in whatever way presents itself; the important factor is the Group's interest in exploring how it can develop its capacity in relation to using media.

Small building blocks: we have found that small building blocks for learning are more successful in developing knowledge and confidence for the groups and their participants. This can operate on a level of perception – where the development of a small media product is in the interest of participants; a small production of a DVD showing a training session in alternative health practice provided an opportunity for self-awareness for the trainer, heightened esteem of the training in the eyes of both participants and the organisation, and for all a heightened awareness of the value of the media to the group. It had no monetary value, it cost an afternoon in time to film, and a day's editing; but it had high impact for the group and opened a path for the use of media

internal to the organisation. Our next step here is to find easy ways for them to produce small scale work like this for themselves.

Integrated practice: Finding ways that media actions can be built into their work practice means more integrated learning for the Groups and a more integrated practice for us. The Groups have done a lot of this already, many will have a website and someone who is capable of maintaining it and producing a range of small scale media - which can make us seem redundant at first until we start working to identify the gaps alongside those with that interest in media. In one case this has led to actions to support a local woman's idea to establish a video club. For those who do not have these activities or participants with this level of knowledge, we can help them start and find those within their community who may have the interest. But we provide for all a bridge between what they can do now and developing stronger control over a wider range of media.

The principle of two-way learning: CMN brings media skills to the groups, but CMN needs to learn about the groups processes, what is important to them, and with them to look for ways to work together. The groups themselves have been challenged by this in their own practice and won't accept a community media person who cannot attempt to deal with the same, particularly when they are engaged in making re-presentation of the community's issues. Community workers in the Groups tell us that they, as people from the inner city who went to college and graduated as social workers, returned to their communities to find they had to engage with live issues. Many undertook Addiction Studies to equip themselves to deal with the realities. The engagement that happens in these groups aims to enable and empower local people to become workers who can be effective in dealing with their community's issues. Their experience is that those engaging with communities must be prepared to see themselves as learners. CMN needs to engage in a similar manner. We find that opportunities exist where volunteers are being trained and the CMN group works alongside them, documenting the course. Volunteers are exposed to media operating within their environment and CMN people are exposed to the training, the processes in action, and the kinds of issues that are being dealt with. This can mean we will attend far more sessions and collect far more footage than we would were we dealing with the group as an objectified 'subject' of a media piece. We are operating here in a totally un-media-like manner. This will be frustrating for media-minded operators.

Trust and Community Contracts: The understanding that is built between CMN and the Groups involve both formal and informal elements. When a group wants CMN to do work, CMN issues a formal Letter of Commitment that states the purpose of the project and clarifies ownership of the material produced. This is an important part of the process as it represents conversations that have taken place - CMN has had opportunity to explain its purpose and the group starts to

understand that it's ownership of the material also means it has responsibility for that material and its use.

This basic understanding is also explained to any of the Group's workers or volunteers that come in contact with the media activity. The reassurance that media produced will be controlled by the Group allows their participants to relate to the media activity in a more open, but also more confident manner. What we have found is that people will tell the 'camera' to "go away now", or to proffer themselves as interviewees, as having something they want to say, or are simply able to ignore it and concentrate on their task in hand.

Engagement of this kind involves trust and the spread of a sense of ownership amongst those who participate is significant. Because this involves many people it can also raise issues – the Group needs to understand that with media produced in this way they must remember that a sense of ownership lies with all participants. Therefore those people will feel they have a right to be involved in connected activities. This can challenge the Group to exercise greater levels of participation in key activity.

Declaring sides: The community media operator must understand itself as being as much a part of the community as the groups with whom it works. This can pose real problems, but if the CM entity is not engaged as are others with creating and maintaining community infrastructure, and seeing itself as an integral part of that, it will fail.

The issue here is how the CM operator engages in the issues that concern the community. This is where the basic claim of community media is crucially important - as a tool for social justice, a means to combat exclusion, a channel that celebrates diversity, and an enabler of voice for those who are excluded.

Points to conclude:

Our findings have been discussed in the previous pages, here I will try to summarise our core concerns: a key question is "how do we develop a consciousness of community media as an activity that supports community action for justice?" Our issue when approaching research is "what do we need to know?"

For most community media activists the engagement with the community is a prime concern and it would then seem logical that community media operators engage with those self-organising on the ground in communities – this must include community organisations. A perennial issue arising at meetings of community media activists is "why do community organisations not engage with us? Why are they using commercial media instead of our people?"

CMN has found that community organisations will answer these questions quite clearly. There are inherent difficulties for voluntary organisations in engaging with community media – the prime motivation of the community group is advocacy, provision of services, and engagement with their community's needs. For the majority, their prime purpose is not engagement with media, media reform, or even engagement with community media organisations. Commercial media, if the group can pay them, will deliver within the terms the media company operate on – the community organisation knows what it can get – and works within that confine. The demand for the groups engagement from community media, and the idea of D.I.Y media, create a pressure that many groups cannot bear. CAN TV[21] has developed a number of ways that community organisations can access the channel and get support for their activities – the interactive Bulletin Board, the Hot-line Studio, and the community notices prepared with a CAN TV artist's help are not 'hot' media products, but they were the result of a considered research process conducted by CAN TV with their community groups that aimed to find ways to meet their needs. What they have produced works for those organisations and their city; we need to know what will work in ours under the conditions our channels exist within.

The conditions we must contend with are also in our operational and organisational forms and practices. Community groups are convened to use whatever will deliver results for their purpose and in this regard they can be what could be called politically 'grey', i.e., they may see power-brokers as people to win around to their cause and offer them a place 'on the Board'. The problems that assail campaigning organisations have been well explored (Piven and Cloward, 1979; Bekken, 2000; Lee, 2006).   Funding brings a need for professionalisation and managers, carrying with it a

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21 See www.cantv.org also documented with clips in Programme Formats for Community Television, (Gillan, 2007)
   see www.communitytvassociation.org

danger of distancing from the base and a trend to corporatism. Corporatism in community organisations is currently fed in Ireland by a number of factors: the pressure by funding bodies and state departments for groups to comply with standards of 'Good Governance" that have little to do with ensuring everything works well and correctly, but enforcing practices more suited to large industry (an irony considering the practices now being exposed in the country's industrial and banking sectors), swamping voluntary organisations in bureacracy. In Ireland a system known as "Boardmatch" aims to bring skills to Boards of community organisations – accounting and marketing feature highly in the desirable skills mix. This results in bringing people who want 'Board experience' to further their careers but who have little real interest in the group's cause; the latter is augmented by the current trend for companies to engage in activities that fulfill 'corporate social responsibility' and an incentive to avail of tax concessions for charitable donations. This is an endemic problem in the community sector in Ireland – and needless to say organisations may also be seen by power-brokers as elements they wish to control. When community organisations become dependent on resources controlled by the dominant class their claim to independence is threatened; if dominant groups exert internal controls within the organisation then the aim to address exclusion becomes meaningless.

Community media organisations are open to precisely the same influences and risk silencing the voice that they exist to liberate. When community media operators then engage in processes that remove the most relevant sector from access to a form of voice, we become the arm of the state that absorbs and silences dissent, rather than a means for voice.

One of the problems CMN faced – a problem felt by many CM organisations – is that the community organisation would work with community media on many of the levels we have described above but would turn to commercial media when it felt that commercial groups would produce 'better quality'. This meant that the community groups continued to:
- work in mainstream ethos and so did not contribute / provide opportunities to develop community production ethos;
- maintain the 'professional expert' and 'technician' work ethic of the professional mainstream media and so stunting any development of their own capacity to produce;
- put funds at their disposal into commercial for-profit companies and so denied not-for-profit CM operator that potential for independent growth;

Community organisations need to explore this and what it means for their practice.

Participatory processes that work deliver objectives that serve the intent of the groups involved. These need to be clear. In developing our research practice as community media activists we need

to bridge the gap between the production of what is seen as authentic research and the conditions that 'those who must be part of the answer' exist within.

My work practice is to engage those organisations I work with in this conversation; I do not intend to solely address an academic audience. I am an activist researcher and I aim to produce work that will bridge these constituencies: one reason is to insist on a conversation that is two-way; another is to re-claim that academic territory for work that liberates those who have been objectified 'subjects' of much research. I am conscious that this extends the page- count.

Writing this paper remained my work because I have created the time for it, even though it is about our groups' activities and needs and they have contributed to the conversations. It goes to them now for their response. I hear the complaints about lengthy texts before they are uttered – and I agree. I will be grateful too when we can document the issues and our activities in a more 'digestible' format; for the moment however, I'm still exploring the ingredients for what is not one, but serial 'meals' that have consequences for our social health. I don't think we can do that job in 'quick time' or in sound bites.

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Appendix: Tomaselli's table of Differences

Community and Professional Video: Table of Differences

Community video	Professional and conventional video
Communication	
Group media animates and mobilises personal experience in group contexts	Mass media informs and homogenises personal experience in individual contexts
Non-profit motive	Profit motive
Develops human relations	Develops techniques
Communication associated with process	Communication associated with technical quality
Knowledge	
Produces new knowledge	'Restricts' knowledge or repackages & reconstructs it in new ways
Recuperates local histories	Emulates dominant view of world
Retains local cultural specificity in terns of subjects	Homogenises local cultures in term of markets and techniques
Questions of Democracy	
Emphasises relationships	Fragments relationships
Horizontal/participative working relationships	Imposed/top-down working relationships
Transformative	Reformist
Coding	
Creates new codes, if often crude, but organic origins address community's agenda	Refines conventional styles, sophistication often hides local issues and specificities
Refers to processes beyond the community	Literal/if processes not shown, they do not exist
Production, Distribution, Exhibition	
Production cannot be executed in terms of predetermined schedules	Production must be executed in terms of pre-determined schedules
Process precedes product	Product is only goal. Process is concealed

Develops local audiences	Develops national and international markets
Crew not alienated from its labour	Crew alienated from its labour
Participant video-makers are part of local distribution networks	Are alienated from their audiences through independent distribution

Power, Empowerment	
Decision-making power vested in the subject-community	Decision-making power retained and secured in the production crew and/or producers
Initial power relationships exposed and negotiated between crew and subject-community	Nature of power relationships mystified by crew in *its* relations with the subject-community
Empowers/active response	Disempowers/passive response
Community networks strengthened	Community networks exploited and/or weakened
Community must take responsibility for completion of video	Crew takes responsibility for completion of video
Facilitates both video and political theory building	Prevents theory building by concealing processes of production
Producers are part of subject community or are drawn into it	Producers are outside subject-community
Collective decision-making	Hierarchical decision-making
Long-tenn relationship between crew and community develops	Short-term relationship develops
Viewers have political expectations	Viewers want to be entertained
Empowerment takes place, if differentially, at every level of production, from production techniques to recovery of local histories and catalysation of community organisational networks	Usually only film/video makers are empowered. Sometimes subject-communities can be detrimentally affected through exposure to alien influences and payment for acting services.