The London School of Economics and Political Science

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Going Beyond the Mainstream?

Online Participatory Journalism as a Mode of Civic Engagement

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Declaration

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Abstract

Practices commonly termed participatory or citizen journalism, such as blogging and publishing content in participatory news media, have triggered interest in academic and media discourses alike. The discussion has centred on the significance of participatory journalism and whether it leads to democratisation of media and to redefining journalism and its ethics. This thesis examines online participatory journalism practices and what enhances or impedes them by drawing on a close and systematic analysis of qualitative interviews with reporters and facilitators of participatory media. The research considers both the meso level of media organisations in their socio-cultural context and the micro level of reporters, and is comparative and transcultural in scope. The focus is on the international edition of the South Korean news organisation OhmyNews and on two Indymedia collectives, namely, Indybay in California in the USA and the no-longer active Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto in Finland.

The study employs Dahlgren's (2009) analytic frame of civic cultures that, although it downplays skills and somewhat problematically assumes equal weight of all dimensions, proved valuable in addressing several key aspects to participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement. The research demonstrates how reporters' journalistic activities do not exist in a vacuum, but are shaped by participatory media organisations, for example, through the values they promote and the type of journalism, the access to sources and training they facilitate. Furthermore, the thesis argues that participatory media practices are less distinct from those of mainstream media than may have been assumed. Underpinning the analysis of media organisations are the theories of alternative media and of voluntary associations, whereas Mouffe's (2000a) political theory of agonistic pluralism is applied to assess the viability of an agonistic space online. The findings, apart from the instances of its constructive uses, point toward the difficulties in sustaining an agonistic online space.

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Table of Contents

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CMC = Computer Mediated Communication

GUMG = The Glasgow University Media Group

ICT = Information and Communication Technology

IMC = Independent Media Centre

Indymedia = Network of Independent Media Centres

OMN = OhmyNews

OMNI = OhmyNews International

STT = Suomen Tietotoimisto (The Finnish News Agency)

VAI = Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto

YLE = Yleisradio (The Finnish Broadcasting Company)

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1 Introduction

1.1 On a Revolutionary Road

The past decade saw a rapid broadening of the ways in which people engage online with each other, and with media. A range of terms have been employed that aim to capture various aspects of this trend of increased participation, including social production (Benkler, 2006), mass collaboration (Tapscott & William, 2006) and social media (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009). They all fall under a broad umbrella concept of *Web 2.0*, which became one of the buzzwords of the 2000s. Built on the "old" web, namely, *Web 1.0* "as a read/write tool", Web 2.0, it was argued, meant people were "entering a new, more social and participatory phase"[1] (Anderson, 2007, p. 2). Cormode and Krishnamurthy's (2008, p. 2) characterisation of the term[2] is helpful in clarifying what Web 2.0 is about:

> Web 2.0 is both a platform on which innovative technologies have been built and a space where users are treated as first class objects … the essential difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 is that content creators were few in Web 1.0 with the vast majority of users simply acting as consumers of content, while any participant can be a content creator in Web 2.0 and numerous technological aids have been created to maximize the potential for content creation.

Thus, the notion of Web 2.0 is broad in scope, as it aims to capture not only the participatory character of the various new, and no-longer so new spaces, but also the technological environment that facilitates them.

So, aided by various, often innovative, peer-to-peer technologies, the Internet has come to accommodate a range of websites for social networking, wikis, podcasting, blogging, disseminating news and collaborating in its production, and sharing photos, video and audio, to name some of the most obvious. In these spaces[3], people debate,

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[1] For Tim Berners-Lee, the originator of the World Wide Web, there is, however, nothing new about Web 2.0. He has argued: 'Web 1.0 was all about connecting people. It was an interactive space, and I think Web 2.0 is, of course, a piece of jargon, nobody even knows what it means. If Web 2.0 for you is blogs and wikis, then that is people to people. But that was what the Web was supposed to be all along" (quoted in Laningham, 2006).

[2] The term was coined in the early part of the decade by Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty (O'Reilly, 2005).

[3] Examples of well-known web sites facilitating at least one of these activities include Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, Blogger, OhmyNews, Indymedia, and collaborative wiki projects of the Wikimedia Foundation such as Wikipedia.

play, trade ideas and collaborate to solve problems; they exchange with each other many types of information about themselves and the world around them in a range of formats.

To begin with, the various participatory practices tended to be greeted with a great deal of enthusiasm. They were acclaimed, depending on the context, for their democratic, commercial and emancipatory potential. However, questions were also emerging, not least concerning the transformative power and consequences of these practices. The evidence thus far warrants cautious optimism. On the one hand, undoubtedly, spaces for participation facilitate interaction between people and the sharing of, for example, ideas, information, opinions and news and can often have positive consequences, at least for the people directly involved. These include forming new and reinforcing existing bonds through networking, feeling empowered by participating in various, often, creative activities, and gaining access to peer support online when facing setbacks in life (e.g., Bakardjieva, 2005). Moreover, the positive outcomes sometimes extend beyond personal fulfilment. Examples are networks aiming to find solutions to specific problems by utilising what Surowiecki (2004) has called "wisdom of the crowds", such as the development of various open source software (Meikle, 2002) and the Creative Commons[4], a project that provides copyright licensing that aims to encourage sharing of information and creativity.

On the other hand, there is no escaping the reasons to be alert. O'Hara and Stevens (2006) capture the essence of how many of these fairly recent developments may leave us feeling:

> The whirl of technological advance can pull us down, as though there is no solid base upon which to stand. The old, familiar concepts and ideas that we used to order and understand our world no longer seem to apply to the new situations or the new technologies. (p. xi)

More specific concerns include the following examples. The inequalities between people, perhaps most notably concerning access to Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and an ability to use them both amongst the world's population and within countries have not disappeared (Norris, 2001; van Dijk, 2005); there are possible risks of involvement for young people (e.g., Livingstone & Haddon, 2009, section 3) and evidence suggests fairly modest civic usage of many of the participatory

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[4] See, http://creativecommons.org/.

spaces when compared to usage for, for example, entertainment (Norris, 2001, pp. 224-225). Moreover, participation online has consequences for people's privacy and fears have been expressed regarding increased surveillance (O'Hara & Shadbolt, 2008). Also, many of the popular websites such as MySpace, where people post content, have become colonized by the market, and the consequences of increased commercialisation have been, among others, disputes about copyright (Cammaerts, 2008) and concerns over how the vast amounts of data that are collected from people are used at present by companies, but even more importantly, how they will be used in the future.

If the nature of current developments is anything to judge by, whichever directions "participatory culture" (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robinson, & Weigel, 2006) takes in the future (and there are likely to be many), it is hard to imagine that there would be a way to go back; how current and future challenges can be responded to is another question altogether.

1.2   In with the New, Out with the Old: Journalism Transformed?

When focusing on the journalistic sphere, the 2000s came to mark several interlinked developments from the hybridisation of journalism to the circulation of more journalism and news, often with extraordinary speed between the multiplicities of places that can equally be near to or far away from each other (McNair, 2006). In relation to the hybridisation, what is seen as the transformation of journalism has been described by McNair (2006) as follows: "Dissolving, too, are boundaries between journalism and not-journalism, between information and entertainment, objectivity and subjectivity, truth and lies" (p. 11). Technologies, not least the Internet, tend to be seen as playing a key role in the change.

One of the processes that have taken place in journalism is an increase in the amount of media content created by the so-called "former audience" (Gillmor, 2006, p. 136). Friend (2007) has argued, with a dose of optimism: "Internet technology has empowered anyone with a computer to create a media outlet with a potential audience of millions. And millions have" (p. 13). Although assertions of the empowering capacity of the Internet should be treated with caution, as its appropriation is situated in the offline context[5], it seems fair to assert that, in the current media environment, many of the established media are struggling to maintain their role as gatekeepers of

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[5] As Cammaerts (2008) notes "The Internet cannot be treated as a separate entity from the economic, political, and cultural realities of the offline world; it forms an integral part thereof" (p. 373).

information. One reason for this is that alternative sources of news and information, both mediated and original, are readily available to people, not least online. Rantanen (2009) has described the situation as follows: "news is everywhere. Because it is everywhere, it has lost part of its former value. Nobody wants to pay for a general news service, but everybody wants to use it" (p. 128).

It may be that the emergence of so-called participatory or citizen journalism, that is, media content created by people with no or little previous experience in journalism, has in part been fuelled by how the privately owned mainstream media, as many argue, have been failing in their democratic function (Coleman & Blumler, 2009; Curran, 2005; McChesney, 2004) for a number of reasons that generally relate to the consequences of a free-market model of media (for an overview, see Curran, 2005). The public or civic journalism movement that originated in the USA in the early 1990s has been one of the prominent models aiming to provide a solution for this perceived decline and the diminishing news readership by emphasising that the media should first and foremost aim to address issues that are important to people in their communities (Glasser & Craft, 1998; Rosen, 1994; Schudson, 1998). Thus, the media are seen to have a responsibility to help to engage citizens in public life, so that they can not only debate matters of public interest, but they can also seek solutions to challenges facing them (Voakes, 2004). It has been argued that participatory modes of news production can be seen as a progression from the public journalism movement (Nip, 2006; Rosenberry & St. John, 2010a), the aim of which was reformist; that is, it intended to transform journalism as it is practised in the mainstream media.

Rosen, one of most visible proponents of the movement, has certainly shown considerable enthusiasm about citizen journalism, it seems, mainly because of its promise to democratise media production. Thus, people, who in the past were, by-and-large, users or consumers of the mass media not least because the opportunities to contribute, such as writing letters to an editor, were rather limited and were in the control of the traditional media organisations, for many years now have been able to put their news, views and information "out there" on the Internet. Bruns (2005) has argued that what we have seen is the rise of "produsers" (p. 23), who, in addition to being recipients of information, are involved in a range of other activities, such as seeking, gathering and producing new information and updating already existing sources.

Rosen (2008) has described the people who participate in the creation of media content in his manifesto for more democratic media as follows:

The people formerly known as the audience are those who were on the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak very loudly while the rest of the population listened in isolation from one another — and who today are not in a situation like that at all. (p. 163)

Hence, what is celebrated here is the notion of people, aided by the Internet as an affordable distribution channel for various types of media and equipped with a consumer-priced digital technology, having an ability to surpass the traditional media and their top-down one-to-many information flow by forming peer-to-peer networks for exchanging many types of information. It is believed that people collectively can challenge what Couldry (2002) has called "the symbolic power in media institutions" (p. 25). Therefore, who and what is represented in the media and how, is no longer decided by "a few firms", but by "the people formerly known as the audience", as Rosen (2008, p. 163) puts it. The promise appears to be that as a result, the media landscape becomes more diverse, and the range of perspectives available in the media multiplies.

In addition to citizen and participatory journalism, which themselves are concepts that are far from unambiguous, as will be discussed in the next section, propositions have emerged to suggest that the power of people's participation in media production truly materialises when they cooperate with media professionals, not when they are producing media on their own. Beckett (2008) clarifies the difference between the two in relation to one such model for collaboration: "Networked Journalism is a catch-all for many types of more connected media practice. But not all journalism will be networked. Some 'amateurs' will remain resolutely apart from the 'professionals.' And much of the news media will appear relatively untransformed" (p. 7; also Beckett & Mansell, 2008). The characterisation puts forward two important points. The first is that not all practices of creating media are becoming collaborative. The second draws attention to what appears to be a common view within the sphere of the mainstream media; that is, despite the emphasis on media production being a joint effort, it is still necessary to distinguish between people who are involved in it as "amateurs" and "professionals". Also touched upon by Beckett is what emerges as one of the fundamental questions regarding participatory media practices: in which circumstances might they be able to fulfil the promise of participatory journalism? This is summarised by Lih (2004) as follows:

> With citizens gaining access to the tools of publishing and distribution on the Internet, it has started to change the media ecology in profound ways. In countries with restricted press environments, participatory journalism in the form of web logs and wikis has become an important "reality check" to mainstream and state controlled media, allowing ordinary users to help craft the news and keep traditional media sources accountable. Even in open societies, it provides the tools necessary for citizens to interpret events in context and to make informed decisions on news events and the local polity. (p. 4)

As Lih's characterisation demonstrates, participatory journalism is laden with expectations, and they vary depending on the context.

The following section introduces the focus of this thesis on online participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement in participatory news and information websites. For the sake of clarity, it needs to be stressed that this research is not investigating blogs or blogging, which is considered a more individual mode of content production and one that has attracted a surge of interest from academia in recent years (e.g., Couldry, 2010; Gil de Zúñiga, 2009; Tremayne, 2007; Lovink, 2008). The discussion begins with observations concerning participatory journalism research that have helped in focusing the thesis. There is also an explanation of how participatory journalism is understood in this research by reviewing three prominent attempts to define it. Then the current research trends on participatory journalism, categorised by their approach to the topic, are discussed briefly to situate the thesis even further within the field of media studies.

1.3   Building an Agenda for Research into Participatory Journalism

Despite an aura of optimism surrounding the democratic potential of participatory media, it is obvious that whilst Internet access and the means of producing media content create the basic conditions for engaging with participatory journalism online, some people use these opportunities for self and collective expression, but others do not. Although there is no shortage of research exploring bloggers' practices and motivations (e.g., Nardi, Schiano, Gumbrecht, & Swartz, 2004; Trevino, 2005; Ugille & Raeymaeckers, 2008), far less interest has been shown in why and how people are creating media for publication on the participatory news and information websites, which, as was noted above, are of interest in this research (Sutton, 2006; Bentley et al., 2006; Bentley et al., 2007).

Sutton's (2006) research into reporters posting content on the South Korean edition of OhmyNews (OMN) is one of the few studies in this area focusing solely on reporters' motivations and practices on a participatory website that is not a by-product of a larger mainstream media news organisation. Bentley et al.'s (2006) study on MyMissourian.com explores, amongst other dimensions, the reporters' motivations to post content on a community website that the researchers themselves launched at University of Missouri-Columbia in 2005 as a "trial citizen journalism site" (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 240). Both of these studies have produced some interesting findings concerning participatory journalism practices and why people become involved as reporters, such as that they want to write about topics that receive little attention in the media (Bentley et al., 2006, p. 16). However, the scope of these investigations is somewhat limited because of the tight focus on one location and one website and because the conclusions on motivations are based on survey data that may not capture the richness of reasons there can be for why people create media content. The contribution of this thesis with regards to understanding better reporters' involvement derives from an analysis of qualitative data concerning the practices, aims and motivations of reporters in three participatory media organisations.

The second premise of the thesis in hand is that what is at stake in people's journalistic activities online, goes beyond an ability to defy the traditional media (Rosen, 2008), as participatory journalism can be seen as a mode of civic engagement that matters for democracy. This point comes across in Bowman and Willis' (2003) definition of participatory journalism:

> The act of a citizen, or group of citizens, playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analyzing and disseminating news and information. The intent of this participation is to provide independent, reliable, accurate, wide-ranging and relevant information that a democracy requires. (p. 9)

Hence, people are seen to act either independently or collectively to create a broad range of media content that is relevant for a democracy. While Bowman and Willis' (2003, p. 9) formulation does not address the question of exactly what is the information democracy requires, their definition rests on the widely acknowledged premise that journalism plays an important political role: it should be "feeding and sustaining the democratic process by supplying citizens with the information they require to make rational electoral and economic choices" (McNair, 1999, p. 21). Papacharissi (2009), drawing on Schudson (2008), has put forward "seven functions journalism has served in

democracies", which are: "informing the public, investigation, analysis, social empathy, public forum, mobilization", and "publicizing representative democracy" (p. viii). Are these also the tasks for participatory journalism? This is a question that is open for debate, and will be touched upon in this thesis.

Bowman and Willis' (2003) formulation is more relevant for this research than are many other attempts to define participatory, or citizen journalism, which has become a popular term for the phenomenon, in particular in the mainstream media discourse, but also more recently in academic literature (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Tremayne, 2007). The diversity of definitions indicates that, thus far, there is very little agreement on some of the fundamental aspects of these journalisms. To illustrate this point, it is worth considering here briefly two prominent characterisations of citizen journalism, the preferred term for some writers. The first is to perceive it as "a form of media that involves moderated reader participation" (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 240), and the second is to associate citizen journalism closely with spontaneous eyewitness depictions of events that are then made available for wider distribution either in the traditional media or outside of them (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Cohn, 2007).

The first of the two definitions thus perceives citizen journalism as so-called user-generated content that the traditional media organisations have been keen to increasingly employ to supplement staff reporters' coverage and to offer their audiences opportunities to discuss topics that typically emanate from media content (Hermida & Thurman, 2008; Thurman, 2008; Vujnovic et al., 2010). The second of the above definitions excludes a vast number of other types of citizen journalism where reporters practise journalism not because they happen to witness something newsworthy, but because they decide to provide coverage on something that, for one reason or another, is interesting or important to them. Neither of these two definitions speaks about the type of participatory media practices and media, which are of interest in this thesis, that exist outside the realm of the traditional mainstream news organisations, and where most if not all of the content is made available by the people who, in addition to using or consuming media, choose to create their own.

To go back to Bowman and Willis' (2003, p. 9) proposition, what is somewhat unsettling in it is that they appear to suggest that similar normative standards, which, as has been demonstrated in a number of ways from a number a perspectives in the field of media studies (e.g., Gans, 1980, 2003; The Glasgow University Media Group 1980, 1982; Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke, & Roberts, 1978/1999; Herman & Chomsky, 1994), have not corresponded to the reality of media production thus far, should be

applied to participatory journalism. Yet, it could be argued that the assumed ability to challenge the traditional taken-for-granted conceptions concerning journalism ethics and practices is one of the elements in participatory media that makes them a particularly interesting phenomenon, and a rich topic for investigation such as this thesis.

Participatory journalism ethics have been discussed by scholars such as Allan (2006) and McNair (2006) who have argued that journalism ethics such as objectivity do not necessarily apply to various participatory media, not least to blogging. Allan (2006), for example, has argued "Few would deny that blogs are inherently subjective" (p. 85). Critics of participatory modes of media production have not been shy in claiming that it falls short of the standards employed by professionals (Freedman, 2006; Keen, 2007; Lemann, 2006). It has been argued that "Loss of certainty about authority and credibility is one of the prices we pay for the freedom of democratized publishing", as Rheingold (2008, p. 109) puts forward what has become a popular perception.

Toolkits have been offered for people involved in participatory media who may not be familiar with the ethical (Friend, 2007, pp. 16-17; Gillmor, 2009, p. 10) and legal implications (Berkman Center for Internet and Society, 2008) of their practices. One further approach to ethics has been to solicit responses from journalists who are working in the mainstream media on content posted online by reporters from outside their sphere either on the websites on their own news organisation, or in general (Heinonen, 2005; Singer & Ashman, 2009). To summarise, ethics in online participatory journalism have been explored in many ways and from a range of standpoints. In this thesis, the aim is to contribute to the discussion by focusing on the intersection of reporters' views on the ethical dimension of their practices and the values instigated by participatory media organisations on those websites on which these reporters post content.

Although participatory media developments online have attracted a surge of scholarly attention, research has been quick to find a focus not least on blogging and on corporate media's attempts to harness the potential of participatory culture for their own means (Deuze, 2008). Some have set out to offer a comprehensive overview of current developments and future directions of participatory journalism practices. At times, these accounts are either manifestly pessimistic (Keen, 2007; Lovink, 2008), at least mildly hopeful (Bruns, 2005; Gillmor, 2006) and sometimes more realistic (Atton & Hamilton, 2008; Turner, 2010). Others focus solely either on the motivations and practices of reporters (Sutton, 2006; Ugille & Raeymaeckers, 2008), or on motivations of readers of participatory media content, typically blogs (e.g., Kaye, 2007), but tend to pay less

attention to the broader context of those activities. The third type are case studies that, more often than not, do not attempt to be comparative, but focus on a specific case typically ranging from a platform for participatory practices in a geographic location such as in Woo Young's (2009) account of OMN, to reporting a specific event in a certain media, such as Vis's (2009) research on the reporting of Hurricane Katrina on the Wikinews website. The fourth approach is characterised by the method of content analysis, as these studies analyse the posts created by reporters or bloggers, rather than their practices or viewpoints (Herring, Scheidt, Kouper, & Wright, 2007; Papacharissi, 2007). Finally, the fifth approach can be called issue or group specific, because the focus is on one aspect of the phenomenon, such as the legal implications of participatory journalism practices (Salter, 2009) or on a defined group such as youth (Huesca, 2008).

1.4   Research Focus

As a review of a variety of research into participatory media indicates, there existed an opening for a study that would be comparative in scope with a focus on the viewpoints of the people involved in participatory journalism in more than one location, and that would take into account the role media organisation plays in the process of the creation and dissemination of media. The notion of organisation is important, because at the same time as participatory journalism has been celebrated for its ability to challenge the established media, it almost seems to be forgotten - beyond enthusing over new, exciting sites and noting unsuccessful experiments that consequently vanish - that participatory media practices, though perhaps to varying degrees, are also embedded in media organisations; that is, in organisations that maintain websites for participatory media. As research on various types of media shows, the strategies and structures of a media organisation, be it business or non-profit, shape media production and media content (e.g., Atton, 2002; Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Louw, 2001; Deuze, 2007). Therefore, when devising the research design, it was seen as imperative to take the media organisation into account, for example, to explore the question of organisational support for reporters, what kind of participation[6] an organisation facilitates, and what affects its sustainability. Moreover, it was seen as valuable to not only explore these issues in relation to one type of participatory media, but to make comparisons between

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[6] It is drawn here on Carpentier (2007, p. 105), who has indicated that 'participation is a politically-ideologically contested notion', and it must be carefully considered in an analysis of participatory media.

participatory media organisations to see what kind of similarities and differences would emerge. For these reasons, it was decided to adopt a multiple case study approach.

Broadly speaking, this thesis draws on an agenda implied in Bowman and Willis' (2003) characterisation of participatory journalism that places an emphasis not only on the democratic function of participatory journalism, but also on the process of making media and the factors that shape this journalism process as a mode of civic engagement, the end product of which is media content. Dahlgren's (2009) circuit of civic culture provides a useful theoretical framework within which to explore these several interlinked aspects of participatory journalism without forgetting their embeddedness in a socio-cultural context. Moreover, the notion of civic cultures was selected in this research as the analytic frame because it makes it possible not only to delineate the different elements that may affect the engagement in participatory media, but also to analyse the dynamics between them.

Although Dahlgren's formulation will be returned to in more detail later in the chapter, it is useful to provide here a brief description of what is meant by civic cultures. Dahlgren (2007a), drawing on the work of Almond and Verba (1963, 1980), defines civic cultures as follows:

> We can think of civic cultures as cultural patterns in which identities as citizens are an integrated part, supported by a number of important elements such as relevant knowledge, democratic values, trust, practices, and skills. (p. 9)

In his later work, Dahlgren (2009) puts forward a revised conceptual model in which civic cultures are a "circuit comprising six dimensions of mutual reciprocity" (p. 108). These dimensions, with reference to which participatory journalism is discussed in this research, are "knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices, and identities" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 108). What is of interest in this thesis is the ways in which, under which conditions and in what contexts participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement thrives and struggles. The project rests on the premise that to be able to begin to grasp the sociology of participatory journalism, it must be explored at the grassroots level in its organisational context and in different locations.

Two prominent examples of organisations for participatory media investigated in this study, both of which have been hailed as a "major success" (Coleman & Blumler, 2009, p. 67) and as pioneers within participatory media scene, are an international Indymedia network and OMN. More specifically, it was decided to approach

participatory journalism by analysing three cases, which are: an English-language edition of OhmyNews called OhmyNews International (OMNI) and two Indymedia collectives, namely, the San Francisco Bay Area-based Indybay and Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto (VAI), which was active in Finland for three years at the beginning of the past decade (for the screen layout of the websites, see Appendices A - C).

Selecting these organisations for investigation allows several types of comparisons. The first type is between an active (Indybay) and a no-longer active (VAI) case belonging to the same media activist network, the second is between non-profit cases and a more commercial type of case. The former in this research is being represented by Indybay and VAI, and the latter by OMNI. The third type of comparison concerns locations where the research was conducted. Thus, the empirical data were collected through face-to-face interviews, mainly in the USA and Finland, but also in South Korea, followed by questions sent by email to the research participants.

This holistic approach, which aims to provide a close, systematic and comparative analysis of participatory journalism practices by featuring the accounts of those who take part in it, forms, in part, the basis of the claim for originality in this research. Moreover, through this approach, the thesis hopes to contribute to current understanding of participatory media practices beyond the much-studied blogging. What is more, prompted by the observation of how contested the notion of ethics has become in relation to participatory journalism[7], it has been explored in this research from the perspective of the reporters, but also by taking into account a media organisation.

In this research, the terms *participatory journalism* and *participatory media* are employed for a number of reasons, firstly, because these terms highlight the notion of *participation* as the key concept in assessing the assumed participatory nature of the production of these media. Two types of participation must be distinguished here, specifically, participation in the creation of media content and participation in the media organisation that provides a platform for participatory media (Carpentier, 2007, pp. 113-115). The second reason for the chosen terminology was to distinguish the type of participatory media that is investigated in this study from the definitions of citizen journalism that were put forward earlier in the chapter, that is, associating it with people's participation in the mainstream media (Bentley et al., 2007, p. 240) or with

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[7] In relation to the discussion on journalism ethics, the aim has been to respond also to a fairly recent call for research put forward in the field of alternative media research, where a need has been noted for investigations that consider ethical issues in alternative journalism (Atton, 2008a) and investigate the practices of alternative media production and their links to those of the mainstream media (Atton, 2008b).

coverage of something newsworthy provided by a person who happened to witness it (Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Cohn, 2007).

A further important reason for rejecting citizen journalism, which will be revisited later in the thesis, is that in the interviews with reporters, the terms *citizen journalism* and *citizen journalist* turned out to be highly contested; many of the reporters did not recognise themselves or their practices from them. For example, several reporters found the terms problematic for reasons such as the perceived negative connotations of the word citizen, whereas some were uncomfortable with calling their practices journalism. In his research on UK bloggers, Couldry (2010) makes similar observations concerning the use of the term citizen journalist, and decides to call those people who do not necessarily describe themselves as journalists "writer-gatherers" (p.139).

Although at the beginning of the investigation the terms citizen journalism and a citizen journalist were employed, it was later realised that participatory journalism and a reporter, were more appropriate terms for this study. Therefore interviewees who post content online are referred to as *reporters* without prefixes that might detract from the value of reporters' activities by, for example, implying amateurish reporting. If the reporters under discussion in this thesis work for the traditional media as paid employees, that is clearly indicated in the text.

The next section introduces the conceptual framework that informs the study. Moreover, it is considered participatory media in relation to the associated concepts of alternative and community media.

1.5   Conceptualising Participatory Media

As the content production of media has commonly been the terrain of amateurs and enthusiasts in a wide range of alternative media and therefore is understood here in its broadest sense as "media produced outside of mainstream media institutions and networks" (Atton & Couldry, 2003, p. 579), it can be argued that the roots of the current phenomenon extend way beyond what is now called participatory media (Bowman & Willis, 2003; Lasica, 2003). Thus, although the history of participatory and citizen journalism does not stretch far back – Allan (2009) traces the usage of the term "citizen journalism" (p. 18) to the eyewitness reporting of the devastation caused by the South Asian tsunami in 2004 - alternative media in print format go as far back as the 18th century and, for example, the pamphlets written by Thomas Paine in support of the American Revolution and weekly publications in Britain criticising the political elite

(Coyer, Dowmunt, & Fountain, 2007, p. 69). Furthermore, as Downing (2001, p. 105) argues, alternative media practices relate to a wider range of ways of communicating emotions, ideas and resistance. Such forms, according to him (Downing ,2001, pp. 105-129), have included songs, dances, jokes, poetry, public speech, storytelling, graffiti, dress styles, and pins and badges.

Although alternative media are sometimes seen to be synonymous with radical media, giving their own voice to those who are underrepresented or misrepresented in the mainstream media, and often produced within the ranks of social movement activists, it is useful to separate radical media from those alternative media, such as fanzines and personal websites, that are not necessarily politically radical (Atton, 2002). Moreover, as Downing (2001) notes, democratic radical media must be differentiated from repressive radical media because "neither critical reflection nor any genuine increase in personal or collective freedom are on the radar screen of such media" (p. 89). By these, Downing (2001, p. 89) refers to the media, the content of which is, for example, racist, homophobic, fundamentalist religious or fascist.

The historical trajectory from alternative to participatory media is not the only reason theories of alternative media are helpful in investigating participatory media. In some cases, the line between alternative and participatory media is blurred. The collectivist and horizontal production processes, as well as the shifting and overlapping roles of readers, producers, editors, publishers and distributors that are often identified in various forms of alternative media, can characterise also some participatory media (Atton, 2002, p. 27). In these alternative media, as Atton (2002) has argued: "knowledge production has become the province of the activist and the 'common reader' in media that hope to be participatory and non-hierarchical" (p. 104). It seems justified to argue that certain types of participatory media fit these and even narrower definitions where alternative media are seen to be produced for political or social change by people empowered to represent themselves and their communities (Downing, 2001; Rodriguez, 2001). On the other hand, it must be stressed that certain forms of participatory media, such as audience participation in the mainstream media, have very little to do with these alternative media that Downing (2001) has called "radical alternative media" (p. 24) and Rodriguez (2001) "citizens' media".

Another valuable attempt to theorise alternative media in a way that is helpful when considering some of the current forms of participatory media that do not fit neatly into the notion of alternative media as radical, is put forward by Carpentier, Lie, and Servaes (2003; also Bailey, Cammaerts, & Carpentier, 2008). Bringing together features

from a number of theories on radical, alternative, citizen and community media, the approach that they put forward perceives alternative media as a rhizome - a metaphor borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), who used it to illustrate anarchic non-linear thinking (Carpentier et al., 2003). The rhizome approach stresses the fluid nature of community media organisations and sees them as a catalyst, linking organisations and individuals who may be active in a variety of groups, perhaps in networks, not only as a means of articulating the needs and voices of a specific group (Carpentier et al., 2003). Although three key elements, namely, civil society, the state and the economy, are delineated in the rhizomatic approach, there being links between them is not necessarily seen to jeopardise the autonomy of rhizomatic media (Carpentier et al., 2003).

In addition to print media, radio, video and television (Atton, 2002), more recently, the Internet has established itself as a distribution channel of alternative media, whether the content is text, still images, sound, video or a combination of some or all of these (Villarreal Ford & Gil, 2001). The democratic potential of the Internet for alternative media as a public sphere has been the basis for optimism amongst some media scholars (Villarreal Ford & Gil, 2001). As Villarreal Ford and Gil (2001) argue:

> The Internet is the first medium through which individuals and independent collectives throughout the globe may hope to communicate, in their own voices, with an international audience of millions. Thus the purely technical possibilities for the Internet as a public sphere are unlimited. (p. 202)

The above view, thus, draws attention to the notion of the public sphere, a normative concept formulated by Habermas (1962/1989) to describe how the bourgeoisie of the 17th to mid-20th century in Western Europe came together to debate about matters of public interest.

More relevant for the study of participatory media, because of a promise to provide spaces for a multiplicity of voices, seems a substantially different approach from that of Habermas to the public sphere, namely, that offered by Mouffe (1996, 2000a), who puts forward an argument for the recognition of antagonism in what she calls the public space. Thus, when the Habermasian conception emphasises how a consensus of common good can be achieved in a *rational* debate that tolerates pluralism of views as long as they are based on some kind of "universal reason" (Mouffe, 1996, p. 245), Mouffe draws attention to power, passions and exclusion as three undeniable elements of such debates. Both of these notions make Mouffe's concept of an agonistic

space relevant for the study of participatory media that aims to promote the emergence of a diverse range of voices.

When considering people's journalistic activities as a mode of civic engagement, it appears that the rise of participatory journalism relates to the changes in the ways in which people are politically active. There has been much talk about voting apathy and people's general detachment from politics and community life in Western democracies (Dahlgren, 2000, p. 311; Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010; Putnam, 2000, p. 35). On the other hand, it has also been argued that disengagement with parliamentary politics does not necessarily imply that interest is lost altogether, as it is possible that some people are channelling their interest into becoming active in, for example, social movements, charities and local community groups (Bennett, 2008; Dahlgren, 2000, p. 311; Dahlgren & Gurevitch, 2005, p. 378; Dalton, 2008). The revitalisation of social activism, including media activism, the aim of which has been to include in the democratic rights of citizens the "right to communicate" (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 13) since the 1990s (Atton & Couldry, 2003, p. 579), may reflect a shift in the ways in which some people's interest, not only in politics, but also in a broader realm of the political manifests itself.

In addition to disillusionment with formal politics, it appears that some people's attitudes towards the traditional media may be changing. Although many political news media are available in a variety of formats, and not least because of the emergence of the 24-hour television news channels and constantly updated corporate-owned online news services, criticism of the content of these mainstream news media and the seeking of alternative sources of information online are arguably becoming common (Waltz, 2005; Hill & Hughes, 1998). This criticism may be based, at least partly, on the notion of the mainstream or the corporate media being "misleading and profit oriented" (quoted in Rannikko, 2005, p. 1), in the words of one of the respondents in an Indymedia online survey conducted in 2005. From these critiques, parallels can be drawn to political economy literature on a range of issues, such as media concentration, commodification of audiences and bias towards establishment and capitalist interests (for a helpful overview, see Mosco, 2009). Many activists, especially media activists, are known to align themselves with this literature.

It also appears that an interest in participatory media may relate to specific events. For example, Alexander (2004) argues that, in the context of the strengthening of an international peace movement as a response to the threat of war in Iraq and dissatisfaction with the way in which the combat phase of the war was reported in the

mainstream media, momentum was created for some alternative type of participatory websites to reach "beyond their core supporters to a vast global audience" (p. 280, see also Kidd, 2003a). On the other hand, the emergence of some of these alternative media is directly linked to specific events and to a need to find a way to communicate usually the resistance in relation to them. For example, many of the Indymedia collectives have been launched because an event-related resistance such as mass demonstrations has necessitated their presence.

As suggested in this section, it would be a mistake to ignore the parallels between participatory media and various alternative and community media, of which some are published offline, some online. However, some clarification is necessary to be able to understand how and to what extent alternative media differ from participatory media and journalism, the latter of which, rather confusingly, has been used interchangeably with a number of other terms, for example, with "grassroots" journalism (Gillmor, 2006). Thus, some participatory media can be categorised as alternative, even "radical alternative media" (Downing, 2001, p. 24), because of their aim to instigate change, usually social, political or cultural. At the same time, much of participatory media cannot be seen as portraying such goals, especially user-generated content, and consequently, they do not correspond with the notion of alternative media. It also seems justifiable to argue that, whilst what is known as community media are produced by people who are, for example, living in a certain geographic area or whom a shared hobby or a common goal has brought together, participatory media online are not necessarily built on a community. Thus, community media in this traditional sense have continued to be alive and well in many places (for an overview, see Rennie, 2006), and are nowadays also online, but with the emergence of participatory media online, the focus is shifting from close-knit communities creating media mainly to serve the needs of their communities to individual journalism practices and loose networks of people creating media for broad audiences.

Indymedia can be described as alternative participatory media, whereas OMNI, as a more hybrid model, can be called rhizomatic participatory media. The following section focuses the discussion on the emergence of these two pioneering participatory media organisations that are explored in this study.

1.6   Contextualising Indymedia and OMNI

The Independent Media Centre, commonly referred to as Indymedia, is an international volunteer-run information network of participatory, non-profit media. Indymedia originated in Seattle, where it acted as a communications hub for activist-journalists of various movements for social justice, who covered demonstrations during the World Trade Organisation conference in 1999. The Indymedia newsroom in Seattle was not only a place where news stories could be written and edited, but it also offered a channel for the international distribution of articles, and audio and video material on the website, which was built on open source software. Indymedia, which defines itself as "a network of collectively run media outlets for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of the truth" (Indymedia, 2005), claims to challenge the ethics and practices of the conventional mainstream media, for example, because its reporters tend to favour personal eye-witness accounts of events and engage in intellectual analysis (Atton, 2007; Platon & Deuze, 2003). Platon and Deuze (2003) describe this focus in their study on Indymedia journalism "Most Indymedia define their way of working as showing grass roots reports from the streets. A reader's own individual narrative is considered to be of higher value and authenticity than a report from a distance" (p. 345).

Although Indymedia (2005) stresses that it is not "a conscious mouthpiece of any particular point of view", the network originated in the struggles of what has been called variably the "anti-globalisation movement" (Ayres, 2004; Kidd, 2003b; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2004), the "anti-capitalist movement" (Bramble & Minns, 2005; Welsh, 2002), the "anti-corporate globalization movement" (Juris, 2008) and the "alter-globalisation movement" (Bramble, 2006; Chesters & Welsh, 2005; Kavada, 2006). The last one is the preferred term in this thesis because of its positive connotation and the emphasis on the aim of acting on the perceived dominance and exploitation by a few countries and powerful global corporations over the majority of the world's population.

The emergence in 2000 of both VAI and Indybay, the two Indymedia cases in this study, corresponds with what has been called the alter-globalisation movement's "creative phase" (Lindholm, 2005, p. 164), the beginning of which can be traced to the abovementioned demonstrations in Seattle in 1999, commonly referred to as the Battle of Seattle. Lindholm (2005) asserts that, during the creative phase, activists were "bold and innovative" (p.165) and that that period saw an increase in "protesters, organisations, media exposure and violence" (p. 165). The peak of the alter-

globalisation movement's success, according to Lindholm (2005, p. 165), ended in the 2001 demonstrations during the G8 meeting in Genoa.

Although, at least in some places, Indymedia collectives have continued their alliance with the alter-globalisation movement, a more accurate assessment of the current stance of the network would be to stress how it connects to struggles for global social justice, which cover a broad range of movements, such as those that are anti-capitalism and anti-war, and the environmental movement, to name but a few. However, essentially, the network can be seen as a manifestation of media activism (Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Meikle, 2003). Hence, Indymedia marks a departure from the new social movements' relation to the media. As Hackett and Carroll (2006) explain, "Among new social movements … the tendency has been to deploy media strategies that strive for standing and sympathetic coverage or that produce alternative media for movement constituents" (p. 202). For media activists, democratisation of the media is the aim. Coyer (2005) explains how Indymedia relates to media activism:

> Indymedia is a participatory and hence more democratic form of media. It is media created by activists, participants and observers – media activism seeking to use independent media as a form of direct action and as an alternative to the corporate media system. (p. 167)

Indymedia provides space for self and collective representation potentially to anyone who wants to publish content on its city-, region- or country-based websites providing that people adhere to the editorial policies of the collectives. The contributions appear on the website immediately, as editing and moderating takes place after contributions have been published on the newswire. In addition to open publishing, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, the Indymedia network is characterised by a decentralised organisational structure and a decision-making process that is consensus-driven and aims to be anti-authoritarian (Coyer, 2005, pp. 166-167).

The Indymedia network consists of well over 150 media centres around the world. Although there are Indymedia centres in all continents, the biggest concentration is in North America and Europe. In addition to a strong web presence, some Indymedia collectives broadcast radio programmes, some publish print media and some make video documentaries. An international website, www.indymedia.org, brings together articles from around the world, whereas local websites focus on issues that are important to the people in the area they cover.

The global website is managed by volunteers from around the world, who also coordinate editorial policy and technical issues, while local collectives make decisions on their own work. As stated on the global Indymedia website: "Each IMC is an autonomous group that has its own mission statement, manages its own finances and makes its own decisions through its own processes" (Indymedia, 2005). Usually, Indymedia centres are financed by donations of, for example, money, equipment and server storage space (Pavis, 2002). They do not make payments to people who submit content, nor are people who do editorial, technical or other work in the collectives normally compensated for their efforts.

Although OMNI, the third case in this study, was launched in 2004, that is, four years later than VAI and Indybay, the emergence of OMN in South Korea in 2000, corresponds with the launch of Indybay and VAI. The founder and the CEO of OMN Oh Yeon-ho's vision of participatory media where citizens could post their news and take part in debates online was based on a perception that there was a demand for an online media alternative to the predominantly conservative press in a nation where a majority of households had high speed access to the Internet, and there had grown up a generation that was technologically competent (Gillmor, 2006, pp. 126-127).

OMN has been in the forefront of the school of thought that considers that practising journalism should not be left to professionals alone. This is not only because everyone should have a right to create their own media, but also because, as Sutton (2006) argues about participatory journalism:

> The models' basic assumption asserts that the collective knowledge of the general public is more powerful than that of an individual professional journalist, and so traditional news consumers can themselves become news producers. (p. 4)

In OMN, the content published on the website is a joint effort of reporters who, for a modest financial compensation, offer articles for publication, and staff who not only edit articles, but also decide on what is published. Kim and Hamilton (2006) call this organisational model of OMN "a hybrid form of participation" (p.547). As they (Kim & Hamilton, 2006) argue about the South Korean edition: "OMN has realized an organizational model that broadens the demographics of who can participate, but it also monitors the nature of those contributions while minimizing its own labour costs to its economic benefit" (p. 555). Most of OMN's proceeds derive from advertising, as despite reduced the expenditure on employing journalists, OMN needs revenue to cover

various other costs, such as hiring other staff, maintaining an office space and paying reporters.

Although OMN represents a more commercial model for participatory journalism than Indymedia, the emergence of OMN relates to the democratisation of the media in South Korea. It has broadened opportunities for participation in the creation of the media and has aimed to bring more diversity to a media landscape dominated by the conservative press. As Joyce (2007) asserts: "OhmyNews granted an influential public platform not only to a new set of users as reporters, but also highlighted a different set of political priorities than those normally represented in the South Korean press" (p. 4). OMN quickly grew in popularity in terms of both the number of readers and of reporters and has become an influential medium in South Korea (Kim & Hamilton, 2006, pp. 550-551). The website has brought into the public domain many stories downplayed by the conservative press (Gillmor, 2006). A frequently quoted example of the political power of OMN is how the support amassed by the website helped to have a reformist president Roh Moo-hyun elected in 2003 (Gillmor, 2006, p. 126). OMN has also tried to expand to other countries. The company launched a countrywide website in Japan in 2006, which, however, failed to replicate the success of the Korean website.

OMNI is an international, English-language edition of OMN (for research on OhmyNews see Allan, 2006; Gillmor, 2006; Kim & Hamilton, 2006). OMNI has a traditional organisational structure in which reporters have a fixed role beyond which they are not expected to take part in the organisation. A small staff takes care of the day-to-day running of the website, such as editing and promoting it. Distinct from OMN, which employs staff reporters, the media content of OMNI comes virtually entirely from its reporters from many parts of the world, who write in English. Up until 2009, reporters were compensated for contributions that staff editors had determined fit for publication after fact-checking and editing each article prior to publication. Unlike in Indymedia, reporters for OMNI are required to register and they are asked to publish under their real name. Moreover, although registered reporters can offer content for publication, the editors decide what is published on the website.

As the above discussion on Indymedia and OMNI and Table 1 aim to summarise, the two organisations represent fairly different types of participatory media. Indymedia, as a non-commercial participatory medium rejects advertising, usually has no paid staff and does not compensate reporters. Until the implementation of recent changes, OMNI had portrayed the opposite characteristics from those of Indymedia with paid staff and modest compensation to reporters. At the beginning, OMNI did not have advertisements

on the website, unlike the OMN website, which from the start has been financed largely by selling space to advertisers on the website. Another difference between OMNI and Indymedia is that, while the former operates in English and aims to appeal to an international audience, the Indymedia websites are usually published in a local language and they tend to serve best the needs of people in the localities. As seen in Table 1, other differences concern the editing of the two websites, anonymity, the main topics and types of content. It seems justified to argue that the content of the Indymedia websites tends to mirror their association with the global justice movement and an aim to feed information for action, whereas OMNI's approach is to provide news in a non-politicised manner that resembles more that of mainstream media news websites that aim at neutrality.

As can be seen in Table 1, there are also some similarities between Indymedia collectives and OMNI, such as in the formats of content, but most importantly, both media organisations rely on reporters to submit content to their websites; Indymedia and OMNI encourage people to take on work that has conventionally been reserved to reporters working for the established media organisations. While Indymedia (2005) states that its aim is "to empower people to become the media", OMNI's (2004) slogan is "every citizen is a reporter". It is due to the vision that anyone should be able to be involved in media production that, despite the differences, they can be considered participatory media.

Table 1: Comparisons between Indymedia and OMNI

	Indymedia	OhmyNews International
Type	Information network of participatory, non-profit media	Participatory online news service
Organisation	Autonomous, volunteer-run collectives that are part of an international Indymedia network	OMNI is part of OMN, which is a South Korean media company that has a third website in Japan
Language	Usually in local language	English
Main content types	News, opinions, analysis, information on events, calls for action	News, opinions, analysis, interviews
Common content formats	Text, photographs, video and audio	Text, photographs
Main topics	Alter-globalisation, anti-capitalism, anti-war, human rights, gender equality, environment	World news, science & technology, art & life, entertainment, sports
Reporters	Potentially, anyone adhering to an editorial policy can post content and comment on content posted by other reporters	Potentially, anyone adhering to an editorial policy can post content and comment on content posted by other reporters

Advertising	No	Yes (not at the beginning)
Funding	Donations	Part of OMN, the main source of revenue of which is advertising
Editing	No editing prior to publishing	Staff and, more recently, volunteer editors edit content prior to publishing
Payments to reporters	No	Until 2009, reporters were paid approximately $17 for an article
Anonymity	Allowed throughout the website	Not allowed for reporters posting content to main sections of the website
Decision-making	Consensus	Hierarchical

1.7 The Research Questions

To summarise the aim of the thesis, the very broad topic of participatory journalism online has become more focused through an objective to analyse reporters' participatory media practices as a mode of civic engagement in three participatory media organisations operating in different contexts. Therefore, the key research question that this research project sought to answer is as follows:

> How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations?

The fairly broad key question is unpacked in Table 2 into more explicit sub-questions to highlight how the dimensions of civic cultures, which, as noted earlier, are applied as the organising framework in this study. Table 2 also provides an indication of how the empirical part of the thesis is structured. Thus, it is shown how participatory journalism is approached in the three empirical chapters of the thesis. In Chapter Four (questions 1-2), there is a comparison of how participatory media organisations operate and what affects their success. In Chapter Five (questions 3-4), there is an analysis of the publishing process, the focus being on how the three websites are edited and moderated. The final empirical chapter, Chapter Six (questions 5-8), looks into the reporters' participatory journalism and related activities, their motivations and aims, their skills and ethics and their other modes of civic engagement.

Table 2: Sub research questions and corresponding dimensions of civic cultures

Chapter number	Sub questions	Dimension of civic cultures
4	1. What are the similarities and differences between Indybay and VAI, and between them and OMNI, regarding their aims, and how and where they operate? 2. What factors affect the sustainability of participatory media online, on the one hand, between the two Indymedia collectives, and on the other, between them and OMNI?	Spaces
5	3. How do editorial principles and procedures differ between Indybay, VAI and OMNI and what are the wider implications of these differences for participatory journalism? 4. To what extent does the publishing process of participatory journalism disrupt or reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy?	Spaces Trust (Skills)
6	5. How and why do reporters of Indybay, VAI and OMNI engage with participatory media online and media in general? 6. What are the principles that reporters employ in relation to journalism ethics? 7. What kind of skills and knowledge does the practice of participatory journalism require? 8. When considering reporters' different modes of civic engagement, does the evidence support a theory of a shift in the ways in which people are politically active?	Practices Identities Values Knowledge (Skills)

The civic cultures analytic frame has been adjusted to some extent from its original formulation, as put forward by Dahlgren (2009). This applies especially to values, identities and knowledge, as will be discussed at the beginning of Chapter Six, where these dimensions, alongside practices, are addressed. This section is focused on providing an overview of how the analytic frame of civic cultures is applied to participatory journalism in this research. Thus, the dimension of spaces is taken to refer to both the organisational and the broader socio-cultural context within which participatory media are embedded. Trust is approached by mainly discussing the relationship between reporters and those who facilitate participatory journalism in media organisations as editors and moderators. Identities are seen to refer to people's ability to see themselves as reporters - this is closely linked to what motivates them and to their aims. Knowledge is taken to relate to having access to information and other sources that reporters require to be able to create media content, as well as to what extent, if any, access is facilitated by the participatory media organisations. Both in Dahlgren's (2009, p. 116) model, where skills are situated in the practices dimension of civic cultures, and in this study, skills are discussed with reference to the many abilities civic engagement (in this research, the practice of participatory journalism) requires.

The dimension of values is taken to point to the ways in which reporters negotiate the ethical dimensions of their journalistic practices.

1.8   Chapter Outline

Whilst Chapter Two of the thesis puts forward the theoretical framework that underlines and informs the analysis in three empirical chapters, Chapter Three presents an overall research design and the methods that were employed in this study. The empirical chapters are built on one another and proceed from broader to more specific. Therefore, the first of the empirical chapters, Chapter Four, discusses the organisational basis of the three cases and contextualises their emergence, which then lays the foundation for the analysis of the publishing process on the Indybay, OMNI and VAI websites in Chapter Five. The final empirical chapter, Chapter Six, explores participatory journalism from reporters' perspectives as a mode of civic engagement in these three cases for participatory media, and is, thus, linked to the previous two chapters in which the meso level of organisations was of interest. Which dimensions of the civic cultures analytic frame are addressed in a chapter depends on its focus; this will be discussed next in an overview of the thesis structure per chapter.

Chapter Two, called "Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: From the Democratic Role of the Media to Participatory Journalism as a Mode of Civic Engagement" puts forward, as the name suggests, a theoretical framework that underpins the findings that are presented in Chapters Four to Six based on the analysis of empirical data. Before discussing the application of relevant theories to the three case studies and, ultimately, how the research project aims to contribute to these theories, the main part of the chapter provides an overview of the theory on a more abstract level. As a means of structuring the discussion on why there may be a need for alternatives to the mainstream media (a few of the proposed ways of remedying what some call a democratic deficit are discussed), the chapter begins with an overview of some key strands in theories concerning the democratic role of the media and the ways in which the mainstream media are falling short of the ideal. Thus, the purpose of the discussion is to inform the analysis provided in the empirical chapters. These critiques also relate to the emergence of the three participatory organisations in this research namely, Indybay, VAI and OMNI, that is the focus in the first of the empirical chapters.

The second part of the theory chapter considers Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures framework based on his latest adaptation. Before the analytic frame of civic cultures,

which, as noted earlier, has been applied in this study of participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement, the notion of civic engagement is examined in the context of the Internet. The dimensions of civic cultures are supplemented with theories of the rhizomatic model of alternative media, voluntary associations and Mouffe's (2000a) political theory of agonistic pluralism, because they are employed in the discussion in the empirical chapters. In the final part of the theory chapter, the ways in which the six dimensions of civic cultures, , spaces, knowledge, values, trust, practices (including skills) and identities, are applicable to research into participatory media is considered.

Chapter Three, "Research Design and Methods", details a discussion of the research design, ranging from the overall approach to the study to a more detailed account of the methods and analysis of the empirical data. Thus, the rationale for exploring participatory journalism through three cases, VAI, Indybay and OMNI, and in two countries, Finland and the USA, by conducting interviews with reporters and facilitators of the websites, is explained, as are the opportunities and challenges of both a multiple case study approach and cross-national research. Moreover, the chapter considers the ethical implications of the research project in hand.

Chapter Three begins by explaining the epistemological grounds for conducting a qualitative inquiry and for choosing semi-structured interviews as the main research method, though an account is also provided of the methods that were considered and rejected. Then, the selection of cases and locations in which the research was to be carried out is discussed. Taking into consideration the critique of qualitative research in general, and of qualitative interviews and case studies in particular, the chapter aims to provide an informed response to some of the critiques and to explain how they have been addressed in this research. In relation to the interviews, a self-reflexive account of how the interviewees were contacted and how the interviews were conducted is provided. The secondary sources of data that inform the empirical chapters (Four to Six) of the thesis are noted, as is the operationalisation of the research questions. The ethical aspects of the research project are discussed prior to an explanation of the approach to sampling and the characteristics of the actual sample. Then, there is a description of how the interviews were analysed, followed by, in the final part, a summary of the research design and the empirical data at stake, which is provided by the presentation of a table. This is concluded by a discussion on some of the key decisions made concerning the research design.

The title of Chapter Four, which follows the methods chapter, is "The Contextual Origins and Organisational Basis of VAI, Indybay and OMNI". By drawing mainly on

the interviews with people who are, or in the case of VAI, were, active in the two Indymedia collectives, and the staff of OMNI, the first of the empirical chapters discusses VAI, Indybay and OMNI as media organisations that provide a platform for participatory journalism. Thus, the chapter focuses on the dimension of spaces in the Dahlgren (2009) formulation of a civic cultures analytic frame. More specifically, the emergence of the three originations in the context of Finland, South Korea and the USA, their organisational basis and what affects their viability, is analysed.

The chapter contextualises the emergence of each organisation by drawing on the notion of media activism (Hackett & Carroll, 2006). The aim is to explore how these organisations relate to the wider societal and cultural context in which they are embedded. Secondly, the chapter examines the ways in which VAI and Indybay operate as voluntary associations, and how they are, thus, susceptible to many of the challenges facing non-profit organisations that are either mainly or entirely dependent on volunteers, the latter being the case with Indybay and VAI. An underpinning concept when considering OMNI is a rhizomatic model (Carpentier et al., 2003) of media, because it grants flexibility to consider OMNI as a hybrid model for participatory media that portrays characteristics of both alternative and mainstream media. A third key theme in the chapter is a discussion on why maintaining an organisation for participatory journalism, whether as part of a larger hybrid participatory media organisation (OMNI), or as a voluntary association (Indybay and VAI), is challenging. An important function of Chapter Four is to provide the basis for the analysis of the publishing process of Indybay, OMNI and VAI.

In Chapter Five, "The Publishing Process on VAI, Indybay and OMNI Websites", the notion of power is considered in relation to the analysis of how moderating and editing is arranged in these three participatory media organisations. By drawing mainly on the interviews with people who are, or in the case of VAI, were, active in these collectives, this chapter compares VAI and Indybay's fairly different approaches to open publishing, which is one of the key principles in the operation of Indymedia network. The consequences of the collectives' interpretation of open publishing and how it is implemented in practice are analysed in the context of the radical pluralism framework as put forward by Mouffe (2000a). In particular, the viability of an agonistic online space is assessed in the context of VAI, because for several reasons it provides a compelling case for testing in which circumstances what Mouffe (2000a) calls "radical pluralism" may struggle to function and why.

The second part of Chapter Five analyses how the OMNI website is edited and how the editing process compares to that on the VAI and Indybay websites. The focus here is on how these processes disrupt or reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy. In addition to *spaces*, another dimension of the civic cultures frame that is addressed in Chapter Five is that of trust. By drawing on Putnam's (2000) notion of *thick trust* and *thin trust* and by use of a graph, the role trust plays mainly in various relationships between moderators/editors and other players within a participatory media organisation is explored. Moreover, by drawing examples from VAI, Indybay and OMNI, it is shown why trust is fragile. Finally, the chapter, by discussing whether, and if so, to what extent, VAI, Indybay and OMNI can be considered participatory media, attempts to demonstrate how, in the context of participatory journalism, the notion of participation itself must be carefully considered by taking into account mechanisms that support or restrict involvement in participatory media in relation to the notion of freedom of speech.

The last of the empirical chapters, titled "From Advocates to Media Makers: Practising Participatory Journalism" draws mainly on accounts by reporters of all three cases in order to bring together four dimensions of civic cultures, which are: practices, identities, knowledge and values. The focus is on reporters' practices of participatory journalism, most notably what kind of content reporters post on the websites, their other journalistic activities, and what trends can be delineated in relation to reporters' media usage. Skills, which in the frame of civic cultures are located under practices, receive detailed attention through a discussion on what skills are required and are important in participatory journalism and by discussing the skill levels of reporters in this study. The notion of identities, that is, why reporters see themselves as practising participatory journalism, is approached by proposing a reporter typology, which is based on reporters' aims and motivations for practising participatory media on the Indybay, VAI and OMNI websites.

The dimension of knowledge is analysed in relation to reporters' access to sources that facilitate their journalistic activities. By drawing on Atton's (2008a) work on ethics in alternative journalism, the dimension of values is taken to refer to the ethics reporters employ. The focus is on three aspects: the degree of detachment or attachment regarding what is being reported, separating news and opinion, and the use of facts and sources. By drawing on the theories of a "new" type of citizenship (Bennett, 2008; Dalton, 2008), the chapter, before its conclusion, discusses reporters' modes of civic engagement other than their journalistic activities, such as whether reporters vote and

their membership in civil society organisations. The aim is to assess whether, in the case of reporters in this study, it is possible to see a broader shift in civic engagement from what Bennett (2008) has called a "dutiful citizen" to an "actualising citizen" (p. 14).

The concluding part of the thesis, Chapter Seven, the main findings of the research, are put forward by summarising the key aspects of the empirical findings of the study in the context of the analytic framework of civic cultures. The focus is twofold. The first aim is to return to the main research question in this study, that is, "How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations?" by highlighting the consequences of the three different organisational settings for participatory journalism in the framework of civic cultures. The second aim is to consider the contribution of the findings to some of the key theories employed in this study. Another important focus in the conclusion is to offer a self-reflexive account of the entire research process, with particular emphasis on the conduct of qualitative interviews. The chapter also revisits the discussions about why media matters to democracy by considering what reporters in this study deem to be the significance of participatory journalism. Suggestions for further research into participatory media that are based on the findings of this study and the insights gained are proposed in the final part of Chapter Seven.

2 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework: From the Democratic Role of the Media to Participatory Journalism as a Mode of Civic Engagement

This thesis on participatory media analyses participatory journalism practices in their organisational and broader context in the analytic frame of Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures. As a way of structuring the conceptual framework in this study it is, however, useful to begin by reviewing of some of the key strands in the theoretical debates concerning the democratic role of the mainstream media and their perceived crisis. Moreover, the discussion is helpful in positioning the rise of participatory media as a response to some of the problems with mainstream media, and how they may be aiming to offer a different way of producing media from that of the mainstream. The overview, thus, also informs the analysis provided in the empirical chapters four to six of the thesis. For analytic clarity, there is differentiation in this chapter between the mainstream media as "the mass media of television, radio and the press that are corporately owned, controlled or governed" (de Jong, Shaw, & Stammers, 2005, p. 6) and the alternative media. In addition, public service broadcasting is included here in the category of the mainstream media.

After a brief overview of the role of media and journalism in a democracy in liberal theory and from the political economy perspective, and of some of the arguments concerning their failure to deliver, as it were, the chapter will put forward three proposals that aim to offer a solution. In the first one, the promise is the renewal of journalism as practised in the mainstream media; in the second, the transformation of a media system; and the third is a call for alternatives to the mainstream media. The second part of the chapter focuses on the notion of civic engagement, and discusses Dahlgren's (2005, 2009) framework for civic cultures, first, in abstract, and then by suggesting how the six dimensions of civic cultures and related concepts will be applied to the study on participatory media in this thesis. In the discussion on the civic cultures framework, a number of other concepts that are employed in this study will also be presented, most notably the model of rhizomatic media (Carpentier et al., 2003) and the notion of voluntary associations (Billis, 1993; Harris, 1998; Rochester, 1999), as ways of approaching the participatory media organisations in this thesis, along with Mouffe's (1996, 2000a) political theory of agonistic pluralism. The conclusion provides a

summary of the conceptual framework and the preceding discussion on media's democratic role in society.

2.1   The Democratic Role of Media

In normative formulations of the functions of media and journalism in democratic societies, the media are seen to play a key role in supporting the democratic process (McNair, 1999, p. 21). As Schudson (2005), in his review of different approaches to sociology of news, has come to conclude, "Most studies, regardless of the approach they take, begin with a normative assumption that the news media *should* serve society by informing the general population in ways that arm them for vigilant citizenship" (p. 191). The differences emerge when consideration is given to what exactly the media should do so that they can serve society. Thus, it is useful to consider two key theoretical traditions with this regard, namely, liberal theory and the political economy.

In traditional liberal theory, perhaps the foremost function of the media has been seen to be that of a watchdog that monitors authorities such as politicians and reveals any attempts to misuse power, as Curran (2005, p. 122) has noted. Another important democratic role of the media is "representing people to authority" (Curran, 2005, p. 131). A third key function for them is to "provide a forum of debate in which people can identify problems, propose solutions and reach a consensus" (Curran, 2005, p. 129). Central to liberal theory is a view that the media should be independent from the state and that this independence could be achieved and maintained in the free market system (Curran, 2005, p. 122). Thus, the argument goes that if anyone has the freedom to publish in minimally regulated media markets, this enables the media to fulfil their democratic role (Curran, 2005). For a number of reasons, some of which will be discussed in the next section, the free market ideology has shown a number of flaws. However, in part to contrast with liberal theory, it is helpful at first to consider how active citizenship should, ideally, be supported by the media when viewed from the political economy perspective, which, as outlined by Mosco (2009), is "the study of the social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources" (p. 2).

For Murdock (1992, p. 21), the role of the communication systems in the constitution of citizenship in democratic societies is threefold. First, people as citizens should have access to the information that they need in order to be active members of a society (Murdock, 1992, p. 21). Second, people should be able to find in the media a

wide range of information, not just one angle or interpretation (Murdock, 1992). Third, people "must be able to recognise themselves and their aspirations in the range of representations on offer … and to be able to contribute to developing and extending these representations" as Murdock (1992, p. 21) argues. In the third point, Murdock suggests that people themselves should be able to be involved in the communication system, yet he does not make it clear exactly how people could contribute, nor does his analysis of public communication address alternative media, which, as will be discussed in some detail later in this chapter, have been the realm of media where communication rights have been extended to people who are not engaged in media production in the corporate media organisations.

People's participation in the production of media content will be revisited later in the chapter, but prior to that the ways in which, and the many reasons why, the media are seen to struggle to fulfil these many expectations laid upon them are considered. The review draws largely on the dominant Anglo-American research tradition, and thus it is necessary to note that the aim here is not to suggest that the critiques of the media discussed below would be universally applicable, as obviously the crisis of the media has a unique character in different parts of the world depending on a number of factors that may be, for example, country or region specific. These differences will be taken into account in the empirical part of the thesis concerning the analysis of the emergence of three cases in this study.

2.2   Mainstream Media and Journalism: The Crisis

The political role of the media can be seen to be vital to the constitution of an active citizenship, but as scholars within media studies have argued from a variety of points of view, there are many reasons why the media may fail in their functions. A prominent line of thinking in critical media theory asserts that many of the problems with the mainstream media have to do with them having grown to be the business of a few, but large, media conglomerates, seeking to pursue their economic interests rather than the public interest (Curran, 2000). Criticism from the field of critical political economy has drawn attention to the consequences of the wide range of developments in media and communications and in their regulation, such as cross-media ownership, the privatisation of the previously state-owned public service media and the corporatisation of public communication organisations (for a review of many of these developments in Europe, see Doyle, 2002), that have led to impoverishment in the range of media

content or even outright bias of the media (Murdock & Golding, 2005). Therefore, as Curran (2000) rightly points out, the free market, which in liberal theory is seen as the best way of guaranteeing that the public interest is served and media pluralism achieved, does not necessarily "enhance public enlightenment" (p. 131).

One line of criticism that has a long historical trajectory concerns the influence of owners of the media on their content. An illuminating account of the interference by the owners of the British press in the era of the press barons of the late 19th and early 20th century and more recently in the age of often transnational media conglomerates, such as that owned by Rupert Murdoch, is offered by Curran (1997a, 1997b). He notes, for example, how Murdoch, with the aim that his newspapers would reflect his values and political views, appointed the editors of *The Times* on the basis that they would not stand against him (Curran, 1997b, p. 75). In many critiques of the mainstream media, the explanations offered for the perceived media bias, however, usually derive from a far more complex set of reasons than in the case of this media tycoon; they usually have to do with commercialisation of media, the related questions of media regulation and how media are produced.

From the political economy perspective, perhaps one of the most severe criticisms of the mainstream media's actions has come from Herman and Chomsky (1994), who in their "propaganda model" analyse the processes that arguably cause the media in the USA to be heavily biased. According to them (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, p. 17), the USA news media are manufactured through several "filters", such as advertising, and the news material is sourced from "powerful sources of information" in such a way that the published content fits into the ideologies of the economic, political and military elite and ultimately serves their aims. Herman and Chomsky (2008), in the newer edition of their book *Manufacturing Consent*[8], helpfully summarise the key reasons that, in their view, cause the mainstream media to become the lapdogs rather than the watchdogs of these elites:

> Most biased choices in the media arise from the preselection of right-thinking people, internalized preconceptions, and the adaptation of personnel to the constraints of ownership, organization, market, and political power. Censorship is largely self-censorship, by reporters and commentators who

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[8] The title of Herman and Chomsky's book is borrowed from the work of Lippman (1922/2007, p. 142), who in his book on how the public opinion is controlled to control people's behaviour, originally published in 1922, argued that "the manufacture of consent is capable of great refinements … the opportunities for manipulation open to anyone who understands the process are plain enough …The creation of consent is not a new art. It is a very old one which was supposed to have died out with the appearance of democracy. But it has not died out."

adjust to the realities of source and media organizational requirements, and by people at higher levels within media organizations who are chosen to implement, and are usually internalized, the constraints imposed by proprietary and other market and governmental centers of power. (p. L)

Thus, Herman and Chomsky suggest that the perceived bias in many ways is a problem of a structural and economic nature, rather than the result of conspiracy, which, it seems mistakenly, is how it has been perceived by at least by some of the critics of the propaganda model who consider it to be Herman and Chomsky's main reason for claiming the media are biased.

Although the propaganda model has some limitations, such as it falls short in acknowledging the significance of alternative media or that it does not really take into consideration the reception of media content, on the whole, the model has been dismissed by its critics somewhat unjustly. Moreover, in their later work, Herman and Chomsky have addressed some of the inadequacies. For example, in the afterword of a newer edition of the book, Herman (2008) does acknowledge the rise of the Internet-based media and communication that "provides a great deal of critical opinion, comment, information, and occasional counter-pressure on the MSM [mainstream media]" (p. 290), but, as he (Herman, 2008) then concludes, "at this point in history they are overmatched by the dominant media" (p. 302). It seems fair to assert that despite the glimpses of hope in the form of the emergence of spaces for alternative media and the exchange of opinions online, Herman, at least, is sceptical about their ability to disrupt the dominance of the mainstream media.

Following Schudson (2005, p. 177), it must also be noted that one shortcoming in the propaganda model is that it is fairly dismissive about the role of journalists in the production of news. Moreover, as Schudson (2005, p. 177) rightly argues, Herman and Chomsky fail to take notice of news that criticises the elites. To add to the list of criticisms, as has been already noted, Herman and Chomsky (1994) seem to have very little to say about the reception of media. The only references to people who consume or use media are those in relation to the manipulation of public opinion and the effect of advertising on content that is then consumed by audiences. In relation to the latter, their argument is that because the media companies' mission is to maximise their advertising revenue, and sell advertising space to accompany certain types of media content that is considered "safe", such as entertainment, is more straightforward than selling advertising to programming that pushes the boundaries or is more controversial, this leads to a reduction in the variety of media content (Herman & Chomsky, 2008, p. 16-

17). However, one can argue that convincing as the argument is, it is also somewhat flawed; for example, it does not take into account media content that attracts advertisers who are targeting niche consumer markets, or that the boundaries between what interests larger groups of media users and what does not, are always in motion and not always so easily predicted as Herman and Chomsky's model seems to suggest. For example, what interests people today may include topics that not long ago were not considered mainstream. A relatively recent example would be environmental issues.

The relationship between the commercial media, audiences and the advertisers cannot be examined in detail here, but it is useful to consider briefly a fairly common perception, which is put forward here by O'Neill (1992):

> The commercial media exists in two markets: they sell their products to an audience and an audience to advertisers … A section of the population which has little purchasing power is in general less attractive to advertisers, and hence a newspaper that articulates its views will fail in its second market. (p. 25)

In Britain, for example, a large circulation has not always guaranteed advertisers' interest, for example, in cases where they have perceived the audience to lack purchasing power (O'Neill, 1992, p. 26). On the other hand, in part, the quality press has survived the pressure to build up a large circulation and has been able to resist becoming more tabloid-like because it has reached small, but affluent audiences, and consequently has been found attractive from the advertisers' point of view (Curran, 1997b, p. 97).

One strand of criticism concerning why the media may struggle to achieve their mission to provide a wealth of information blames the political system and its components, most typically governments, of obstructing rather than assisting the free flow of information. The political censorship that results in "distorting the exchange of information", Keane (1991, p. 94) claims, takes place not only in totalitarian systems, but also in democratic societies. Keane (1991) argues that censorship can have many different forms; for example, journalists can be lied to, or denied access to information that those in power view as being prejudicial to their political agenda.

In their analysis of the processes that have led to the "crisis of communication for citizenship" resulting in "an impoverishing way of addressing citizens about political issues", Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, p. 204) demonstrate that the relationship between the media and politicians tends to be more complex than suggested by Keane (1991), and is shaped by the changes in political and social systems and media regulation. Such

changes relate to, for example, communication technologies and professionalisation in the creation of political messages (Blumler & Gurevitch, 1995, pp. 204-207). In relation to the latter, political communication has come to be characterised by information management, as the political parties and various other political advocates all try to push their message forward in the news media, at the same time as, arguably, they have reduced the space available for political content (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2005, pp. 106-107).

A different viewpoint, though, observes that the news media have expanded rather than decreased; for example, because of the emergence of 24-hour news channels such as CNN and BBC News 24 and their extensions online. The vast quantity of political information and various other types of news available, often for free, has been said to have led to a risk of an information overload (Capurro, 2005). Moreover, it has been argued that all the political information circulating in the media may have an opposite effect than that which might be expected, that is, it may contribute to a lessening of interest in politics (McNair, 2000).

One major strand of criticism using the media content as a starting point has centred on the notion that political broadcast journalism is increasingly being replaced by "infotainment". For example, Thussu (2003) argues in his analysis of war in relation to infotainment that because of the demand for 24-hour news and live coverage, "contemporary television journalism is tending toward 'infotainment' – news where presentation is as important as the content of the report" (p. 122). Moreover, according to him (Thussu, 2003), "Given a fiercely competitive commercial environment within which television news networks have to function, television has to be live and the most important 'live TV' is news" (p. 117). As Thussu implies, news, and in particular live news has become the main means of competition between news organisations.

In the context of television, it has been argued that in order to secure success in the TV ratings and, ultimately, to achieve the maximum profit, news programmes favour light topics that seem to attract the best audience rating, such as, for example, celebrity gossip, over weightier issues, such as political news (McNair, 2000). Thus, television, similarly to news media in print, has been claimed to suffer from tabloidisation, that is, adopting strategies from the popular press about what kind of journalism sells. Arguments surrounding tabloidisation and infotainment are valuable because they draw attention to the fact that the quality of news presented in the media matters, not only the quantity of political news being circulated. However, some other aspects of political news tend to be left largely unexplored, most notably how the people

are engaging with these types of media content and why, and what the journalists' role is in producing them.

Scott (2005) argues in his summary of the current deplorable state of democratic journalism, that journalists themselves have come to notice the effect of an expectation for increasing profit on the quality of their work:

> For well over a decade, it has become increasingly clear that the public service mission of democratic journalism has been abandoned by the commercial press in favor of expanding profit margins… In practice, this has meant shackling the quality of a news organization to the fortunes of the equity market, almost inevitably sacrificing long-term credibility for short-term returns. As a result, and despite a near constant outcry from disillusioned journalists, most editors have seen a striking decline in costly (though essential) journalistic practices such as investigative reporting, foreign correspondence, maintaining a large and diverse staff of reporters, and performing as the watchdog of the political and economic seats of power—which increasingly underwrite their erstwhile media adversaries. (p. 90)

The problem is, Scott (2005) argues, that the privately owned press' quest to maximize profits tends to override any concern for quality in reporting, making it hard for journalists to produce the kind of content, such as investigative reporting, that would allow the media to fulfil their democratic role.

To guarantee the quality of media content, journalism as a profession has certain principles of professional conduct. These principles, which form the professional ethics of journalism and define what is considered good quality news, are adopted and agreed upon by journalists themselves within their professional associations, although media organisations often have their own codes of practice that are intended to provide guidance for media professionals working in that organisation (McQuail, 2000). A widely adopted, useful concept in relation to defining good news is that of news values. As Golding and Elliott (1999) argue, they guide the newsroom practices in two ways:

> They are criteria of selection from material available to the newsroom of those items worthy of inclusion in the final product. Second, they are guidelines for the presentation of items, suggesting what to emphasise, what to omit, and where to give priority in the preparation of items for presentation to the audience. (p. 632)

The selection of what is to be presented in the media and how depends on assumptions about what is of interest to audiences and what material for the production of news is available to journalists (Golding & Elliott, 1999, p. 633).

Of the ethical standards journalists have, the key professional norm is arguably objectivity. If, in the nineteenth century, journalists believed that they could detach themselves from the world around them and observe "the truth" (McNair, 1998), in the twentieth century, it was acknowledged that it was impossible that journalism would somehow reflect reality and give a totally unmediated, value-free account of events (McNair, 1999). Objectivity is a normative concept that has been contested from a number of premises in media studies; some argue that objectivity is not possible, some claim it is not desirable, whereas some assert that at least in principle it can exist, but that in reality the media fall short of an ideal (for a discussion of these different takes on objectivity, see Lichtenberg, 2000). In current formulations of journalistic ethics, objectivity is usually defined as giving a balanced account of events, using credible sources and separating facts from opinion (Harcup, 2009; McQuail, 2000).

The production process of news has been of interest in studies such as that of Hall et al. (1978/1999, pp. 648-649) and Schlesinger (1992) on the information flows in news production and the construction of news. Hall et al. (1978/1999, p. 646) draw attention to how the news is shaped not only by how news items are selected, based on news values, but also by how a news story is constructed. Hall et al. (1978/1999) conclude that the media "play a key role in reproducing the dominant field of the ruling ideologies" (p. 651). Thus, those who are regarded within society as influential are able to set the framework within which news is constructed, as journalists see them as credible, authoritative sources (Hall et al., 1978/1999, pp. 648-649). Coming from a poststructuralist research tradition, Hall et al. (1978/1999) suggest that although the media tend to reflect an existing power structure of society rather than act as a platform for different, competing views, bias is not necessarily intended, but rather originates in the routine of structures of media production.

Schlesinger (1990, p. 66) has argued that the notion of Hall et al. (1978/1999) of "primary definers" of news is far from unproblematic (see also Miller, 1993). Their formulation dismisses the idea of competition between various authoritative sources, which tends to result in unequal access to the media, and does not take into account less direct attempts to influence the media content or what happens when there are major shifts in institutional power structures, as Schlesinger quite rightly points out (1990, p. 66). Significant in the critique (Schlesinger, 1990) also is the concept's failure to acknowledge the ability of voices other than those of "primary definers" (p. 66) to at least sometimes access the media, and thus challenge dominant views. Another

limitation in this approach to news production lies in its failure to consider the role of audiences in the media production/consumption process.

Schlesinger (1992) analysed the production of television news based on the observations he made while working in the BBC's radio and television news departments in the 1970s (Schlesinger, 1992, p. 11). He (Schlesinger, 1992, pp. 79-80) put forward the argument that often there was not much new about the news, as news programmes were planned and structured in advance and that due to the costs, production was a deadline-driven routine where predictable, pre-planned stories came to form an essential part of the news. Fiske (1987) examined the narrative structure of the news. He (Fiske, 1987, p. 282) argued that news and fiction, in contrast, perhaps, to what news professionals would like to admit, had much in common. As Fiske discovered, news is formulaic, that is, it follows a formula that is highly predictable (Fiske, 1987, p. 281). One of his (Fiske, 1987, pp. 286-287) arguments was that the way news was divided into subcategories, such as politics, international affairs, the economy, and human interest stories, does not encourage the audience to think critically or make its own readings of what they see. Fiske's (1987, p. 290) study also showed how through the means of visual and vocal representation, the news stories were framed in a way that emphasised the authority of those with institutional power over the radical voices. In a similar vein to Fiske, Hartley (1992/1999) has shown how the aesthetic requirements come to play an important role in the construction news. He puts forward a persuasive conclusion (Hartley, 1992/1999): "the news is active in the politics of sense-making, even when the stories concern matters not usually understood as directly political (a wage dispute), and even when it is striving for impartiality" (p. 662).

A prominent example of the analysis of the media texts is the Glasgow University Media Group's (GUMG) (1980, 1982) study in which they scrutinised the coverage of the economy and industry of British television news broadcast by the BBC and ITN in 1975 (GUMG, 1982, p. xi). They argued that journalists did not explore information that contradicted the dominant views, and even though those alternative views were occasionally shown in news they were "simply fitted into the dominant flow" (GUMG, 1982, p. 29). The researchers also criticised the way interviews were framed (GUMG, 1982, p. 33). The GUMG (1980, 1982) concluded that that the way television journalists were presenting events were favourable to the British establishment and biased against the Labour party. Unsurprisingly, the study has been criticised by broadcast companies as well as right-wing intellectuals who blamed the GUMG of bias against the broadcasters (McNair, 1999, p. 40). One of these critics has been Harrison (1985), who

analysed the same ITN transcripts as the GUMG. In addition to being able to challenge some of the arguments, he draws attention to the shortcomings of the method, as different interpretations can be made of the news transcripts depending on who is analysing them.

A more recent study of news content with revealing findings is that by Lewis, Inthorn, and Wahl-Jorgensen (2005), wherein they analyse the representation of citizenship in the content of television news and press in the UK and the USA at beginning of the 2000s. The findings indicate that, apart from the vox populi, that is, asking the people on the street for their opinions on various topical issues, an ordinary citizen, as it were, hardly makes an appearance in the news. As they (Lewis et al., 2005) argue:

> citizens have very little place within the conversation among elites that makes the news. Yet here [in vox pops] we have overwhelming evidence that citizens *are* being given a chance to comment on the news of the day in their own words. (p. 70)

Although Lewis et al. (2005) also note a few other opportunities for public participation in the media, such as talk shows and audience participation programmes in television, it is the ways in which people are portrayed in the news that is a cause of concern. The findings Lewis et al. (2005) put forward in this regard make alarming reading. To summarise some of the key observations (Lewis et al., 2005, p. 135), well over half of the claims concerning public opinion are not supported by any evidence, representation of active citizens such as protestors is very rare, and instead citizens tend to be portrayed as "passive observers", they have "feelings rather than opinions", and whilst they have "fears, impressions and desires", they are rarely depicted as providing solutions to problems. These findings, as the researchers conclude, suggest very little support for active, engaged citizenship (see also Eliasoph, 1998).

As has been shown, what is common to the arguments put forward thus far is that they say very little about the people who use or consume media contents, that is, what in the past were commonly called audiences. The notion of active audiences requires some attention here as way of connecting to why some people are becoming involved with media as producers of content and to understand better what role is reserved for people in some alternative models of media and communication, as well as to highlight that indeed the usage of media has been a rich topic for investigation. Thus, what tends to be called an active audience paradigm represents an enormous shift from the thinking of

the early part of the 1900s when media were seen as all-powerful and therefore they were thought to be able to "shape opinion and belief, to change habits of life and to mould behaviour more or less according to the will of their controllers", as McQuail (2000, p. 417) explains. The emergence of the notion of an active audience was preceded by a lengthy phase when studies focused on the various effects of media on different types of audiences that provided masses of, often, contradictory evidence (for review, McQuail, 2000, pp. 418-420).

2.3   From Active Audiences to Participants in Media Production

An active audience paradigm puts forward an argument of audiences that, rather than being passive receivers of media messages, as was intended by those sending the messages, are active in their media usage, and capable of creating their own meanings of media content and of using media in many ways and for a variety of purposes. Thus, for example, from the feminist perspective, it is argued that texts such as soap operas are consumed for pleasure (Ang, 1985) and romantic novels to resist the dominant culture (Radway, 1984). On the other hand, some of the research on active audiences has related to increased consumer choice, such as, for example, Hebdige's engaging (1979, 1988) work on subcultures.

Many researchers have chosen to focus on television (e.g., Fiske 1989/1999, 1987; Lull, 1980; Morley 1992; Silverstone, 1994), which is not surprising given its prominent place in media culture and people's lives. In the field of postmodern theory, television has been seen to be at the heart of our culture as a medium that endorses the aestheticisation of everyday life and promotes consumption through advertising and an endless flow of images for which a viewer may create new meanings (Barker, 1997). In general, criticism of the theories of active audiences have deemed at least some of them, such as certain claims made by Fiske (1987) about television viewers, to be overoptimistic about the audiences' ability to generate their own, resistant readings of media content (Alasuutari, 1999, p. 10).

As new technologies have come to facilitate "many to many" and "peer to peer" exchanges of information in addition to the "one to many" communication dominating the mass media that were of interest in the active audience paradigm, more recent studies have been focusing on how audiences interact with so-called new media, such as the Internet, and how they use the various technologies in their everyday lives (Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). The Internet and those of its features that allow the

sharing of information online have been of interest in communication research in which interactivity is generally seen to relate to the ways in which "they [new media systems] afford users more selectivity in their choices of information sources and interactions with other people" (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006, p. 25) than do mass media (for research on interactivity online, see, for example, Bakardjieva, 2005; McMillan, 2002).

One approach has been to explore the audiences' opportunities to interact with the media directly. In the mainstream media, until relatively recent developments of media organisations encouraging their audiences to provide feedback, story ideas and to ask questions via email (Schultz, 2000), and to offer content, the suitability for publication of which is then determined by the media organisation (Thurman, 2008; Vujnovic et al., 2010), interaction between media organisations and their audiences has been limited. As Beckett (2008) puts it, "Apart from the cash-price exchange, direct contact with the consumer was typically through cross-word competitions and letters pages" (p. 48). The other two major ways in which the mainstream media traditionally, and still commonly, it seems, have endeavoured to include the voice of the public in media content, or at least their opinion, are the vox pops, and referring to results of opinion polls.

Deuze's (2003) model of four different types of online journalism highlights how, in comparison to other types of online journalism sites, which he has termed "index and category sites", "meta and comment sites" and "share and discussion sites", the media production in the "mainstream news sites" (p. 205) is "where users may participate, but their communicative acts are subject to strict editorial moderation and control" (Deuze, 2003, p. 207). Deuze (2003) concludes: "Mainstream news sites tend to translate the traditional way of doing things to the web, repurposing not only their content, but also their journalistic culture (including relationships with publics)" (p. 219). Thus, what is implied here is that the ways in which the mainstream media online facilitate audience participation in fact do very little to re-address the imbalance of power between the media professionals (who control the content) and users (who offer content for publication).

It is hoped that the discussion thus far has conveyed the current state of turmoil the mainstream media are experiencing, and how many of the ways in which they operate do little to support active citizenship. What will be discussed next are some of the remedies that have been proposed to address this myriad of shortcomings.

2.4   Remedying the Mainstream Media and the Alternative Visions

As outlined above, arguments put forward from a number of perspectives have come to demonstrate that the mainstream media are struggling to fulfil their democratic role. It has been argued not only that there is a need for the revitalisation of the mainstream media, but also that there is room for other, alternative forms of media. Before focusing on the latter, it is helpful to discuss briefly two different ways in which the public service mission of the mainstream media could be re-invigorated. The first one aims to offer a way forward for journalism, whereas the latter proposes the restructuring of a media system.

The public journalism movement has been one of the prominent models aiming to provide a solution to the some of problems with journalism. The movement is rooted, according to Rosenberry and St. John III (2010b, p. 2), in the ideas expressed already in the 1920s by John Dewey (1927), a press critic and educator, about the role of the press in encouraging public debate. It is not a surprising that the movement originated in the USA, where, as McChesney (2004) forcefully argues, many of the problems with the media are particularly rife because of "inadequate journalism and hyper-commercialism" (p. 11), which are linked to neoliberal media policies that are seen to sustain first and foremost the commercial media's quest for maximum profits.

Merritt (2010), one of the key advocates of the public journalism movement, provides an informative account of the circumstances in the USA under which the movement was born:

> A healthy civic conversation requires shared information (which is what journalism theoretically provides) and a way to discuss the implications of that information. Participation in that conversation was waning, as evidenced by declining voter participation and high levels of distrust in institutions – pointedly including politics and the press. People increasingly withdrew into private niches and away from public life, and problems went unsolved because of an increasingly polarized ideological divide. (p. 21)

The public journalism movement emphasises that journalists should first and foremost aim to "promote active citizen participation in democratic processes" (Haas, 2007, p. 3). In other words, journalism should help to (re-)engage citizens in public life, even if it sometimes means departing from the journalistic principles of neutrality and objectivity, or rather, as Merritt (1998) argues, these ethics should be understood differently (for a discussion of public journalism, see Haas, 2007; Glasser & Craft,

1998; Merritt, 1998; Rosen, 1996; Schudson, 1998). Merritt (1998) proclaims from his point of view as a journalist:

> We can maintain professional objectivity while not being detached from the implications of what we do. We can care whether public life goes well and yet report accurately and fairly on whether or not it goes well. (p. 25)

A major shift from traditional journalism comes from the way in which supporters of public journalism see that journalists should do their work in their capacity as citizens, and not try to separate these two identities (Rosen, 1996, p. 81). Central to public journalism is also the call for greater accountability of the media to the public. On a practical level, it is thought the media should be more transparent about how they operate and what links they have and with whom (Rosen, 1996, p. 71).

In a recent formulation of public journalism, Haas (2007) argues for journalism where "journalists should share their authority with citizens by instituting various formal and informal means of involving citizens in the settings of the news media agenda" (p. 47). Thus, the possibility of citizen involvement in the process of making the news is implied here. A radical extension to this proposition has been how the various ways in which citizens make media of their own has been noted to further the ideals of public journalism, prompting Nip (2006) to call this development the "second phase of public journalism."

Rather than of journalism, the transformation of a media system has been the aim of Curran (2005), one of the outspoken critics of the traditional liberal approach. He has put forward an alternative model for a healthy media system in democracies. Curran's (2005, p. 139) proposition rests on a premise that the media should consist of components, each of which are important and serve a different role in a democracy and therefore contribute to a greater pluralism. Thus, Curran (2005, p. 139) distinguishes between four components, namely, private, civic, social market, and professional sectors; at the core of these four is the public service television "where different individuals and groups come together to engage in a reciprocal debate about the management of society" (Curran, 2005, p. 139).

The private sector is the one that comes closest to the currently prevalent minimally regulated free market system and, in Curran's (2005, p. 143) model, is designed to cater mainly for media usage for entertainment purposes. The professional sector is aimed at providing a range of high quality media content that requires an input of what Curran (2005) calls "professional communicators" (p. 142). Social market

media, subsidized by the state, would provide an outlet for minority programme makers and cutting edge productions. The civic media sector is where the media of civil society organisations, social movements and party-controlled media are located (Curran, 2005, p. 140). Thus, in Curran's model, alternative media, situated in the civic media sector, have their place alongside the other types of media.

Frequently, alternative media are seen as a critical response to the mainstream media. As Atton (2008b) argues:

> We have become so used to the commercialised and professionalized mass media that we consider it as a natural status quo … Media power does not always have to lie with professionals and experts within institutions … Alternative media challenge the structures of the mass media; they appear more democratic and socially inclusive. (pp. 215-216)

Therefore, it is argued that alternative media denaturalise the power of the media by their ability to challenge the mainstream media's construction of reality through representing mainly those who hold a status of a political or economic authority or an expert in society (Atton, 2008b, p. 216). Moreover, as alternative media scholars such as Coyer (2005) and Downing (2001) have noted, how these media are organised is one way in which they tend to differ from the mainstream media. Another way of doing it differently from the mainstream media, which has been the focus, for example, in Rodriguez's (2001) study, is the ability of alternative media, or as Rodriguez calls them "citizens' media", to act as a channel of political and social empowerment for people who may have been either underprivileged or subordinated.

It is to the media's democratic deficit, heightened by the commercialisation of the media, not least because of neoliberal communication policies, that various forms of media activism, such as influencing policymaking and creating autonomous spaces for communication outside the mainstream media, seek to react (Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Allan, 2006, p. 123). At the heart of media activism is the notion of communication and of being heard as a democratic right (Hackett & Carroll, 2006). Whether media activism should be seen as a new type of social movement or as building alliances between existing movements, and whether media activism is mainly radical or reformist in its aims are questions to which scholars such as Hackett and Carroll (2006) have sought an answer, but regarding which they found no conclusive evidence.

Participation is an essential concept for understanding how various alternative media where people can exercise their right to communicate, function. Participation in this context refers to the ways in which people can participate in the content production

of media and in discussing and making decisions concerning their organisation (Bailey et al., 2008, pp. 15-16). To probe further into participatory media, it is useful to consider Carpentier's (2007, pp. 113-115) typology of participatory media organisations. Carpentier (2007, p. 114) delineates between participatory media organisations that produce participatory outcomes at the macro level, and at the micro level aim to facilitate access, interaction and participation or only access and interaction, but not participation (Carpentier, 2007; also Deuze, 2003, 2007). Organisations can be either membership or non-membership based, which adds another dimension to the model. This mapping of participatory and semi-participatory media organisations highlights one of the key differences between participatory media organisations, as some offer the highest level of participation, unlike others, where reporters take part in content production, but are not involved in making operational decisions.

To return to Curran's (2005) model, it does little or nothing to accommodate the possibility that ordinary people would become involved in the production of media as authors of media texts rather than being their audiences. The Internet, which is where much of the recent developments in participatory journalism take place, is mentioned only in passing in Curran's (2005, p. 144) formulation and only in relation to how global civil society has made use of the Internet for debate, and for the distribution of information as well as for organisation. Yet, as at least some peoples' practices on the Internet shift between using media, producing content for them, re-circulating already published information and participating in discussions, people's engagement with media cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the reception and usage of media content.

The traditional news media organisations have had to adapt to the challenges of the digital age. The mainstream media have not only been trying to discover profitable ways of producing and distributing news online with expectations for the news to be updated 24/7, but they have also been increasingly finding themselves in competition with numerous other sources of political and other information available on the Internet and often without charge (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2005, p. 105). Bagdikian (2004) noted already several years ago: "The Internet has already become both a competitor against the printed news industry and also an adjunct to it" (p. 56). If anything, it seems that the role of the Internet has become even more crucial in the strategies of the mainstream media organisations, and it has even been predicted that eventually newspapers will cease to exist in print, or rather, that many of them will move to the Internet completely. However, as most journalists reportedly still work in print media (Deuze, 2007, p. 167), the vision of a printless press does seem still rather distant.

The impact of new technologies not only concerns the media as businesses, but also, of course, the very practices of journalism. Thus, Deuze (2007) has argued that journalists have had to "retool and diversify their skillset to produce more work in the same amount of time under ongoing deadline pressures for one or more media" (p. 155). Another significant change noted by Deuze (2007, p. 156) is that journalists can no longer make a claim for a professional status as intermediaries between the origins of the news and the audiences when potentially anyone can produce information online.

The following section offers an overview of the notion of civic engagement and the potential of the Internet for its various modes as a way of setting the scene for the organising framework in the thesis, which is that of the circuit of civic cultures.

2.5   Civic Engagement and the Internet

Park and Perry (2008) define civic engagement as "citizens' individual and collective involvement in public affairs' encompassing "a variety of forms of political and non-political activities" (pp. 238-239). Thus, as they point out (Park & Perry, 2008):

> Civic engagement may be electoral or nonelectoral. *Electoral engagement* involves election and campaigns, while *nonelectoral engagement* is related to participation in general (non-partisan) politics, government policies, or community issues. Some civic engagements are deliberative in a sense that they accompany exchange of information and opinions among citizens. (p. 239)

It has been argued that civic engagement, such as voter turnout, is in decline in many Western democracies, for example, in the USA (Patterson, 2002; Wattenberg, 2002). Putnam (2000), in his analysis of the situation in the USA, concluded that from voting and involvement in both political parties and campaigns to active participation in various voluntary associations and religious organisations, levels of involvement are decreasing. Although in general the trend is that the electoral turnout is in decline in addition to the USA, for example, in the UK and in Northern Europe (Helin & Nurmi, 2004, p. 2), a good turnout in the latest presidential election in the USA shows that people are active in some circumstances, even young people, whose voting turnout normally tends to be lower[9] than the average. This certainly was the case with the 2008 USA presidential election (Tisdall, 2008).

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[9] For example, Couldry, Livingstone and Markham (2010, p. 17) note young people's low voting turnout in Japan and the UK.

Putnam's (2000) - at the time of its publication - highly influential account of declining civic engagement has since been challenged by much research suggesting that rather than a downward spiral in all civic participation, we are seeing a shift in the ways in which people are politically active (Bennett, 2008; Coleman and Blumler, 2009; Dalton, 2008; Lewis et al., 2005). Coleman and Blumler (2009) summarise this change as follows: "In the past 30 years participation in formal politics has declined, but citizens are participating much more in informal, nongovernmental, sporadic ways" (p. 159). The argument, which certainly seems plausible, is that whilst in mature democracies electoral turnout has decreased, this signals peoples' disengagement with and disappointment in party politics rather than in all things political. This perception is supported by many current modes of civic engagement that are extra-parliamentary, and in which some, but of course not all people are engaged. Examples are social activism, such as the emergence of so-called new social movements (Melucci, 1989; for a collection of articles Laraña, Johnson, & Gusfield, 1994) that often have as their focus issues that affect people on a planetary scale (e.g., the environmental movement), and mass demonstrations, for example, against the invasion of Iraq, as well as issue-specific local campaigns.

Couldry, Livingstone, and Markham's (2010) research on people's daily practices including media consumption, and how these practices are linked to their sense of agency, provides a valuable contribution to the discussion on civic engagement. The key conclusions they put forward concerning what would encourage people's civic engagement are as follows (Couldry et al., 2010):

> What will sustain mediated pubic [*sic*] connection best in the long run is citizens' sense that if they follow the public world, that knowledge may contribute to their agency in that world, and that agency may in turn make a difference. (pp. 194-195)

Thus, the convincing argument here is that people who do not believe that their engagement in public life is taken seriously are not likely to become engaged.

The important question in relation to the political role of the Internet is how the availability of "mechanisms for the exchange of views and information" online is changing political communication (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2005, p. 105). Attention has been drawn not only to the effect of the Internet on citizens' uses of political communication (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2005, p. 105), but also to what opportunities the Internet affords for different forms of civic engagement, who takes them up and under

what conditions. Thus, the civic potential of the Internet in both official political (Bimber & Davis, 2003) and extra-parliamentary political settings (Van de Donk, Loader, Nixon, & Rucht, 2004; de Jong et al., 2005) has been extensively researched and widely debated (Barnett, 1998; Axford & Huggins, 2001). In the dystopian end of the evaluations have been those who have argued that the impact of the Internet on challenges to the existing political status quo is not significant (Margolis & Resnick, 2000; Hill & Hughes, 1998) and that attempts to incorporate e-democracy into political decision-making can hardly be hailed as great successes (Malina, 2003).

More optimistic have been those who have argued that the Internet facilitates, at least potentially, new public spaces for discussion that typically are independent of the official political organisations (Dahlberg, 2001; Hauben & Hauben, 1997; Tambini, 1999; Villarreal Ford & Gil, 2001). As Coleman and Blumler (2009) have noted: "By reducing the cost of finding, contacting and maintaining communication links with others, the Internet has made it much easier for dispersed groups of people to form associations, share knowledge and mobilise for political action" (p. 117). Providing several examples of successful mobilisations from around the world, Downing and Brooten (2007) show that many political movements have employed effectively the Internet and ICTs more generally, such as, for example, mobile phones (for various social movements' uses of ICTs two collections are particularly useful: McCaughey & Ayers, 2003; Van de Donk et al., 2004).

It is common to conceptualise the Internet as a public sphere that facilitates civic engagement online (Dahlgren, 2005; Dahlgren & Olsson, 2009; Papacharissi, 2002; Sassi, 2001). For example, Dahlgren (2005, p. 153), thus drawing on Habermas' (1962/1989) notion of the public sphere as a consensual space for a rational debate between equal participants about issues of public interest, has identified five types of online public spheres: government-led e-democracy initiatives, the advocacy and activist domain, civic forums for debate amongst citizens, the parapolitical domain for cultural and social topics and the journalism domain, which Dahlgren (2005) sees as "the core element of the public sphere on the Internet" (p. 153).

However, the notion of the Internet as a public sphere has also been contested in a number of ways, and it is worth considering here some of the key arguments for why that is. Dean (2003) rejects the notion of the public sphere completely. She (Dean, 2003) argues that the spaces on the Internet "are produced by and reproduce communicative capitalism. In an odd way, the ideal of autonomous spheres and freefloating, spontaneous reasons and values seems a fantasy of a disconnected life, a

life liberated from the networks of global corporate technoculture" (p. 104). Instead, Dean (2003) rather convincingly argues, the dream of spaces for a debate based on reason and equality, and autonomous of communicative capitalism must be abandoned, as "the Web is a site of conflict. And this conflictual, contested dimension of the Web needs to be emphasized" (p. 107). Dean's (2003) proposition is something she calls "neodemocracy" where the emphasis is on the decisive action and the aim of reaching outcomes rather than on what she describes as "communicative capitalism's endless reflexive circuits of discussion" (p. 110). However, somewhat disappointingly, Dean has practically nothing to say about how the spaces of neodemocracy come about and how they are sustained, beyond a few references to issue networks and protests against G8 and the World Bank (Dean, 2003, p. 110).

Unlike Dean (2003), others, such as Papacharissi (2002) and Sparks (2005), do not challenge the usefulness of the notion of a public sphere per se, but rather focus on the reasons for why the Internet cannot be called a public sphere, at least not yet, or why it does not meet the criteria of a "global public sphere" (Volkmer, 2003), or a "transnational public sphere" (Cammaerts & van Audenhove, 2005; Fraser, 2007). The latter two are terms that some scholars have brought into the discussion to highlight the potential and the role of the Internet in the globalised world. What tends to be central to the debates of whether a global or translational public sphere is emerging is how the role of the nation state should be understood, which is the context to which the Habermasian conception of the public was bound (Fraser, 2007). Fraser (2007) offers a plausible solution to the challenge:

> The all-affected principle holds that what turns a collection of people into fellow members of a public is not shared citizenship, but their co-imbrication in a common set of structures and/or institutions that affect their lives. For any given problem, accordingly, the relevant public should match the reach of those life-conditioning structures whose effects are at issue (Fraser, 2005). Where such structures transgress the borders of states, the corresponding public spheres must be transnational. Failing that, the opinion that they generate cannot be considered legitimate. (p. 22)

Those who have focused on more practical challenges in the notion of the Internet as a public sphere have pointed out issues such as the inequalities between people around the world regarding the access to and skills in the use of the Internet, how the spaces online for discussion tend to be dominated by a few even if in principle they are open to many, and how they are not necessarily used for the democratic means (e.g., Papacharissi, 2002; Sparks, 2005). Some critics have reported that the behaviour by the people who

post messages online and the quality of their contributions often leaves much to be desired (Noam, 2002; Wilhelm, 2000). However, some caution is advisable here because the interpretation of findings depends on what expectations there were in the first place concerning the ideal type of behaviour and content.

Participatory journalism practices online and the related activity of posting comments about other people's articles is yet another mode of current non-electoral civic engagement on the Internet. As Dahlgren (2009) has described the phenomenon:

> The evolution of journalism in the wake of the Internet has several dimensions, and certainly opens up new spaces for civic participation in the journalistic activity. The increasing "joint production," where citizens cooperate in various ways with mainstream journalists, is one area; the growing field of citizen journalism is another, represented by both activist organizations and individual bloggers. (p. 179)

Some scholars and media commentators have set out to determine the significance of participatory journalism by tracing various cases where people's journalistic activities have made a significant impact (Gillmor, 2006; Benkler, 2006). In these descriptions, participatory journalism by the means of peer production tends to be seen to occupy the mainstream media's role of a watchdog (Benkler, 2006, p. 264). One approach in scholarly work has aimed at providing conceptual tools for research on participatory media whilst noting their potential for civic engagement, such as Deuze's (2006) article on participatory culture in general and minority media, or what he calls "ethnic media" in particular. Another significant effort is Nip's (2006) typology of different types of participatory journalism in which, using the notion of public journalism as a starting point, she helpfully considers participation in both media production and in the organisation for participatory media. However, it must be noted that the label "citizen journalism" that Nip (2006, p. 218) grants to Indymedia, where citizens can participate in many ways, not just by producing media content, is rejected in this thesis for the reasons that were indicated in the introduction and that will be looked at in more detail in Chapter 6.

The empirical research on participatory journalism that has aimed to take into account the civic engagement aspect focuses largely on bloggers' practices, such as, for example, Keren's (2006) research on USA-based bloggers and Couldry's (2010) study on bloggers in the UK. However, some interesting research has emerged also on participatory journalism practices on websites that mainly offer news and information,

such as Bentley et al. (2006, 2007) and Sutton's (2006) studies, the findings of which are, however, limited by their single case study design and reliance on survey data.

A useful analytic construct for examining various modes of civic engagement is that of civic cultures. This concept was introduced by Almond and Verba (1963) in the 1960s in their ambitious landmark research, which, by comparing survey data from five countries, analysed citizens' attitudes towards political processes and institutions sustaining a stable democracy.

2.6   A Framework for Research on Civic Cultures

Drawing on the research of Almond and Verba (1963), Dahlgren (2009) notes "civic cultures is a framework intended to help analyze the conditions that are necessary for – that promote or hinder – political engagement" (p. 103). The notion of civic cultures rests on two important premises. The first one is that people's identities as citizens are rooted in a wider cultural and social milieu and that rather than being fixed they are being constantly negotiated (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 102-103). Second is that in our complex late modern societies there can be a number of modes of civic engagement (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 103). Hence, there is a significant departure from Almond and Verba's (1963) work in which civic engagement was seen largely in terms of electoral participation.

Dahlgren's (2009) construct for the empirical analysis of civic engagement consists of a circle of six interconnected dimensions that, in his most recent formulation, are spaces, knowledge, values, trust, practices and identities. In the earlier versions, there have been between five and six dimensions. In the model consisting of five aspects of civic cultures, spaces is absent and, instead of trust, one of the dimensions is affinity, which Dahlgren (2005) describes as "a minimal sense of commonality among citizens in heterogonous late modern societies" (p. 158). As will be discussed below, this aspect is included in the values dimension in his recent, most comprehensive framework. Perhaps the most significant difference between Dahlgren's (2003) early analytic frame of civic cultures and the latest one (Dahlgren, 2009) is that in the former, "discussion" was put forward as one of the six dimensions, whereas in the latter it is considered in relation to spaces and practices.

Of the spaces, Dahlgren (2009) notes: "For democracy to happen, citizens must be able to encounter and talk to each other. They need access to each other to develop their collective political efforts, and contexts in which they can act together" (p. 114).

Dahlgren (2009, p. 116) acknowledges the opportunities that the Internet offers for civic encounters in loose networks that can stretch across national borders. However, the broader societal and cultural context, as Dahlgren (2009, p. 116) acknowledges, matters even in virtual environments. Although Dahlgren (2009) stresses the importance of the existence of communicative contexts, he does not discuss further their role in facilitating civic engagement, nor under which conditions spaces for civic engagement succeed or fail.

Even if focusing on communicative spaces for participatory journalism practices, it seems helpful to use as a starting point the notion of communicative spaces as media organisations, that is, as sites where media production takes place. McQuail (2000) notes about traditional media organisations: "The media organization, where the media content is 'made', is an essential link in the process of mediation by which 'society addresses itself'" (p. 244). McQuail (2000, p. 246) identifies two central questions within the organisational theory on media that are, first, the extent to which media organisations have autonomy in society, such as how they are governed and regulated and what kind of "unwritten social and cultural guidelines" (McQuail, 2000, p. 249) underlie the ways in which the media operate. The second question concerns the internal processes of media production within the media organisation, such as procedures, routines and values (McQuail, 2000, p. 246).

A range of factors have been noted to affect media production and ultimately the content. These include media legislation, various types of self-censorship on the organisational level that typically arise in the corporate media from their need to apply the market logic of profit making to media production, but sometimes also from the owners' interests, advertisers' influence, organisational routines and media workers' attitudes (Croteau & Hoynes, 2006; Shoemaker & Reese, 1991). How exactly, and to what extent these factors shape the media production depends on the media organisation and on the context in which it operates.

Many structural aspects of media production in relation to news were considered earlier in the chapter. The discussion did not, however, address the autonomy of journalists in media production. With this regard, Louw's (2001) insight seems plausible:

> … it is possible for journalists to be simultaneously agents of the powerful and autonomous beings, that is they are not simply the play-things of the powerful, but are ensnared in webs of discourse and practice which set parameters on autonomy. Essentially, each news-making site has its own set

of preferred practices and discourses which "guide" the work of the journalists working at that site. (pp. 155-156)

Although journalists who work for the corporate media can be seen, on the one hand, as autonomous agents, on the other hand, their practices are embedded in often routinised work practices of media organisations that tend to have a hierarchical structure and employ a top-down decision-making process (Louw, 2001). It is important to note here, following Louw (2001, p. 157), that just because the media production is situated in newer communicative spaces such as the Internet, this does not mean that it is automatically different.

In the context of alternative media, the rhizomatic model is helpful in conceptualising a communicative space for civic engagement. The notion of a rhizome, employed by Carpentier et al. (2003; see also Bailey et al., 2008, p. 26) to conceptualise alternative media, refers to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) metaphor of thinking that is nomadic, non-linear, and anarchic. The rhizomatic approach aims to overcome what is seen as a weakness in other models of alternative and community media, which tend to overemphasize certain aspects of them, such as perceiving alternative media as diametrically opposite to the mainstream media, giving prominence to them serving a usually geographically bound community (i.e., the community media approach) or positioning them as an integral part of the civil society (for discussion on these three models, see Bailey et al., 2008).

Regarding community media as a rhizome, Carpentier et al. (2003) argue that:

Both their embeddedness in a fluid civil society (as part of a larger network) and their antagonistic relationship towards the state and the market (as alternative to mainstream public and commercial media) make the identity of community media highly elusive. In this approach it is argued that this elusiveness and contingency, as is the case for a rhizome, forms its main defining element. (p. 61)

Rhizomatic media are located within the broad realm of civil society, the concept of which has become a highly contested. Cohen and Arato's (1994) definition of civil society as a "sphere of social interaction between economy and state, composed above all of the intimate sphere (especially the family), the sphere of associations (especially voluntary associations), social movements, and forms of public communication" (p. ix), captures a common conception of civil society as separate from state and economy. The rhizomatic approach challenges this strict separation by stressing "the linkages alternative media (and other civil organisations) can establish with (segments of) the

state and the market, without losing their proper identity and becoming incorporated and/or assimilated", although the risk of losing independence is seen as a possible threat to rhizomatic media (Bailey et al., 2008, pp. 28, 30).

The model of rhizomatic media aims to highlight several aspects of alternative media, such as their fluidity, diversity and elusiveness (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 27). Hence, the approach stresses how the organisations of rhizomatic media are flexible - for example, they can emerge and sometimes also disappear quickly - which enables them to challenge more rigid mainstream media structures and practices (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 27). The rhizomatic media model puts an emphasis on how alternative media are varied, for example, because they can be local or global or part of larger network, but still mainly local in reach (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 27). A further important aspect to rhizomatic media is "their catalytic role in functioning as the crossroads where different type of movements and struggles meet and collaborate" (Bailey et al., 2008, p. 29).

To address the second point about the spaces for civic engagement, that is, what affects their success, it is helpful to consider briefly the literature of alternative media, as it has drawn attention to a number of organisational challenges that threaten their viability. These have to do on the one hand with economic sustainability and on the other with the organisation of alternative media. Therefore, one of the commonly noted dilemmas for alternative media is finding a funding model that does not lead to them having to sacrifice their independence from the market forces (Atton, 2002, pp. 32-39; Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 131). In comparison to the mainstream media, much of the alternative media tend to have fewer options for securing a steady stream of funding, as they typically reject revenue from advertising and rely on donations (Atton, 2002). Unstable funding can lead to difficulties in retaining staff and hamper the effective distribution of alternative media. Those alternative media that are dependent on volunteers for labour are also vulnerable to shortages in human resources.

Other challenges of alternative media as a realm of media activism have been noted as being poor organisation, lack of strategy or inadequately defined common goals (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 131). The notion of small voluntary organisations is helpful in discussing the organisational challenges for media that are volunteer-run. In this sense what Rochester (1999) calls the member/activist model of voluntary organisations is useful; drawing on the work of Billis (1993), he defines it as an "association, a group of people who have come together to pursue a common goal, have drawn a boundary around themselves by distinguishing between members and non-members, and have adopted a set of rules by which their affairs are regulated" (p. 15).

In comparison with other types of voluntary associations that have paid staff, the member/activist model may appear somewhat simpler. However, it has been argued that these types of organisations face a number of challenges. Harris (1998) identifies five, the first and second of which are the balancing act on the one hand between the goals of an association and the needs of volunteers, and on the other between "member-benefit goals and public-benefit goals and activities" (pp. 147-148). The third is the internal disagreements between volunteers about the goals of an association whereas the fourth is the difficulties there may be in managing volunteers (Harris, 1998, pp. 149-151). The fifth challenge concerns associations that employ paid staff, as apprehension between staff and volunteers is a well-documented occurrence in research into no-profit making organisations (Billis, 1993; Bishop & Hoggett, 1986).

Knowledge, the second dimension in Dahlgren's analytic frame, refers to not only access to various types of information that inform civic engagement, but also to an ability to obtain, disseminate and in some cases generate information (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 109). The role of knowledge acquisition in civic cultures varies. As Dahlgren (2009) notes:

> Some [civic cultures] no doubt tend to rest more on established background knowledge – which may even become outdated and ossified as ideological truths – while others are more continuously dealing with new information and thereby revising knowledge and even some political perceptions. (p. 110)

The kind of information that is circulated in the media and the other sources of information to which people have access are, therefore, seen to feed into the formation of their political views. In journalism, information is the currency, as it is what people are offered, but it is also what journalists need to be able produce media content.

Values, in Dahlgren's (2009, p. 111) formulation, are the universal principles that underpin a democracy. There are two basic types of values. As Dahlgren (2009) explains: "We can distinguish between substantive values such as equality, liberty, justice, solidarity, and tolerance, and procedural ones, like openness, reciprocity, discussion, and responsibility/accountability" (p. 111). In the periods of political turmoil, democratic values are particularly important, as they can prevent society from sliding into total chaos by providing some ground rules for finding solutions.

For democracy to function, trust, the third aspect of the civic cultures framework, is of vital importance. It has been traditionally understood as trust between citizens and political organisations and their representatives, but as Dahlgren (2009, p. 114) notes,

the interest in trust has expanded, for example, to various civil society contexts. For Dahlgren (2009, p. 112), trust in the civic cultures framework relates mainly to the ways in which trust is established between individuals or groups of citizens. Moreover, Dahlgren (2009, p. 112) proposes an analysis of how, drawing on Putnam's work (2000, pp. 136-137), two types of trust come into play in these relationships. These are thick trust between people who know each other personally, and thin trust between people who do not. About the importance of thin trust in civic contexts, Dahlgren (2009) rightly argues that it "becomes the salient mode for the loose bonds and networking relationships of civic participation" (p. 113), as without some level of trust such networks could not function.

Drawing on the work of Granovetter (1973, 1983), this type of connectivity between people has been conceptualised in network theory as weak ties (Haythornthwaite, 2005; Kavanaugh et al., 2005). Haythornthwaite (2005, p. 127) argues that the strength of weak ties is that people with whom weak ties are formed come from different social circles, which leads to an exposure to new ideas, contacts and resources. The strength of strong ties that are formed between people who know each other in person, such as close friends and co-workers, is that people are motivated to share between them resources and information (Haythornthwaite, 2005, p. 128). The opposite is seen to be the case with weak ties (Haythornthwaite, 2005, p. 128).

Practices are the concrete acts of civic engagement, such as voting or deliberating issues of public interest. Dahlgren (2009) argues:

> …practices help generate personal and social meaning to the ideal of democracy, and they must have an element of the routine, of the taken-for-granted about them if they are to be part of a civic culture… To engage in practices contributes to experience, which can in turn serve to empower citizens. (pp. 116-117)

Moreover, practices can both evolve over time and develop into traditions (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 118). They are learnt, and an important aspect of practices is therefore the skills that enable civic engagement to occur (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 117). Obviously, different skills are required depending on the practice. However, as deliberation is seen as a fundamental practice of civic engagement, Dahlgren (2009), drawing on the work of Agre (2004), places emphasis not only on communicative and social skills, but also on "practices well beyond deliberation, such as mobilizing, bargaining, disruption, and even civil disobedience" (p. 98) that tend to precede bringing issues into the public domain.

In the context of civic talk, the notion of the nature of political culture is relevant. It is, therefore, helpful to consider Mouffe's vision of agonistic pluralism as an alternative to what Dahlgren (2009, p. 99) calls the Habermasian tradition of deliberative democracy. The two formulations provide a significantly different vision of the democratic ideal on the whole, but here the interest is in those aspects that have relevance for practices of civic talk. The deliberative democracy is described by Benhabib (1996) as follows:

> According to the deliberative model of democracy, it is a necessary condition for attaining legitimacy and rationality with regard to collective decision making processes in a polity, that the institutions of this polity are so arranged that what is considered in the common interest of all results from processes of collective deliberation constructed rationally and fairly among free and equal individuals. (p. 69)

Thus, in this framework, the legitimacy of institutions of democracy is based on the assumed ability of free and equal citizens to come together in a rational debate that leads to an agreement. The critics of the deliberative approach argue (Fraser, 1992; Mouffe, 2000a) that its pursuit of consensus tends to override concerns of the role of power (sometimes even coercion, see Mansbridge, 1996) in democracy, which is seen as central in agonistic pluralism, as will be discussed shortly.

In addition to access to all citizens and the aim of achieving a rational consensus, there is another characteristic in what has come to be commonly described as the public sphere, following Habermas' (1964/1974) highly influential formulation of "a realm of social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed" (p. 49). That is, when debating public matters, "They [citizens] behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy", as Habermas (1964/1974, p. 49) argues (see also Habermas, 1962/1989).

To sum up, the key characteristics of the public sphere are that deliberation is rational, that the public sphere is inclusive, that it is independent from private and economic interests and the state and that reaching consensus is possible. Despite the widely debated limitations of Habermas' original account of the public sphere, such as its historical inaccuracy (Calhoun, 1992; Curran, 1991; Keane, 1991) and its failure to acknowledge the inequality in the distribution of power leading to the formation of multiple (counter) public spheres (Fraser, 1992), the notion of the public sphere has retained significance in theorisations of media and democracy (Sparks, 2005).

In her radical-pluralist approach, Mouffe (1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2005a, 2005b; see also Laclau & Mouffe, 2001) challenges many of the fundamental attributes in the Habermasian deliberative democracy. She criticises the ideal of consensus and the failure of the discursive deliberative model to acknowledge that power is constitutive of all social relations (Mouffe ,2000a, 2000b). As Mouffe (2000b) argues:

> One of the shortcomings of the deliberative approach is that, by postulating the availability of a public sphere where power would have been eliminated and where a rational consensus could be realized, this model of democratic politics is unable to acknowledge the dimension of antagonism that the pluralism of values entails and its ineradicable character. (p. 13)

Therefore, Mouffe (1996) believes that the idea of "a rational political consensus - that is, one that would not be based on any form of exclusion" (p. 254) must be abandoned as conceptually impossible. This does not mean that compromises would not be possible, but means that they are always temporary (Mouffe, 2000b, p. 16). Nor does this propose ignoring that there is a need for equality and liberty as values that must be accepted even by those who disagree about them (Mouffe, 2000a, p. 121). Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) take on radical and plural democracy, which builds on Gramsci's concept of hegemony in conjunction with the work of post-structuralists such as Derrida and Lacan, forms the basis for Mouffe's (2000a, 2000b, 2005a, 2005b) later formulations of power and hegemony. She (Mouffe, 2000b) argues:

> Since any political order is the expression of a hegemony, of a specific pattern of power relations, political practice cannot be envisaged in simply representing the interests of pre-constituted identities, but in constituting those identities themselves in a precarious and always vulnerable way. (p. 14)

What follows then is that instead of aiming to eradicate power from social relations, the tasks for democratic political order is to discover "forms of power more compatible with democratic values" (Mouffe, 2000b, p. 14).

The conflictual "political" should be distinguished from "politics" by which Mouffe means political institutions "through which an order is created, organising human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political" (Mouffe, 2005a, p. 9). Thus, the political is "a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition" (Mouffe, 2005b, p. 3). Understanding the political this way includes extra-parliamentary political projects such

as social and political movements and community initiatives as essential spaces of the political, and thus guards against narrower visions of what should be seen as political.

In relation to confrontational spaces of the political, the distinction between antagonism, which refers to a relationship between enemies who aim to destroy each other, and agonism, by which is meant adversaries who recognize and respect each other's legitimacy, is important (Mouffe, 2000a, pp. 101-103). For Mouffe (2000b, p. 16), achieving a true plurality of competing and conflicting views in a debate means accepting confrontation. Another fundamental departure from the deliberative model stressing the importance of rational consensus is that agonistic pluralism acknowledges "passions" as the key component in motivating active citizenship (Mouffe, 2005a, pp. 24-25). Thus, unlike for deliberative democracy, "for 'agonistic pluralism', the prime task of democratic politics is not to eliminate passions from the sphere of the public, in order to render a rational consensus possible, but to mobilise those passions towards democratic designs" (Mouffe, 2000a, p. 103). The notion of passions in people's expression of their identities brings the discussion back to Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures framework and its sixth dimension, namely, identity.

By an identity, Dahlgren (2009, p. 118) refers to an ability to see oneself as an active member in society. The other five dimensions in his framework contribute to the formation of civic identities. Dahlgren (2009) explains how they are connected as follows:

> For example, identities build on knowledge and values, they can be reinforced by trust, and embodied in particular spaces via practices – pursuing issues by the use of civic skills –that in turns serve to reinforce identities. (Alternatively, the spiral can of course be negative, downward.) (p. 119)

Civic identities, Dahlgren (2009) reminds us, are not fixed but rather they "develop and evolve through experience, and experience is emotionally based" (p. 119). Here Dahlgren (2009) agrees with Mouffe (2005a), as he acknowledges the significance of "affective involvement" (p. 119).

Other facets of identities are that levels of involvement vary and people can have multiple civic identities and ways of enacting citizenship depending on the context (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 119). This, again, points to the possibility that civic engagement is not declining per se, but rather changing its forms, as discussed earlier. However, nor does it mean that the notion of legal citizenship with its rights, safeguards and responsibilities has become obsolete (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 120). It indicates that there are

other ways in which civic identities can bring about the "sense of being an empowered political agent" which, as Dahlgren (2009, pp. 120-121) argues can be boosted by involvement in a political community be it local (Delanty, 2003), virtual (Holmes, 1997; Rheingold, 1993), or imagined (Anderson, 2006; Dayan, 2005), to highlight just a few ways of describing a community, the concept of which has turned out to be highly elusive.

2.7   Researching Participatory Journalism as a Mode of Civic Engagement

There are two starting points in this study. The first one is that the media are in a transitional phase that is manifested in a number ways from the crisis of public communication to changes in the way media work. Part of the current development is the tightened competition not just between the mainstream media organisations, but also between them and other information providers. For example, the various ways of distributing information not least on the Internet by a number of players, frequently from outside the sphere of traditional media corporations, have come to challenge the mainstream media in their role as gatekeepers of information. Media organisations for participatory journalism play a part in this scenario.

The second starting point is the notion of a shift in the ways in which people are politically active. Therefore, unlike those who argue that lack of interest in political participation is increasing, this thesis rests on the premise that if the many modes of engaged citizenship beyond the most obvious ones, such as voting and involvement in conventional political campaigns, are included in our understanding of active citizenship and in that of the "political", it may be that it is too early to give in to (complete) pessimism. In relation to participatory journalism, it seems justified to assume that for those people engaging with media both as the users and producers of information, participatory journalism has become part of their repertoire of civic engagement.

Especially when considering the world's population, and not just that of the developed countries, only a minority of "active audiences", to borrow a term from audience studies, are involved in online participatory journalism as reporters. The visions of limitless opportunities of the Internet to democratise the media and to revitalise public communication through people's participation in the production of media content if only they are equipped with online access and appropriate tools, appear overoptimistic (Gillmor, 2006, p. xv; see also Rosen, 2008). However, the pessimistic

evaluations of the grave consequences of what Keen (2007) calls the "cult of an amateur", such as the loss of authority of the experts, the emergence of an unbearable cacophony of voices and the increased spreading of gossip and lies, also seem heavily exaggerated. Given the prominence of these two sentiments, it has become particularly important to explore the actual practices of participatory media of the people who are reporters and the conditions under which these practices take place.

Dahlgren's (2009) analytic framework of civic cultures offers a valuable tool for the analysis of the ways in which people practice participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement, and the factors that enhance or impede their involvement. Participatory media organisations located in a specific socio-cultural setting are the spaces within which reporters' practices are seen to be embedded. When researching participatory journalism, the focus is on not only how media organisations that facilitate reporters' practices shape their engagement, but also on the factors deriving from the broader socio-cultural environment that is likely to affect participatory journalism.

To analyse the economic and organisational aspects of participatory media the notion of rhizomatic media is employed, as it means the hybrid models of participatory media, such as OMNI, can be explored, and the ways in which not only hybrid, but also more alternative media like models of participatory media may be interconnected with the mainstream media. In relation to the economic sustainability of participatory media that is volunteer-run, such as the two Indymedia cases in this study, use is made of the organisational theories of voluntary associations on the one hand, and on the other, of the research into alternative media.

Mouffe's (2000a) model of agonistic pluralism is helpful in analysing media that aim to be participatory. Her (Mouffe, 2000a) political theory works on an abstract level, and it does not address how the confrontational, counter-hegemonic spaces come about, nor how they may be sustained, a point that Couldry (2006a, p. 65) has raised. A task for this research, then, is to begin by employing the notions of enemies and adversaries, to identify the factors that may affect the viability of participatory media as an agonistic online space.

Going back to Dahlgren's analytic frame of civic cultures and, more specifically, the dimension knowledge, in participatory journalism this is taken to relate to reporters having access to and gathering of information for the purpose of creating media content. Thus, knowledge is seen as an important element of reporters' practices. The skills that are required to be able to create media are another vital aspect of practices. However, the skills that are necessary can be expected to vary, for example, depending on the

format of a contribution, such as text, photographs, video or audio. The dimension of trust is explored as trust between facilitators of participatory media, such as editors of the websites and reporters.

The values that underpin practices are mainly what Dahlgren (2009) referred to as procedural values, such as openness, discussion and responsibility. The values have relevance when considering the participatory media organisations and when analysing how reporters for participatory media negotiate values such as various dimensions to objectivity in relation to their reporting. Moreover, it is helpful to consider values as journalism ethics both employed by individual reporters and induced by the participatory media organisations, to shed light on to what extent, if any, there are differences and similarities with the mainstream media and participatory media.

In the context of participatory media, an identity refers to people's ability to see themselves as reporters. Of interest in this research is what motivates people to create their own media and what they aim to achieve by posting content online. It is also considered part of reporters' other forms of civic engagement, such as voting and volunteering, to see if there is evidence to suggest that there has been a shift from what Bennett (2008) has called being a dutiful citizen to being an actualising citizen.

2.8 Conclusion

The first part of the chapter provided an overview of the arguments concerning the democratic role of the media. The aim was to help to situate the emergence of participatory media by focusing at first on the normative theories of how the media should serve an active citizenship, and then on the debates of why the media are seen not to live up to these expectations. Thus, it was discussed how the role of the media is perceived in liberal theory and what their role should be in the constitution of citizenship when discussed from the political economy perspective.

Several arguments in the discussion of how the mainstream media operate were identified as being concerned with the failures of the free market model, which has been invoked by liberal theory, such as conglomeration, cross-media ownership and commercialisation of the media. On the other hand, the critiques that have sought to explain how the media fall short of the ideal were discussed. To summarise the key points, the structure of media production usually reinforces and reproduces the existing power imbalances in society, the media have a tendency to favour content that have some element of entertainment, the representation of the people in the media may fail to

facilitate active citizenship, and the opportunities for the public's participation in the production of the mainstream media are severely constrained even in an online environment.

After an overview of the theories concerning the perceived less-than-ideal state of the mainstream media and democratic journalism, three possible solutions were put forward within the field of media theory that aim to remedy the democratic deficit of the media. These were, in brief, the transformation of journalism, the reorganization of a media system and the resources for media production, and seeking a media reform through alternatives to the traditional, corporate media. The first one was discussed in relation to the public journalism movement, which has proposed that the main task for journalists is to facilitate active citizenship (Haas, 2007; Glasser & Craft, 1998). The second was Curran's (2005) model of four co-existing segments of a healthy media structure, namely, civic, social market, private, and professional sectors, and at their core, public service television. Each of the sectors has a different role, but together their aim is to serve citizens' varying information needs. The third proposition linking the debates to this research came from the proponents of media activism and, as a part of this wider movement, from advocates of alternative media. Here attention was drawn to some important concepts in this study, that is, the notion of participation and communication as a democratic right, as well as to a commonplace view of media production in various alternative media being inherently more inclusive and democratic than in the mainstream media. Although the last claim may well have an element of truth to it especially when the alternative media are compared to the mainstream media, it is important to explore at the level of media organisations and individuals involved in them, the extent to which and in what ways such an argument may be sustained - hence the focus of this thesis.

Both the notion of media activism as democratisation of the media and the concept of alternative media are highly relevant for this study. The former puts forward the idea of the right to communicate, whereas the latter draws attention to the ways in which alternative media challenge the media's power. In particular, the concept of rhizomatic media, with its emphasis on fluidity and a less rigid separation of the alternative media from the state and economy than in those models that conceptualise alternative media through their antagonistic relationship with the mainstream media, provides an accommodating model for considering current, more hybrid models of media, such as OMNI. However, as the concept of rhizomatic media is a rather abstract model, the aim in this study is to explore how it can be applied to this type of

participatory media. For the analysis of the organisational basis of Indybay and VAI, the concepts of voluntary associations and alternative media are more applicable.

As this research is concerned with participatory media practices in Dahlgren's analytic frame of civic cultures, the concept of civic engagement, and in particular, the perception of a shift rather than a decline in people's civic engagement, and the arguments for and against the notion of the Internet as a public sphere were explored. In relation to the latter, Dean's (2003) notion of the Internet as a conflictual space ties in with Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism, which was put forward later in the chapter. Attention was also drawn to the potential of the Internet in expanding the ways in which people are politically active and the contradictory evidence regarding the extent to which this potential has thus far been realised. It seems, though, that finding thriving civic engagement online is most likely in settings that are extra-parliamentary. This study hopes to add to the research on civic engagement online by focusing on the phenomenon of online participatory media.

The second part of the chapter delineated, at first in abstract, then with reference to this research, the six dimensions of the civic cultures framework. As, from the outset of the research, the dimension of spaces was deemed to be important for the analysis of participatory journalism practices as a mode of civic engagement, the discussion of organisational aspects of media was expanded from the earlier parts of the chapter with theories that were identified as allowing certain characteristics of participatory media organisations to be addressed. Thus, as already noted, there was a discussion of the concepts of rhizomatic media, voluntary associations and alternative media. Moreover, Mouffe's political theory of agonistic pluralism was put forward to highlight how the notion of agonism can be applied to assessing online spaces for political communication and the media that appear not only to be counter hegemonic in a sense that they challenge mainstream professional journalism and the market-ideology, but because themselves may become the sites of struggles for power.

3 Research Design and Methods

As indicated in the previous chapter, Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures with its six dimensions of knowledge, values, trust, spaces, practices including skills, and identities provides in this study the analytic frame within which participatory journalism as a form of civic engagement is explored. Consequently, the choices regarding the methodological approach in the research derive from the civic cultures framework and from the key question: How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations?

In addressing the dimensions of civic cultures, use was made of literature that provides theoretical tools to analyse both the organisational and individual level of participatory media. Thus, research into alternative media (e.g., Atton, 2002, 2004; Carpentier et al., 2003; Downing, 2001; Couldry & Curran, 2003), grassroots and volunteer organisations (e.g., Smith, 2000; Billis, 1993; Harris, 1998) and media activism (e.g., Hackett and Carroll, 2006; Meikle, 2002) frame the analysis of the organisational possibilities and constraints of Indybay, VAI and OMNI. Mouffe's (1996, 2000a, 2005b) notion of agonistic pluralism is discussed, and in particular the viability of an agonistic online space is assessed in relation to the case studies. Moreover, emerging theorisations on participatory and citizen journalism (e.g., Allan & Thorsen, 2009; Bruns, 2005; Carpentier & De Cleen, 2008; Gillmor, 2006; Reich, 2008) were identified as valuable for the analysis.

Two more underlying themes run throughout the analysis, which needed to be considered in the light of the empirical evidence. The first is the dichotomy that tends to be drawn between a professional and an amateur in journalism. In relation to journalism online (Singer, 2003), this is apparent, for example, in McNair's (2006) "chaos paradigm" (p. 119), in collaborative models of media production (Beckett, 2008), and in the debates concerning participatory journalism in the media discourse (Freedman, 2006; Lemann, 2006). The second similar tendency is the perception of alternative media as being diametrically opposed to mainstream media (e.g., Atton & Couldry, 2003, p. 579). These categorisations were taken into consideration during the exploration of the practices of reporters, what ethics they employ and what kind of editorial principles and procedures the two Indymedia collectives and OMNI have and why.

This chapter narrates the research process from the beginning when the choices concerning the research design were made, that is, from an overall approach to the study

and the rationale behind the selection of cases and where the research was to be conducted to a more detailed account of the main method, qualitative interviewing and secondary sources that inform the analysis. Ethical choices that were taken into consideration in the various stages of the research process are discussed in a reflexive account with a focus on the challenges encountered in relation to the interviews. The chapter explains the sampling strategy and the characteristics of the sample, and provides an account of the analysis of the interview transcripts, before the concluding section presents a summary of the research design and highlights the key choices made concerning the conduct of research and the reasons for them. The chapter begins by discussing the overall approach to researching participatory media practices.

3.1   Overall Research Design: Choosing a Qualitative Approach

The aim of this research was to provide a close and systematic analysis within the framework of civic cultures of what is involved in participatory journalism as a form of civic engagement when taking into consideration both the organisation within which it is embedded and the broader context. It was therefore decided to investigate people's participation in creating their own media content online in three cases of participatory media as provided by two Indymedia collectives, namely, VAI and Indybay, and OMNI. All three had been identified as having at least the potential to challenge "the symbolic power in media institutions" by expanding the right to communicate, as Couldry (2002, p. 25) has argued in relation to alternative media. Thus, as advocated in media activism (Hackett & Carroll, 2006), people, other than a privileged few typically having access to the media, can create their own media content and have it distributed. Following the decision to conduct an investigation into participatory media, it was decided to focus the enquiry on the Internet, where the most promising developments in participatory journalism were observed to take place. Moreover, participatory news and information websites in which, as Lasica (2003) notes, "citizen-reporters contribute a significant amount of material" were chosen as the focus.

The epistemological position in this inquiry is located in a broad sense in the interpretive research tradition (Charmaz, 2008; Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), as the aim was to form an understanding of participatory journalism from the experience of those who have first-hand knowledge of the phenomenon either as reporters or as facilitators of participatory media online. As explained by Bryman (2004), interpretivism indicates an approach that is "predicated upon the view that a strategy is required that respects the

differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences and therefore requires the social scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (p. 13). Moreover, in addition to the centrality of text as a type of data to be interpreted, the research aims to take into account the social and historical context within which the texts have been produced and the perspectives of their authors.

This positioning led to a qualitative enquiry being conducted. Because the aim was to gain access to detailed accounts of people involved in participatory journalism, the primary method chosen was semi-structured face-to-face interviews with research participants followed by a set of questions that were sent to them approximately six months after the initial interviews. The emailed questions allowed further questions to be asked that derived from the early findings of the interview data (see Appendix D). A possible benefit, which relates to mixing face-to-face and email interviews, is observed by Orgad (2005), who notes:

> Combining offline and online interactions with informants enhances the ways in which researchers are positioned in relation to their informants, and the ways they come to know them. As a consequence, arguably, the analysis that is being produced is enriched. (p. 62)

Interviews were conducted with reporters of the three organisations, as well as people volunteering in VAI and Indybay and, in the case of OMNI, its staff (see Appendix E). My approach was inspired by the classic sociological studies of journalism of researchers such as Morrison and Tumber (1988) and Tunstall (1971). Although the research in hand is first and foremost a sociological inquiry, and, as such, it aims to shed light on participatory journalism as a social process, it is acknowledged that, as Gaskell (2000) argues, "the social world is not an unproblematic given: it is actively constructed by people in their everyday life" (p. 38).

In the holistic approach that was adopted, the aim was to take into account both micro and meso levels, the former in this case referring to reporters and the latter to the participatory media organisations. Therefore, for the purpose of aiming to understand participatory journalism, it was considered important to examine it as something existing not in a vacuum, but within an organisational as well as a socio-cultural context. The following section discusses why a multiple case study design, where organisations operating in different locations were compared, appeared to offer an appropriate way forward in achieving this aim.

3.2 Selecting the Cases and the Contexts

In the past twenty years or so, comparative research has become customary in the field of media and communications, although it tends to be theoretically and methodologically challenging; it can produce contradictory, even difficult-to-analyse evidence, and can add considerably to the complexity of the research process (Livingstone, in press). On the other hand, there are many possible advantages. For example, Hallin and Mancini (2004, pp. 2-3) argue in their landmark study that making comparisons between countries permits an exploration not only of the differences, but also of the similarities between different media systems, thus leading to advances in the formation of concepts. Another assessment of the benefits is provided by Blumler, McLeod, and Rosengren (1992). According to them (Blumler et al., 1992):

> … at the level of observation, comparative inquiry cosmopolitanizes, opening our eyes to communication patterns and problems unnoticeable in our own spatial and temporal milieux … only comparative research can overcome space- and time-bound limitations on the generalizability of our theories, assumptions, and propositions (p. 3).

Leaving aside the questions of whether comparative research can always deliver what it promises and whether it should be adopted routinely, it must be acknowledged that it has come to permeate much of media and communications research. As Livingstone (in press) notes:

> Overall, for a growing number of researchers worldwide, it is clear that comparative research in one form or another has become commonplace. In particular, the study of global and transnational media phenomena has moved from the margins to the centre of our field.

This research investigates one such phenomenon: participatory journalism. However, as a partial departure from the view that participatory journalism online might be something that is not necessarily rooted firmly in a national culture, but rather is part of what Couldry (2000) calls a "transcultural" (p. 98) world[10], it is not an aim to argue here that the notion of the nation has become obsolete in comparative research. Rather, it is

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[10] The three key characteristics of a transcultural world are, according to Couldry (2000, p. 98), homogenised cultural experiences, increase in the exchanges of culture between places, and the products of culture such as news becoming more homogeneous.

acknowledged that the starting point for comparative research is no longer automatically the nation-state (Rantanen, 2008, p. 32; also Livingstone, in press). Moreover, it is recognised that "there is not only one national culture or identity, but several cultures and identities that are not fixed and change in space and time", as Rantanen (2008, p. 32) points out.

In this research, the nation-state was approached in the sense Kohn (1989) refers to it as "context … where the object of the analysis is to ascertain whether similar or dissimilar processes occur between different nations" (p. 24). The key reason for this approach was that on searching through participatory websites, it appeared that social and cultural differences between places where they operate may affect the viability of organisations for participatory journalism and possibly also the ways in which participatory journalism is practised - the former became evident when it was discovered that, in Finland, Indymedia no longer had an active website. Therefore, from the outset of the research project, it seemed valuable to look into the similarities and differences between participatory journalism organisations and not to restrict the exploration to a single country. Thus, it was important to be able to make comparisons not only between organisations themselves, but also to consider the context within which the three media organisations in this study are embedded. Selecting a multiple case study design and choosing the cases from more than one country meant both of the goals could be addressed. Certain "analytic benefits" were to be achieved by having multiple cases, because as Yin (2003, p. 53) argues, having two or more cases allows more powerful analytic conclusions to be reached, and enhances the external validity of the findings, that is, it increases the generalisability of the results (Yin, 2003, pp. 10, 54).

Informed by how Indymedia tended to emerge from previous research as a participatory media pioneer, novel in a number of ways, this investigation presented a good opportunity to build on the existing research. As Indymedia is a network of collectives in various geographic locations, each of which makes decisions concerning the day-to-day running of the activities autonomously, having more than one Indymedia case was seen as beneficial. To probe the possibilities and constraints of participatory journalism between collectives, it was decided to include one collective that, based on the initial research, was identified as thriving, and another that had been closed down. To represent the former, the Indybay that operates in the San Francisco Bay Area was selected, and, to represent the latter, VAI, which had been active in Finland, but is no longer operating. As online participatory journalism is a relatively recent phenomenon,

it seemed important to have a longitudinal element in the research design. VAI made it possible to observe whether its former reporters had continued their journalism activities.

Although having several cases would affect the time and resources that could be devoted to an individual case, the advantages of adding another, contrasting case seemed to outweigh the disadvantages of investigating several cases. Consequently, OMNI was selected because it represents another well-known example of a participatory media organisation. Although Indymedia, in this study more specifically the two collectives, VAI and Indybay, and OMNI are both prominent participatory media organisations, providing reporters with a platform for their news and views and giving readers opportunities to take part in discussions following the articles, the differences were expected to surface when, for example, editorial procedures and guidelines, organisational structure and decision-making processes were examined. To sum up, these participatory media organisations were selected because they represent so-called exemplifying cases, meaning that they provide a suitable context for certain research questions to be answered. As such, they allowed the researcher "to examine key social processes", as Bryman (2004, p. 51) notes.

The decision regarding where to carry out the research was largely determined by an objective to explore participatory journalism both in a context where it appeared to flourish and one where it seemed not to have been successful. Another, practical factor that led to the selection of Indybay and VAI to represent such contexts was that as a Finn, I was able to carry out research concerning VAI in Finnish, whereas my English language skills enabled me to conduct the rest of the research in English. In the case of VAI, it was useful to be able to interview people in their first language, and an ability to read Finnish was also necessary for exploring the VAI website and reviewing earlier research in Finnish not only on VAI, but also on, for example, the alter-globalisation movement[11] in Finland and the Finnish media system.

To be able to keep the number of countries where research was carried out to what was perceived as manageable - after much deliberation, it was decided that two countries had to suffice rather than three, which was the original number - I decided to interview the USA-based reporters of OMNI, although, as an international website, it has reporters in many parts of the world. It would have made sense to interview reporters of OMNI also in Finland. However, as only two Finland-based OMNI

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[11] In Finland, the movement is usually called the globalisation-critical movement.

reporters were identified, this was not feasible. Although carrying out the research in two countries made the research process more complex, broadening the scope beyond only one country was seen as valuable because of the different contexts Finland and the USA provided for investigating participatory journalism. Thus, in this thesis, Finland represents the "democratic corporatist model" of media and politics, and the USA the "liberal model" (for a discussion on these models, see Hallin and Mancini 2004, pp. 143-248).

It was seen as an interesting starting point for the enquiry that in the USA, referred to by Castells and Himanen (2002) as a "market-driven open information society" (p. 18), by and large, both Indymedia and OMNI have succeeded. Indymedia has a strong presence in many parts of the USA, where the first Indymedia website was launched, whereas OMNI has a number of active contributors there. Unlike in the USA, in Finland, which has been described by Castells and Himanen (2002) as an "open welfare information society" (p. 18), neither Indymedia nor OMNI have had much success. VAI was closed down approximately three years after it had been launched, whereas OMNI has attracted virtually no contributors in Finland. Therefore, the USA provided an appropriate context for investigating a flourishing participatory media organisation, whereas Finland was selected because the opposite was perceived to be the case in relation to Indymedia and OMNI. Thus, I set out to conduct interviews with Indybay and the USA-based OMNI interviewees and the VAI interviewees in Finland. Overall, my approach draws from Denzin's (1989) notion of data triangulation, where it is considered advantageous to investigate the phenomenon in different places, at varying times and from a number of perspectives.

3.3 Qualitative Research

It is valuable to consider the ways in which some of the limitations of qualitative research in general and of case studies may be addressed, before focusing on the qualitative interviews. Although some critiques concerning the integrity of qualitative research have been based on the criteria of assessing quantitative research, such as the generalisability and replicability of the findings, these criteria fit poorly with qualitative research. For example, because qualitative research typically employs a case study design and has a small sample that is not based on probability sampling, such as quantitative surveys, generalising the results to the whole population is not possible (Bryman, 2004, p. 273). It has become increasingly common to acknowledge that

somewhat different criteria are required to assess qualitative research and that there are ways to enhance its quality (Diefenbach, 2009; Glaser and Strauss 1965; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, among others). Some of these are considered next with reference, where appropriate, to the research project in hand.

Lincoln and Guba (1985; Guba & Lincoln, 1994) propose criteria of authenticity and of trustworthiness, the latter consisting of credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability, to assess qualitative research. Authenticity places emphasis on the fairness of the research to participants in the research project and on its benefits to them. Both of these have been amongst the principles guiding this research, but ultimately, it is the interviewees who will judge whether the research is of use to them and the media organisations with which they are affiliated. Credibility refers to enhancing the trustworthiness of the research by, for example, a respondent validation and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The latter was employed in this study by using several sources of data, employing different theoretical perspectives and conducting research in different places (Denzin, 1989).

Dependability aims to enhance trustworthiness by introducing auditing to a research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This means that researchers keep complete records of all stages of the conduct of research; other researchers are then asked to review and compare the research findings to highlight possible problems (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Due to the large amounts of data generated in qualitative research, auditing tends to be arduous and has not become common practice (Bryman, 2004). Transferability refers to the idea that by focusing on depth rather than breadth, which generally is the aim in qualitative research, and on what Geertz (1973) has called "thick description", which means rich, detailed accounts of specific social settings, a researcher is able to create a "database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux" (Bryman, 2004, p. 275). Moreover, generalisability in multiple case studies is not as problematic as in single case studies. With a multicase study, the cases are not only interesting in themselves, but also are instruments that allow exploration of the phenomenon in question (Stake, 2006, p. 8). Moreover, as Stake (2006, p. 10) suggests, in multiple case studies, it is possible to bring the questions concerning issues that are of interest to the general level from the particular, and therefore to "deepen the understanding of findings".

Confirmability is linked to the ideal of objectivity of research and suggests that it should be apparent from qualitative research that the researcher's personal preferences, whether deriving from theory or her/his values, have not affected the integrity of the

findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ironically, the term confirmability highlights the weakness of the notion, as despite the efforts of a researcher to preserve academic detachment, it can be difficult for the audience of the research to determine with certainty the extent to which this has been the case. Moreover, some aspects of reflexivity may lie beyond a researcher's control. As Grosz (1995) argues, "the author's intentions, emotions, psyche, and interiority are not only inaccessible to readers, they are likely to be inaccessible to the author herself" (p. 13).

3.3.1   Qualitative interviews

It is worth noting that the vast majority of sociological enquiries employ some type of interview, ranging from standardised interviews, typically survey questionnaires, to unstructured interviews resembling a casual conversation (Briggs, 1986). In qualitative research, interviews are arguably the most commonly used method of data collection (Bryman, 2004). This is not surprising given that a qualitative interview is seen to provide "the basic data for the development of an understanding of the relation between social actors and their situation", as Gaskell (2000, p.39) notes; he continues: "The objective is a fine-textured understanding of the beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations in relation to the behaviours of people in a particular social context" (p. 39). Thus, as the aim of qualitative interviews is to understand interviewees' life-worlds from their descriptions, it was deemed an appropriate main method in this research.

As with any method of data collection, qualitative interviews have been the subject of criticism for a number of reasons, both by those who in principle oppose qualitative research and by those themselves who have or who are engaged in a qualitative enquiry. Kvale (1996, p. 284) sums up the external criticism as follows: Qualitative interviews rely on the subjective viewpoints of respondents and do not provide valid, reliable and objective data, but are unscientific and commonsensical, suitable for exploration rather than for hypothesis testing, biased and not quantitative and they lack generalisability. The ten internal criticisms discussed by Kvale (1996, pp. 291-295) are more nuanced, and include, for example, emphasising interviewees' verbal accounts at the expense of their actions, and the risk of overlooking both the social interactions of the interviewees and the wider context within which they are embedded. As the use of qualitative interviews is very varied, these criticisms are not necessarily universally applicable, but rather depend on the aims and how interviews are conducted in individual research projects.

Much of the external criticisms derive from the debate of what counts as scientific enquiry. More specifically, they originate in the discussion as to whether there should be an attempt to employ the principles of positivism applied in the natural sciences and including hypothesis testing, the generation of knowledge from observable facts and the notion of science as value-free in the study of the social world (Bryman, 2004, p. 13). I align myself in this epistemological debate with the intellectual tradition of interpretivism, as noted earlier. From that perspective, some of the critiques derive from a narrow view of science and a failure to regard knowledge as heterogeneous and contextual. However, some of the concerns expressed above concerning qualitative interviews as part of a qualitative research strategy deserve to be taken seriously, such as generalisability which was discussed in the previous section. In addition, it is helpful to consider the conduct of qualitative interviews to address some of the challenges in relation to this.

Yanos and Hopper (2008) probe into Bourdieu's (1999) notion of "false, collusive objectification", which according to them, is typical of interviews "which appear authentic because they often echo social science concepts and terminology and therefore may please the interviewer" (p. 229). Thus, Yanos and Hopper (2008) draw attention to a problem where researchers fail to address issues beyond their and their interviewees "comfort zone" and are satisfied with accounts that, often provided by interviewees as a result of self-censorship, fit comfortably with researchers' preconceptions. However, interviews that are "too good to be true" are nothing short of useless, as Yanos and Hopper (2008, p. 229) argue.

Acknowledging the risk of "false" interviews, two of Yanos and Hopper's (2008) suggestions for researchers on how to avoid them have been employed in this research, namely, repeated interviews and methodological listening (Yanos & Hopper, 2008, pp. 234-235). The former suggests that interviewing research participants more than once may help to move past the staged interview production, and to allow the interviewer to delve deeply into the interviewees' social world. In this study, the majority of the interviewees were interviewed for a second time by email. The latter suggestion refers to how both sociological and experimental knowledge about the interviewees and devoting undivided attention to them during the interview may help to detect false interviews. In this research, it was found useful to employ an ongoing process of acquiring information that could help to understand interviewees and their position, although not through participant observation, which is one of the suggestions made by Yanos and Hopper (2008), but through online research. Staying focused in interview

situations and limiting the daily number of interviews to no more than two seemed to help avoid the pitfall of false interviews.

An interview is an interactive process between the interviewee and the interviewer. As such, an interview should be viewed as a "social encounter in which knowledge is actively constructed", as argued by Holstein and Gubrium (2006, p. 141). Moreover, the outcome of an interview depends on the interview situation, how the participants in the discussion position themselves in relation to each other, and on the underlying power dynamics between them. Thus, Kvale (1994) argues:

> The conversation in a research interview is not the reciprocal interaction of two equal partners. There is a definite asymmetry of power: The interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview. (p. 126)

The interview is also shaped by what approach is applied to asking the questions. I chose to conduct one-to-one face-to-face semi-structured interviews mainly with open-ended questions because whilst I wanted to have some flexibility regarding question order and omitting or adding questions based on interaction with an interviewee, I also had predetermined themes and specific questions in relation to them that I wanted to guide the discussion. For the purpose of structure and maintaining focus in the interview situation, I devised a detailed interview schedule (see Appendix F).

3.4   Operationalising Research Questions

The key research question in this research was: How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations? The eight sub research questions were operationalised into an interview schedule covering thirteen core areas: 1) organisational basis and principles of participatory media (including organisations' aims, how they operate, the usability of the website and their inclusiveness), 2) sustainability of participatory media, 3) editorial principles and procedures of participatory media organisations, 4) support available to reporters, 5) publishing process, 6) alternative/mainstream media dichotomy, 7) reporters' participatory media practices, 8) reporters' motivation, 9) reporters' aims, 10) reporters' media usage, 11) reporters' journalistic ethics, 12) reporters' skills and knowledge, and 13) reporters' civic engagement other than journalistic activities. Table 3 shows how these core areas correspond with the sub research questions, and gives examples of matching questions

in the research interviews (see Appendix F for Question Sets). To facilitate the flow of questions in the interviews, the grouping of questions in the interview schedule does not follow the order or core areas in the table (see Appendix F for Question Sets).

In addition to the core areas shown in Table 3, interviewees, except for OMNI staff, were asked background questions, for example, concerning their age, occupation and education. Moreover, their views on the various types of media, whether mainstream, alternative or participatory, and their opinions on the media organisation with which they were associated and on other participatory media organisations were discussed. These questions provided useful information when contextualising the three case studies (see Appendix F for Question Sets).

Table 3: Operationalisation of research questions

Research questions	Core areas covered in an interview schedule	Examples of corresponding questions in interviews
1. What are the similarities and differences between Indybay and VAI, and between them and OMNI, when account is taken of their aims and how and where they operate?	Organisational basis and principles of participatory media	- How does the website work? - What are the aims of the website? - Is Indybay/VAI/OMNI open to anyone (for example, regardless of social, cultural or political background, age or gender)?
2. What factors affect the sustainability of participatory media online, on the one hand, between the two Indymedia collectives, and on the other, between them and OMNI?	Sustainability of participatory media	- What are the advantages and disadvantages of OMNI? - How do you see the future of Indybay/OMNI? - Why, in your view, did the VAI website close down?
3. How do editorial principles and procedures differ between Indybay, VAI and OMNI and what are the wider implications of these differences for participatory journalism?	Editorial principles and procedures of participatory media organisations Support available to reporters	- Is there support available, and if there is, what kind of support? - What are the editorial guidelines of Indybay/VAI/OMNI? - What are your views on anonymity and registering?
4. To what extent does the publishing process of participatory journalism disrupt or reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy?	Publishing process Alternative/ mainstream media dichotomy	- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of citizen journalism? - Does Indybay/VAI (in your opinion) offer information that is: - Not available in other media? If so, what type of information? - Accurate? - Up-to-date?
5. How and why do reporters of Indybay, VAI and OMNI engage with participatory media online and media in general?	Reporters' - participatory media practices - motivation - aims - media usage	- Can you describe the process of creating media content? - What are your reasons for posting on the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website? - How do you use or consume media?

6. What are the principles that reporters employ in relation to journalism ethics?	Reporters' journalistic ethics	- Do you have principles or ethics that you follow as a reporter? If you do, how would you describe them? Do you think they differ from those of professional journalists, and if so, how?
7. What kind of skills and knowledge does the practice of participatory journalism require?	Reporters' skills and knowledge	- What kind of skills do you need to be able to create media? - Where have you learnt these skills?
8. When considering reporters' different modes of civic engagement, does the evidence support a theory of a shift in the ways in which people are politically active?	Reporters' civic engagement other than journalistic activities	- Do you do voluntary work? If you do, can you tell me about it? - Are you a member of charities, voluntary organisations, a trade union or a staff association? - Do you vote?

I used a standard introduction and close in all of my interviews (see Appendix G). Four sets of questions, A to D, were used depending on whom I was interviewing, although in interviews with VAI interviewees, I used questions that I had translated from the original questions (see Appendix F) into Finnish. Set A comprised standard questions for reporters of Indybay, VAI and OMNI. Set B was for interviewees involved in either the Indybay or VAI collective. Set C comprised questions about their journalism practices for interviewees who, in addition to being active in a collective, were also reporters. Appendix D lists questions that were sent to interviewees by email. Set D is an example of the interview schedule for OMNI staff. These interviews were treated as what tends to be called "elite interviews", and as such, they were tightly focused on how OMNI operates and on the interviewees' role in the organisation and excluded most background questions about the interviewee. In the planning and conduct stages of these interviews, a variety of discussions of the principles and practicalities of elite interviews were drawn on (Dexter, 1970; Goldstein, 2002; Odendahl & Shaw, 2002; Smith, 2006).

3.5   Secondary Sources Informing the Analysis and the Methods Considered

As part of the process of achieving familiarity with the three participatory media organisations, I visited their websites frequently during the research process. To strengthen the discussion on the organisations in the thesis, the documentation available online concerning them was reviewed. I conducted a textual analysis of the key documents, such as the editorial policies, and I refer to details of these documents in Chapter 5, which discusses the publishing process; the documents are also included in

the thesis as appendices (see Appendices H-M). To validate some of the claims concerning the organisations, for example, in the case of VAI, what led to its closure, online searches were made to see if it was possible to use other sources to corroborate the findings based on the interview data, or if there was any contradictory evidence. Typically, the sources encountered were posts on various Indymedia mailing lists concerning the collectives and interviews with OMNI staff in the media. Information from sources of this type was drawn on in the thesis when it was perceived to add a valuable aspect to the data from the interviews. Following Flick's argument concerning the use of documents in qualitative research (2006), specifically, that "They [documents] can be a fruitful addition to other forms of data if the contexts of their production and use are taken into account" (p. 252), the aim was be attentive to the circumstances under which these documents had been produced.

In summer 2007, I was able to attend OhmyNews International Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul, South Korea. This provided a good opportunity to interview in person Seoul-based OMNI staff and one USA-based South Korean reporter who were attending the forum. Moreover, the information gathered during the event about OMNI informed the analysis of the organisation, not least about the relationship between the Korean and the international edition. It was also useful to get an idea of OMNI's overall reporter base and their perceptions of OMNI. When I was in Seoul, I conducted a further two interviews that were not included in the sample to enhance my understanding of the online media environment and media activism South Korea.

During my second major fieldwork period in the USA, I asked two Indybay and two OMNI reporters of different ages and degrees of involvement to talk me through the interface that they use for posting content to these websites. The purpose of these sessions was to get a feel of the usability of the website features for reporters. I decided not to take this line of investigation further because these meetings indicated that despite some differences between reporters, for example, their proficiency as computer users, posting content to the website seemed to present a fairly straightforward process. An exception was posting photographs, which posed a challenge for an Indybay contributor, as was revealed in one of these sessions. In fact, it later turned out that, for several reporters, uploading photographs to Indybay and OMNI websites was not as simple as posting an article. The usability sessions led me to include in the emailed questions to Indybay and OMNI interviewees a few questions concerning the usability of the website.

I reviewed a large number of newspaper articles, both Anglo-American and Finnish, on participatory journalism. This enabled me to gain a sense, through the ways in which participatory journalism is framed in the mainstream media coverage, of the debates that surround the emergence of the phenomenon. What made reading the articles particularly interesting was that the journalists and the news organisations they represent, as well as experts such as teachers in journalism who occasionally are invited to comment on the phenomenon in the media, have a stake in how the media landscape is changing. After all, journalism as a profession is undergoing a transformation and, at least in some quarters of the mainstream media, participatory journalism has caused apprehension. My initial intention was to analyse the newspaper coverage systematically and to present the results as secondary data in the thesis. This, however, presented a research project that would have merited a study by itself. Most importantly, I decided not to proceed with the idea in the end, as it was not my intention to frame the research through the issues that are raised in the representation of participatory journalism in the mainstream media, but to give priority to the views of people, who themselves are involved in participatory journalism.

Ethnographic methods, such as observing reporters' and website editors' practices, undoubtedly would have provided rich data; however, they did not lend themselves well to being a method in this study. The use of participant observation, being labour-intensive and time-consuming, would have meant a different approach from the outset with a tighter focus on maybe only one case study, whereas I wanted to be able to make comparisons between cases and contexts. Moreover, as one of the cases in my study, VAI, was no longer operating, participant observation would not have been feasible.

Another method that was considered for investigating reporters' practices and views before, in addition, conducting in-depth qualitative interviews was an online survey. However, it was discounted after the likelihood of gaining a representative sample was deemed to be practically non-existent because the population was not going to be known for certain, and because the response rate in online surveys is typically low (Witmer, Colman, & Katzman, 1999). Furthermore, it was seen to be more beneficial to concentrate the effort on collecting a larger number of reporters' detailed accounts than on conducting an online survey, which due an inevitable convenience sample would have provided statistically unsound data (Elford, Bolding, Davis, Sherr, & Hart, 2004) and fewer face-to-face interviews.

Employing content analysis of the three websites and of interviewees' contributions to them was another method that was considered, as it would have added a different aspect to the investigation. However, it was felt that the focus of the research would have become fragmented with the introduction of the analysis of the website content into the research design. Moreover, analysing interviewees' contributions was rejected after it was clear that it was not possible to identify all interviewees' every contribution on the websites, as Indybay and VAI reporters do not necessarily write under their real name, nor could they be expected to remember everything they had posted on the websites. The latter was particularly the case with VAI reporters, because of the time that had elapsed between when the website has been active and when the research interviews were conducted. Thus, the selection of interviewees' articles would have been random, deducting from the value of the method. Although reporters' articles were not analysed systematically, an effort was made to browse through them and to read at least a few articles per interviewee more carefully.

3.6   Ethical Considerations

Any social science enquiry involves many ethical considerations, but adherence to ethical requirements becomes particularly important when the research involves research participants. Following the guidelines by Schrøder, Drotner, Kline and Murray (2003, p. 99) for researchers conducting qualitative research, consideration has been given to several aspects in relation to interviewees in the study: treating research participants equally, respecting their decisions and values and, of course, avoiding causing any harm to them (Schrøder et al., 2003, p. 99). When conducting research in different cultural and societal settings, as was the case in this research project, an awareness of and sensitivity to any cultural differences that manifest themselves, for example, in local customs and values, is essential.

Reflexivity, defined by Robson (2002) as "an awareness of the ways in which the researcher as an individual with a particular social identity and background has an impact on the research process" (p. 172), has had an obvious importance in the research, not least because, as a native Finn, my more profound knowledge of Finnish society compared to my understanding of American or South Korean society is likely to have affected the course of the research. It is also possible that being a native Finnish-, but not English-speaker affected the conduct of the interviews and my understanding of the construction of meanings through the interviewees' use of the language. There is a

general complexity in all cross-national research (May, 1997, p. 212), as attentiveness to different cultures and social contexts is challenging. In that respect, my research was no exception, but I tried to remain aware of these aspects throughout the research process.

It could be anticipated that research participants may be sceptical about the aims and objectives of the study and be concerned about how much of their time it will take and whether it will be beneficial to them, as is regularly pointed out in the literature on research methods (Deacon, Pickering, Golding, & Murdock 1999; Silverman, 2000). A way of overcoming such apprehensions, which may result in a refusal to participate, is to be open about the methods and the aims of the study, and about how data will be used, and to seek informed consent. My approach was to take an overt role in relation to individual interviewees, which I recruited either via email or in the case of OMNI, by sending a message to a reporter through the OMNI website. In my initial email, I explained that I was a Finnish Media and Communications PhD student at the London School of Economics in the UK doing research on participatory journalism and that I was interested in their work with a participatory media organisation, be it Indybay, VAI or OMNI. As the focus was on the subjective viewpoints of individuals and on constructing an understanding of the organisations from the accounts of people involved in them, I decided not to contact interviewees through each participatory media organisation, nor to seek their approval for my research.

My approach when recruiting interviewees was to be open from the outset about my role as a researcher and about the research. However, there is a further important ethical aspect regarding how I positioned myself in relation to my research topic and the interviewees. I considered myself to be sympathetic to the interviewees' activities, but I do not have an activist background nor have I been involved in participatory journalism. When I met the interviewees, I framed my interest in the topic by emphasising my role as a researcher who was interested in participatory journalism. If the interviewees asked me from where my interest derived, I explained where I came from in terms of my studies on media, my prior research on Indymedia[12] and journalism[13] as well as my interest in the democratisation of the media. Where relevant, I noted that I was not an activist.

Because of my position as an "outsider" I may have been, arguably, less susceptible to losing the analytic distance than researchers who are themselves involved

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[12] In 2005, I conducted a network-wide Indymedia online survey.
[13] I researched embedding journalists with the military in Iraq in 2003.

in what they study. On the other hand, certain subtleties of people's accounts may have escaped me because of my lack of any inside knowledge. Then again, it is possible that, occasionally, interviewees went into more detail in their descriptions because they could not assume that I knew what they were talking about. A similar point has been put forward by Miller and Glassner (2004), who, in addition, argue that social distances between interviewees and the researcher may mean "that an interviewee can recognise him- or herself as an expert on a topic of interest", which "can be both empowering and illuminating because one can reflect on and speak about one's life in ways not often available" (p. 132). Some interviewees in this study noted that they welcomed an opportunity to discuss their work.

Four interviewees requested a copy of the interview transcript after the interview. However, as the interviews had not been transcribed at that point, they were offered a copy of the recording, which they accepted. With one interviewee, permission to use the transcribed interview was re-negotiated some time after the interview had been conducted. Very few interviewees seemed sensitive to the fact that I was not an "insider", as it were. One interviewee cautioned me that I should remain responsive to the point of view of people involved, as sometimes sociological explanations are too strong and do not capture what really has happened. In my view, the positions both of an insider and an outsider have their advantages and challenges, and therefore I do not consider either as being inherently better than the other.

Following the LSE's (2008) research ethics policy and in particular the guidelines about informed consent (LSE, 2003), before commencing the interview, I explained to interviewees their rights, what I was researching and how and why, and that I was going to record the interview and have the recording transcribed (see Appendix G). In addition, I asked if I could refer to an interviewee by her/his name in my study or any other possible written outcomes of my research, such as journal articles. All the interviewees agreed to this, with none taking the offered option of anonymity. Before the interview began, I encouraged interviewees to ask questions about my study. Not many interviewees did so, which I took to indicate that the overview I had given them concerning my research was satisfactory. In addition to proposing sharing the findings of the study with interviewees, I offered them a coffee or a meal as a very small token of my appreciation of them giving up their time. This seemed appropriate, not least because many of the interviews took place in cafes. A few interviewees, however, insisted on the opposite, which, I felt, it would have been impolite to refuse.

In this research, interviewees, with their permission, as well as organisations as case studies, and places where research has been conducted, are referred to by their actual name. In the list of interviewees, however, only information that is seen as essential for understanding research participants' involvement in participatory journalism, and the construction of the sample of interviewees is provided. Personal information concerning reporters' age, employment status and education is omitted from their individual profiles, and is presented later in this chapter by discussing these characteristics as a summary by case study.

There are several reasons for not making the names of interviewees, places and organisations anonymous, which has become a common practice in qualitative research because it is believed to protect participants (Kelly, 2009). However, as Nespor (2000), one of the critics of "anonymity as default" (p. 547) argues, the evidence to support the view that identifying participants is harmful or embarrassing to them is practically nonexistent (see also Johnson, 1982; Walford, 2005). Moreover, as Nespor (2000) indicates, even when research participants' names are concealed, there is no guarantee that their identities will remain a secret, as people who have prior knowledge of the interviewees could identify them from the research, and because the visibility of a researcher in a research setting, be it a small community, an organisation or a larger unit such as a town, hinders attempts to keep interviewees' identities non-traceable (Nespor, 2000, pp. 547-548; also Johnson, 1982). Even when the purpose of anonymisation is to protect research participants from government-originated surveillance, the effectiveness of such a practice should be seen to be questionable, as government agencies are likely to have a means of identifying research locations and participants should they wish to do so (Szklut & Reed, 1991).

In addition to the view that being part of relatively small media organisations and communities meant research participants in this study would have been easily identifiable even if pseudonyms had been used, there are a number of other reasons for not attempting to hide their names. Thus, on the one hand, it was hoped that identifying research participants would enhance the credibility of the research, and on the other, the aim was to render visibility to research participants and their work. In relation to the latter point, it was seen that anonymisation would have undermined research participants and their views. Moreover, as the interviewees, all of whom were adults, agreed to be referred to by name and the topics discussed with them were not perceived as particularly sensitive, it was not seen necessary to impose anonymisation. Furthermore, many interviewees were already publicly associated with a media

organisation either as reporters or, in the case of Indybay and VAI, as people active in the collective and in OMNI as its staff. This was the case with all OMNI interviewees, which lists staff on the website, and where the name of a reporter appears in articles that are published in the main sections of the website.

In making a decision to name the organisation and the research locations, the view taken was that without naming the cases it would have been difficult and somewhat pointless to conduct a case study where some of the emphasis is placed on constructing the role of a media organisation in participatory journalism from the depictions of people involved in participatory media. Although in this research it was not seen necessary to conceal the names of research participants' or sites, it is fully acknowledged that there are cases when such procedures are vitally important to protect individuals and communities from harm. How successful such endeavours are is another matter and depends on, for example, what is being studied, how much and what type of information is revealed about the research participants and sites of research and how careful the researcher is in preserving anonymity.

3.7   The Sample, Recruitment of Interviewees

3.7.1   Sampling technique

Broadly speaking, the approach to sampling in this study draws on the notion of theoretical sampling. In theoretical sampling, as introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), sampling is seen as an ongoing process where the findings and the emerging theory constantly feed into the procedure of refining the sample. Thus, the aim is not to have a random sample, as in quantitative research. As this difference in approach is explained by Lindlof (1995), "Most sampling techniques in qualitative inquiry depend not on principles of random probability, where every population element has an equal and independent chance of being selected, but on *purposeful* selection" (p. 126). This principle also applies to this study, which employs "maximum variation sampling", meaning that cases were selected for a sample because there was a possibility that they may have contributed a new, often contrasting element to it (Lindlof, 1995, p. 126). The aim therefore was to choose cases, both participatory media organisations and the people involved in them, that could be expected to provide differing insights into participatory journalism in its organisational context. The selection of case studies was

discussed earlier in this chapter, and I will focus here on the construction of the sample of interviewees concerning each of the three case studies.

The selection of interviewees was based, in part, on prior knowledge of the case studies; thus, I had an idea of what type of interviewees I was hoping to include in the sample before embarking on the fieldwork. I sought to interview both reporters and people involved in the organisation either as a volunteer (VAI and Indybay) or as a member of staff (OMNI). It transpired that in the case of VAI and Indybay, potential interviewees would often be involved both in a collective and in posting content on the website. The aim was to achieve a sample where there was variation based not only on interviewees' relation to an organisation, but also on a number of other aspects of their involvement.

There were a number of attributes in relation to reporters' activities based on which the interviewees could be expected to vary. To summarise them, the aim was to interview people whose motivation to post content on Indybay, VAI or OMNI would differ, people who would post different types of content, from news to features, and in different formats, such as text and video, and on diverse topics. It was also hoped that the interviewees would differ in their level of skills and how much experience they had as reporters, and how regularly they would create content. In addition to the above, it was expected there would be differences in when interviewees had become reporters.

The aim was also to interview different types of people involved in the collective of Indybay and VAI based on the type of work people were doing. The key group of interest was that moderators and editors of Indybay and VAI websites, as their accounts of their activities were vital to obtain an understanding of the editing process. For the same reason, interviews with editors of OMNI were important. It was also hoped that it would be possible to conduct interviews with people who had been involved in the collective for varying lengths of time and who would differ in their levels of contribution. In the case of VAI, the aim was to include in the sample both those who had been involved when the website was launched, as well as those who had made the decision regarding its closure.

The aim was for the sample to consist of both male and female interviewees, although I did not determine the proportions from the outset. In relation to interviewees involved in Indybay and VAI, it was intended that the distribution of gender and age would be close to that of the people who are, or in the case of VAI, had been involved in these organisations. Hence, any observed imbalance regarding gender or age was to be reflected in the sample. With regards to the gender of reporters, in the case of VAI

and Indybay, it was not possible to obtain reliable information about the distribution of gender or of age, because contributors can, if they wish, post anonymously and these organisations do not gather data about those who provide content. Although OMN asks for some information about reporters upon registration, it did not have statistics about the contributor base of the international edition.

3.7.2   Recruitment of interviewees

I set out to conduct face-to-face interviews with 39 to 45 people in total, which meant interviewing thirteen to fifteen people per case study. This was seen as a number that would provide a sufficient amount of empirical data for analysis, in particular considering that more interview data were going to be collected via email from people who had already been interviewed in person. Although the target number of individual interviews exceeded Gaskell's (2000, p. 43) recommendation of between 15 and 25 interviews for a research project with a single researcher, the phasing of interviews, and to a certain extent, the analysis of the interview transcripts, as he suggests in cases where a larger sample is required, made the interview process manageable. I achieved my aim with regards to the total number of interviews, as I interviewed 44 people.

There were five main fieldwork periods, two in Finland, two in the USA and one in South Korea. I conducted eight interviews in Finland between August and September 2006 and seven in January 2007. In the USA, thirteen Indybay and OMNI interviews were carried out between November and December 2006, and fifteen in the USA and South Korea between June and August 2007. A further OMNI interview took place in London in December 2007. Whilst conducting the interviews in Finland and the USA, I was based in Helsinki and San Francisco respectively. The locations were chosen because it was considered that the majority of the Indymedia interviews would be likely to take place in these cities. In Finland, VAI, despite having been a countrywide website, appeared to have been active primarily in Helsinki, and in the USA, San Francisco was an obvious choice because my focus was on Indybay. A further advantage was that other locations where it was anticipated some of the interviews would take place were relatively easy to reach from these cities. This turned out to be the case, as I travelled for interviews to Fresno and Santa Cruz in California and in Finland to Jyväskylä, Järvenpää, Tampere and Turku. As there were not many OMNI reporters based in San Francisco, I visited New York and Chicago for many of the OMNI interviews. In the USA and in South Korea, the interviews were carried out in

English and in Finland in Finnish. The emailed questions to interviewees were in the language of an initial interview.

I expected that it might be more difficult to recruit interviewees in the USA than in my native country of Finland. Moreover, based on my experiences in conducting an Indymedia online survey, when I had come across some scepticism about academic research and general suspicion of institutions such as universities, I anticipated that recruiting Indybay and VAI interviewees would be more difficult than recruiting OMNI interviewees. Another reason for this assumption was that, to protect themselves and other activists, people may be reluctant to discuss activism related topics with someone from outside the collective. Both of these presuppositions turned out to be accurate. In particular with Indybay, several of my requests for an interview followed by one, two, or sometimes three further emails were unsuccessful, as I did not get a reply.

Initially, I identified potential interviewees via a no-longer active VAI website, which was still available online and via the Indybay and the OMNI websites. Further contacts were established through snowball sampling. That is, an interviewee, sometimes prompted by me sometimes not, indicated other potential interviewees. This proved to be a particularly useful way of discovering who was involved in the two Indymedia collectives, or in the case of VAI, had been. When I contacted people about an interview, I let them know if someone I had interviewed had mentioned them to me. My conclusion is that it helped me in recruiting further interviewees if I had already interviewed someone whom a potential interviewee knew. During the interview process, it became obvious that at least some interviewees had discussed my research on IRC [Internet Relay Chat] channels and by email and thus it appeared that my research was being subjected to an ongoing validation process by the interviewees.

The second stage of the research project was to email questions to interviewees approximately six months after the face-to-face interview. Questions depended on each interviewee and their affiliation with an organisation (see Appendix D). The purpose of the questions was to allow further clarifications to be requested and questions to be asked that derived from the interview data. Furthermore, the aim was to keep track of possible changes in reporters' involvement with participatory media, such as whether they had continued posting content or had begun to contribute to other websites. In some cases, where an interviewee was both a reporter and was active in a collective, I asked some of the questions concerning their activities by email to avoid the interview becoming too long.

Convincing participants to respond to emailed questions posed a challenge although I had begun to build a rapport and trust between each research participant and myself in an initial email exchange, which then carried through to meeting them in person. A seemingly successful interview, discussing with interviewees the emailed questions and obtaining from them a positive response to the idea, did not guarantee a reply to the questions sent by email. At least in part this may have been because some interviewees felt they had already given plenty of their input and time to the study – after all, several of the face-to-face interviews were lengthy, being of over two hours' duration. Eleven of the fifteen VAI interviewees replied to the emailed questions, whereas of the Indybay interviewees, ten of the seventeen replied. In OMNI, seven out of the nine interviewees replied to the emailed questions. OMNI staff were not emailed questions at this stage although the senior editor was sent further questions in 2009 for an update on any organisational changes in OMNI. Of the 41 interviewees who were sent questions, 28 replied either to the first or to a follow-up email, making the response rate on average 68%.

3.8   The Characteristics of the Sample

As shown in Table 4, there were three main types of interviewees: 1) reporters; 2) people who are involved in a media organisation, but who are not reporters; and 3) people who are both reporters and involved in a media organisation. As the table indicates, Indybay and VAI interviewees varied in their relationship with the organisation. Seven out of the nine VAI interviewees who were involved in the collective were also reporters. All Indybay interviewees who were involved in a collective would at least occasionally also post content on Indybay and were therefore coded also as reporters. In VAI, four out of the fifteen interviewees were reporters only and two were other types of interviewees. In Indybay, the number of reporters only was nine out of seventeen interviewees. As was to be expected, with OMNI, the distinction between reporters and other interviewees was clearer than with Indybay and VAI. Nine of the OMNI interviewees were reporters and three were staff.

The number of VAI interviewees, fifteen, was within the parameters of what had been the aim. However, of those, two interviewees did not strictly speaking meet the predetermined criteria for the interviewees, as one of them had been a reader of the VAI website and knew some of the people posting on it, but could not recall in the interview situation whether he had ever posted on the website. The other interviewee was

interviewed because, as the editor of a print publication of the environmental movement and of animal rights activists in Finland, he had published in the paper articles taken from the VAI website and had used it frequently.

The total number of Indybay interviewees, seventeen, exceeds the original planned upper limit per case study by two interviews. The reason for this is that I saw it was beneficial to interview people who were involved in Indybay's regional sections. Therefore, I conducted interviews outside of San Francisco, two in Fresno and three in Santa Cruz, which led to the increase in the total number of Indybay interviews. However, as Indybay operates in a fairly sizeable area, I felt that this slight increase in sample size was justified.

Table 4: The sample of interviewees per case study

	Total number of interviews achieved/aim	Total number of email interviews achieved/aim	Reporter only	Involved in a media organisation only	Both a reporter and involved in a media organisation	Other	Male	Female
VAI	15/13-15	11/15	4	2	7	2	13	2
Indybay	17/13-15	10/17	9	0	8	0	13	4
OMNI	12/13-15	7/9	9	3	0	0	9	3

In the case of both VAI and Indybay, the interviewees who were active in a collective varied in their type of involvement. Thus, some Indybay and VAI interviewees had been involved in moderating or editing the website and a few had been involved in coding the application. There were also variations in the length of people's involvement in both collectives. In the case of Indybay, one interviewee was involved in the editorial collective of the bi-monthly newsmagazine of Indybay, called *Fault Lines*, and another interviewee was a photo coordinator of the website. The interviewees of VAI included people who were involved when the website was launched and people involved when was closed, which had been the aim.

The total number of OMNI interviews, twelve, is one less than my original target of thirteen. This was because I had hoped to interview one to two more members of staff. However, when I was conducting the interviews, most of the staff of OMNI had been made redundant and thus there were not many people left working for the organisation. On the other hand, although I did interview one former member of the staff, I did not want to skew the sample by relying excessively on information provided by people who were no longer employees. Therefore, in addition to interviewing a former assistant editor for OMNI, I interviewed the two key people who were still

working for the international edition of OMN, that is, the senior editor and an employee who was responsible for the international business relations and corporate communications of the company and whose idea the launching of the international edition had been. After the redundancies, in addition to the senior editor, there was one USA-based editor working for OMNI, but I was unable to secure an interview with him despite him being initially open to the idea of an interview.

The majority of all interviewees (see Table 4) were male, as were the majority of the reporters (see Table 5). It is difficult, if not impossible, to assess with certainty how closely the distribution of gender of the interviewees follows the actual distribution in the organisations, for the reasons that were noted earlier in this chapter. Based on discussions with interviewees and my own observations when identifying potential interviewees by going through people's contributions on the websites, it seems that there may have been more men than women involved in creating content in VAI, and at the time when the interviews were conducted, also in Indybay and amongst the USA-based reporters for OMNI. In particular in VAI, most of the people who had been involved in the collective seemed to have been men, whereas amongst those who posted content on the VAI website, the distribution of gender seemed to have been less imbalanced. Although I am unable to make any definite statements about the distribution of gender in VAI and Indybay, my observations seem to correspond with what Kidd (2003c) and Pickard (2006, p. 334) have argued about the Indymedia network, that is, that although in principle, it is open to anyone, not everyone is represented in Indymedia. As Kidd (2003c) notes about the Indymedia network on the whole: "the reality remains that those people able to volunteer in IMC groups, or post on-line, tend to represent a small minority of young, white, male North Americans and Europeans" (p. 13). Although in relation to gender, my findings are in keeping with Kidd's observation, in relation to age, as is discussed next, they are contradictory.

3.8.1   Characteristics of the sample of reporters

Table 5 shows the distribution of gender, education, employment and age of interviewed reporters who were involved in creating content on the VAI, Indybay or OMNI website. The age range of interviewed reporters was wide, in VAI between 25 and 60, in Indybay between 21 and 81, and in OMNI between 21 and 65 years old. Amongst the USA-based reporters of OMNI there seemed to be people of many ages and, based on my small sample, I was unable to see any pattern emerging in relation to

age. In Indybay, many reporters were observed to be aged 50 or over, whereas in VAI, the majority were in their twenties at the time VAI had been active. This seems to correspond with many VAI reporters' affiliation with the alter-globalisation movement and with the fact that, unlike Indybay, the VAI website had not had time to mature, as it was closed down in 2003. Consequently, it cannot be known what the reporter base of VAI would have been like several years after the launch of the website. Based on some of the Indybay interviews, it seems that the age structure of reporters of Indybay may have shifted from predominantly young to including a significant number of older reporters. Thus, it appears that in relation to Indybay, the notion of Indymedia's mainly young reporters, as put forward by Kidd (2003c, p. 13), does not apply. This finding also contradicts Atton and Hamilton's (2008, p. 52) observation of not finding much evidence of older people in alternative journalism on the whole.

Table 5: The sample of reporters per case study

	Gender		Education			Employment			Age			
	Female	Male	University degree	University student	No university	Employed or student	Freelance	Not working or retired	Min	Max	Average	Median
VAI	2	9	3	5	3	6	3	2	25	60	32	27
Indybay	4	13	12	1	4	12	2	3	21	81	46	48
OMNI	2	7	7	1	1	6	2	1	21	65	44	40

The level of education of the majority of reporters in this study was high as many either had at least an undergraduate degree, or were studying at the university. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Six, formal education cannot be seen as a prerequisite for becoming a skilled reporter. Amongst those who were coded in the category "No university" were reporters who had finished school or high school, who had vocational qualifications, or who had attended a community college, as well as reporters who had dropped out from university or from another type of course. The highest proportion of reporters that either had an undergraduate degree or, at the time when the interview was conducted, were university students, was in OMNI. In the case of VAI, the high proportion of those currently studying for a degree seemed to relate to the collective being fairly homogenous when considering the age of the people involved in it and that many of them were also providing content to the website. It must be noted though that VAI interviewees were coded based on their education at the time when the interview

was conducted and, therefore, a few of the interviewees shown in the table as students possibly had not yet begun studying when they were involved in VAI.

In the coding of employment, it was decided to create three broad categories, namely, "employed or student", "retired or not working" and "freelancer" that seemed to capture the overall characteristics of interviewees in relation to employment. In all three cases, the majority of interviewees involved in creating content were either employed, students or freelancers. The last category was included in the employment categories to highlight that in all three cases there were reporters who were self-employed. They were usually doing some type of freelance media work, most often as journalists. The group that was retired or not working includes reporters who, at the time they were interviewed, were not employed regardless of whether they were or were not seeking employment.

Other aspects of reporters' activities, such as how they differed in their ways of creating media content, in their skills levels and motivations, and in their modes of civic engagement other than journalistic activities, will be analysed in Chapter Six. The aim of the discussion here was to provide some basic information about the sample in the study as a whole and about the interviewed reporters in particular.

3.9   Analysis of the Interviews

All interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and were conducted "on the record". The average length of the interviews was 1 hour and 39 minutes. A few of the interviews were less than an hour long, and several lasted over two hours. I transcribed a few interviews that were in Finnish, but due to the sheer volume of work involved, decided to commission a professional transcription service based in Finland to transcribe the rest of the interviews in Finnish. All interviews in English were transcribed by a reputable London-based transcription service. The companies were instructed to transcribe each interview exactly as they heard it and to note also other sounds, such as laughter. As the transcripts were not subjected to conversational analysis, this level of detail in the transcription was seen appropriate.

For the purpose of becoming thoroughly familiar with the transcribed interviews, and to ensure that the interviews were being transcribed accurately, I checked all the transcriptions against the recording and made corrections where necessary. There were many occasions when, for example, a term or a name had been misheard by the person transcribing the interview; thus, for that reason alone, it was necessary to go through the

interviews. An even more important benefit, however, was the deeper understanding of the interviews that was gained by listening to the recordings. Responses to questions sent by email were in an electronic format, which helped to manage what became a considerable amount of textual data. Instead of translating into English all the interview transcripts and answers to email questions that were in Finnish, I decided to translate those parts from which a quotation was taken. Both the mission statement (Appendix H) and the editorial policy (Appendix I) of VAI were translated into English by a professional Finnish translator.

Given the decision to focus on research participants' subjective viewpoints on participatory journalism and to employ a comparative case study design, thematic coding was considered an appropriate method of interpreting the interview data. The procedure applied was developed by Flick (1998, p. 187), who bases thematic coding on the theoretical coding devised by Strauss (1987). Similar to the research project in hand, Flick (1998) analysed interview data from comparative studies and was interested in "the social distribution of perspectives on a phenomenon or a process" the underlying assumption being that "in different social worlds or groups, different views can be found" (p. 187).

Flick (1998, p. 188) advises that the process in thematic coding is a multistage process, beginning with a description of each case, that is, information about the interviewee and a summary of central topics mentioned by the interviewee, as well a short statement that captures the essence of the content of the interview. Hence, at this stage, the focus is on capturing the key points of an individual interview. In my analysis of the interview transcripts, I began this first stage when I was checking the interview transcripts against the recordings, and finished it when reading and re-reading the checked transcripts. I modified Flick's (1998) procedure somewhat, because I added my own observations and thoughts to a description of a case.

I conducted the second stage of the analysis using the qualitative analysis software NVivo, one of the computer programs suggested for theoretical coding (Flick, 2006, p. 354). Hence, I uploaded interview transcripts to NVivo and used the software to code each interview separately. While reading through the interviews in NVivo and coding them, I also made notes concerning interesting passages, key points and possible quotations. I modified Flick's (1998, p. 188) procedure, in which he suggests open coding followed by selective coding, by creating a coding frame from the outset based on themes I had covered in the interviews, and by then adding new subcategories throughout the process of coding. I opted for a tree structure in the coding frame and,

thus, I had six main categories, such as "interviewee's activities", "organisation for participatory journalism" and "publishing process" under which there were several subcategories, and some of these subcategories had further subcategories. So, for example interviewee's activities had the subcategories "participatory journalism activities", "involvement in social movements" and "media usage". Participatory journalism activities, for example, then had subcategories such as "ethics and principles", "motivation, role or aims" and "future plans".

As in the procedure devised by Flick (1998, p. 188), it is only after this stage that categories and themes are cross-checked with other interviews. From this cross-check, a thematic structure begins to emerge and this structure can then be further developed by examining some significant parts of the transcripts in more detail (Flick, 1998). I used Excel spreadsheet software in the second stage of the analysis of the themes that emerged from the transcripts because it lent itself better than did NVivo to making comparisons between interviewees' descriptions in relation to emerging patterns and trends. Moreover, it helped in counting different approaches and attitudes in statements that I had moved to Excel from NVivo. At this stage, I integrated the replies from emailed questions into the analysis. Because the questions had been largely standardised, I decided not to code them in NVivo.

Although in principle I followed the procedure described above, I also used a number of techniques ad hoc, in a way similar to what Kvale (1996) describes as perhaps the most common approach to the analysis of interviews, as follows:

> Thus the researcher may read the interview through and get an overall impression, then go back to specific passages, perhaps make some quantifications like counting statements indicating different attitudes to a phenomenon, make deeper interpretations on specific statements, cast parts of the interview into a narrative, work out metaphors to capture the material, attempt a visualization of the findings in flow diagrams, and so on. (pp. 203-204)

Therefore, as the above-described procedure suggests, the reality of how I interpreted the interview transcripts was less clear-cut than the process devised by Flick.

3.10 Conclusion

In this chapter, the aim has been to describe the decisions made concerning the research and to discuss the research process itself. Table 6 provides a summary of the research

design. Thus, it shows the two key types of data that were collected, that is, the guidelines for reporters on the websites of the organisations and qualitative face-to-face and email interviews with interviewees associated with three participatory media organisations VAI, Indybay and OMNI. The number of different types of interviews per case is also specified, and how the interviews and texts were analysed. The second and the third columns put forward the research questions and their corresponding core areas covered in an interview schedule and in textual analysis.

Table 6: The research design summary: VAI, Indybay and OMNI

Data collected/ analytic method	Research questions	Core areas covered in an interview schedule/textual analysis
Guidelines for reporters on VAI, Indybay and OMNI websites/ textual analysis	3. How do editorial principles and procedures differ between Indybay, VAI and OMNI and what are the wider implications of these differences for participatory journalism?	Editorial principles and procedures of participatory media organisations
	Key question: How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations?	All core areas
Qualitative interviews/ thematic analysis Total number of interviews *44 face-to-face* *28 email* <u>VAI interviews</u> *15 face-to-face* *11 email* - 4 reporters - 7 both reporters and involved in a media organisation - 2 involved in a media organisation - 2 other <u>Indybay interviews</u> *17 face-to-face* *10 email* - 9 reporters - 8 both reporters and involved in a	1. What are the similarities and differences between Indybay and VAI, and between them and OMNI, when account is taken of their aims and how and where they operate?	Organisational basis and principles of participatory media
	2. What factors affect the sustainability of participatory media online, on the one hand, between the two Indymedia collectives, and on the other, between them and OMNI?	Sustainability of participatory media
	3. How do editorial principles and procedures differ between Indybay, VAI and OMNI and what are the wider implications of these differences for participatory journalism?	Editorial principles and procedures of participatory media organisations Support available to reporters
	4. To what extent does the publishing process of participatory journalism disrupt or reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy?	Publishing process Alternative/ mainstream media dichotomy
	5. How and why do reporters of Indybay, VAI and OMNI engage with participatory media online and media in general?	Reporters' - participatory media practices - motivation, - aims - media usage
	6. What are the principles that reporters employ in relation to journalism ethics?	Reporters' journalistic ethics

media organisation	7. What kind of skills and knowledge does the practice of participatory journalism require?	Reporters' skills and knowledge
OMNI interviews *12 face-to-face* *7 email* - 9 reporters - 3 involved in a media organisation	8. When considering reporters' different modes of civic engagement, does the evidence support a theory of a shift in the ways in which people are politically active?	Reporters' civic engagement other than journalistic activities

The chapter began by locating the research project in its theoretical framework. This was followed by a discussion of how the qualitative approach in this study draws from the interpretivist epistemological position. Moreover, there was also a discussion of how, as the interest was in the subjective viewpoints and experiences of the people involved in participatory journalism either as reporters or as facilitators of the participatory media online, semi-structured interviews provided an appropriate method. Key criticisms of qualitative interviews and how to improve the quality in qualitative research were discussed.

There was an examination of the reasons for choosing a multiple case study design where research was carried out in two countries providing differing contexts. Furthermore, justification was given for the selection of the three cases: Indybay, VAI and OMNI. It must be stressed that a transcultural three-case study research design despite its benefits, is a compromise in terms of how much of the researcher's time and resources can be dedicated to each case and consequently how advanced the analysis of each case can be. The general complexity of the research, from gathering the data - in this research in two languages - to analysing them, inevitably increases in this type of research design, where the aim is to make comparisons of a number of levels. In this project, the comparisons are between rather different cases (two Indymedia collectives and OMNI), within two more similar cases (between Indybay and VAI) and between two countries (Finland and the USA). Finding a balance between breadth and depth certainly posed a challenge in this project.

The discussion on ethical considerations focused not only on the sensitivity to different cultural and societal settings, but also on how I positioned myself in relation to the interviewees and the impact that my role as a researcher, not having been involved in the practices of participatory journalism myself, may have had on the research. There was a description of the steps I took in order to follow the ethics policy of my university in relation to obtaining informed consent. I then described my general approach to sampling, which was derived from the theoretical sampling and aimed at achieving the

maximum variation in interviewees' perspectives. As was noted, there were certain attributes on the basis of which particular reporters could be expected to vary. Before leading the discussion to the chosen approach to the analysis of interviews and the description of the step-by-step procedure, the characteristics of the sample of interviewees on the whole and the reporters in particular were considered.

On reflection, my research techniques improved throughout the process in particular in relation to interviewing and to data analysis, with the latter proving to be the steepest learning curve for me. Thus, in hindsight and without a doubt, some aspects of my work could have been more refined from the start of the research process. To conclude, there obviously would have been several ways to research the phenomenon of participatory journalism – some of which I have discussed briefly in this chapter - and the route I chose is thus only one of many. However, given my aim to privilege the perceptions of people involved in participatory journalism in the analytic frame of civic cultures, I argue that my approach of employing qualitative interviews as the main source of empirical data and, when appropriate, corroborating the findings from, or drawing on other sources, was appropriate. Moreover, in my view, from the selection of case studies in their contexts and the construction of the sample to the extensive analysis of the interview transcripts, the procedures I applied facilitated the emergence of accurate and interesting findings. In the first of the empirical chapters, which follows next, the focus is on exploring how the three participatory media organisations differ in their ways of operating.

4 The Contextual Origins and Organisational Basis of VAI, Indybay and OMNI

This first of the empirical chapters discusses the organisational characteristics of the three participatory media organisations in the thesis. While the next chapter compares the publishing process on VAI, Indybay and OMNI websites, this chapter contextualises the emergence of these three participatory media organisations, and explores the organisational issues faced by two types of participatory media, both of which, however, rely on people to provide content on their websites. To describe them briefly, VAI and Indybay are volunteer-run, nonprofit and self-governing members of an international network of Indymedia, whereas OMNI forms part of a South Korean media company, OhmyNews, and is dependent on it for its resources. Because of the focus on media organisations that provide a platform for participatory journalism, the empirical evidence provided in this chapter derives largely from the interviews with people who are, or in the case of VAI were active in the two Indymedia collectives, and with the staff of OMNI, rather than from the interviews with reporters for their websites.

The dimension of the analytic frame of civic cultures addressed in this chapter is the spaces that "provide communicative access to others for civic encounters" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 124). The three media organisations, VAI, Indybay and OMNI, are analysed as spaces that facilitate participatory journalism online as a mode of civic engagement. They can be seen to represent what Dahlgren (2009) calls the "interactive media", which, according to him, "allow for many innovations where citizens are 'making space' for democracy, thereby extending and transforming public spheres" (p. 124). In this study, spaces are understood to refer also to the broader context within which each of the organisations is embedded. These two ways of conceptualising the civic cultures framework's dimension of spaces are of importance because, just as participatory journalism online does not exist in a vacuum, as behind the most visible layer, the website, there is an organisation that keeps it in operation, similarly, the organisation is rooted in a broader social, cultural, even historical context. The aim is to veer away from what are perceived as reductionist assumptions about how the use of the Internet for the exchange of information might lessen the need to explore the ways in which other dimensions in relation to communicative spaces shape them. Thus, the starting point in the thesis is not a view that Information and Communication

Technologies (ICTs), and in this case the Internet, would unquestionably be the motors of change, but rather that they are shaped by social relations and that social agents can use ICTs in many ways and for many purposes (Webster, 2002, p. 42).

The chapter begins with a discussion of VAI, which, as a defunct Indymedia collective, offers a starting point for making comparisons with Indybay. The emergence of VAI and Indybay is considered by drawing on the concept of media activism in relation to social movement theory, whereas the discussion on their organisational basis and sustainability is framed in terms of the literature on voluntary associations. OMNI, which is looked into after the examination of VAI and Indybay, is viewed as a more hybrid model for participatory media, and thus adds another aspect to the analysis. Therefore, the concept of the rhizomatic model of alternative media (Carpentier et al., 2003) is used in the discussion of OMNI except where its origins are discussed in relation to the launch of OMN in South Korea, which, similarly to VAI and Indybay, links to ideals of the democratisation of the media (Hackett & Carroll, 2006). To begin, each of the three cases is contextualised; this is followed by an examination of the organisational basis which, in turn, is followed by a description of factors that affect the sustainability of participatory media, on the one hand, as the member/activist type of volunteer organisation (Rochester, 1999) and on the other, as part of a commercial enterprise.

VAI, Indybay and the South Korean edition of OMN, the emergence of which will be looked into because it provides essential background information regarding the circumstances within which the international edition was launched, are analysed by considering the media landscape where they operate and to which, as will be argued, to an extent, they also act in response. Among the themes to be explored are the reasons why VAI was successful for only a limited period, whereas the Indybay website continues to operate. However, although VAI is the only one of the three organisations that is no longer active, it will be demonstrated that none of the three cases have been immune to challenges concerning the sustainability of a platform for participatory journalism.

To summarise the focus in this chapter, the two sub research questions to be addressed are as follows:

- What are the similarities and differences between Indybay and VAI, and between them and OMNI, regarding their aims, and how and where they operate?

- What factors affect the sustainability of participatory media online, on the one hand, between the two Indymedia collectives, and on the other, between them and OMNI?

The analysis of the three participatory media organisations begins in the following section with the case of VAI.

4.1 Launch of VAI: Activists' Media or Media Activism?

The emergence of VAI in 2000 appears to have marked a culminating point in the development of social movement activists' relations to the media in Finland. Mikola (2005) describes the change as follows:

> When in the 1990s, activists identified themselves first and foremost, for example, as environmental or animal rights activists, who certainly used the media to advance their cause, for many activists in the 2000s, the media and media culture were not the only means of influencing. They were seen primarily as objects of a struggle. (p.24)

In the 1980s, Finnish activists had become increasingly aware of the importance of the mainstream media in gaining publicity for their causes (Rasimus, 2006, p. 225). This meant that social movements would, in the planning of their activities, take into account how to maximise the exposure for them and their aims in the media (Rasimus, 2006, p. 226). The notion of democratisation of the media as an aim, therefore, marks a major shift from the media strategies of the 1980s; VAI, as a participatory media organisation that aimed to transform the media landscape in Finland, as will be explained in more detail below, by using the Internet as a distribution channel for information, news articles and opinions, was in the forefront of this development.

The emergence of VAI is also linked to how the range of tools available to movements had broadened. In the 1990s, social movements both in Finland and internationally began to use ICTs, such as email, mailing lists and the web, to coordinate action and to promote social and political change often alongside more traditional means of operating (Lindholm, 2005, p. 60; Rasimus, 2006, pp. 216-221; Rucht, 2004). The extent to which social movements' use of ICTs has enhanced their efficiency is debatable. On a positive note, Dahlgren (2007b) has asserted: "Both technologically and economically, access to the Net (and other technologies, such as mobile phones) has helped facilitate the growth of massive, coordinated digital

networks of activists" (p. 64). A more cautious, but fair assessment of the impact of ICTs, is put forward by Diani (2000), who argues:

> Existing bonds and solidarities are likely to result in more effective mobilization attempts than it was the case before the diffusion of CMC [computer media communication]; it is more disputable, though, whether CMC may create brand new social ties where there were none before. (p. 397)

As Diani (2000) suggests, the extent to which CMC and the Internet have enhanced social movements' attempts at mobilisation is not entirely clear.

In relation to activists' media strategies, the promises of the Internet have been, in addition to it offering an affordable means of self-representation and distribution of information to and beyond activist circles, its capacity to allow activists to surpass the mainstream media, and to offer them a source of activist-originated media content. However, it has also been argued that, similarly to other alternative media projects, those available online tend to have difficulties in reaching larger audiences without publicity in the mainstream media (Juppi, 2004, p. 94). Moreover, Downey and Fenton (2003, p. 197) note in relation to the Indymedia operation in Seattle in 1999 that there was a positive correlation between the visibility activists gained in the mainstream media and the number of hits on the website (Downey & Fenton, 2003, p. 197). These arguments point to the limited potential of the Internet on its own in helping activists reach wider audiences.

The idea of launching an Indymedia website in Finland came about in discussions between Finnish activists, who were protesting in Prague as part of an alter-globalisation movement during the Summit of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in September 2000. After returning home, a small group of people who knew each other from activists' other projects, some of which had to do with media, such as a video publication called *Katalyytti*, decided to form an Indymedia collective in Finland. As one of the activists who was involved in the launching of VAI and was active in providing content to the website recalled (Nikkanen, personal communication, September 1, 2006): "When I think of those first meetings, there were six or seven of us, really not a big group at all, and all of us were people who had worked with each other at least on some level." A few in this small group of people interested in media work were also living in the same commune. Based on the interviews, it seems that the VAI collective was built on existing ties between activists. This corresponds with

findings in research into social movements regarding the importance of social networks and private ties in encouraging individual participation (for example, Diani, 1995).

The Indymedia network was familiar to Finnish activists, as they had come across it on the Internet, and some had met abroad, often in demonstrations, people who were involved in Indymedia collectives in other countries. Some of the activists who launched VAI had been involved in the local Indymedia collective in Prague. The concept of a website where activists could give their account of events, however, was not entirely new in Finland, and not based only on activists' knowledge of Indymedia. As one interviewee recalled, one activist had collected other activists' stories, for example, from demonstrations, and published them on his website (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006).

The VAI website opened in time to cover a demonstration by a group of activists on the Finnish Independence Day on 6 December 2000, and it remained operational until August 2003. The emergence of VAI should be understood in the context that, in Finland, activism had attracted a great deal of bad press in the mainstream media from the mid-1990s onwards and public opinion was not particularly favourable towards certain forms of activism, such as illegal direct action (Karisto, 2006, p. 38; Rasimus, 2006, p. 287). As Rasimus (2006), who has researched the 1990s new social movements in Finland, argues: "The media coverage of social movements and their actions was characterised by suspicion and questioning of their motives" (p. 287). Hence, because of the frustration with the way in which activism was portrayed in the mainstream media[14], the activists' aim was to create a medium where they could represent themselves to a potentially wider audience than that which the social movements' the print publications had reached. For some activists, the aim of VAI was to be "the news medium of the alter-globalisation movement", as one of the core group of activists who launched the website put it (Laakso, personal communication, August 24, 2006). The view that VAI was important for the movement's "critical argumentation", as Lindholm (2005, p. 168) has noted, is likely to be a valid assessment, although the website's significance most likely did not remain the same at the different stages of its life-cycle.

Despite a strong identity as the alternative media of the alter-globalisation movement, at least for some of the interviewed activists who launched the website, VAI was to have a broader appeal. The second key aim was "to bring forward news that otherwise would not be brought forward" (Vainio, personal communication, September

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[14] Activists' criticism of the media is noted also by Lindholm (2005, p. 101) in his study on the alter-globalisation movement in Finland.

3, 2006). In practice, VAI created the opportunity for potentially anyone to publish content on their website and to discuss and comment on other people's contributions, as long as people adhered to VAI's editorial policy (Appendix I). In this sense, VAI can be seen as an attempt by activists to open media production and discussions to more people, encompassing also those not usually engaged in social movement activities, but who were interested in this type of civic engagement (Appendix H).

The collective running the Indymedia website decided to call it Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto. The latter part of the name means news agency, but the first part Vaikuttava does not translate well into English, because it means in Finnish something that aims to influence, but it also means impressive. If the literal meaning of the word vaikuttava is rejected, the name can be translated as "Active News Agency". Nonetheless, the name contains a reference to STT (Suomen Tietotoimisto - The Finnish News Agency), which is the biggest news agency in Finland with an 80% market share when sport and financial news are excluded (Kilpailuvirasto- The Finnish Competition Authority, 2001). The difference between VAI and STT becomes evident when how they perceive themselves is considered. While VAI (Appendix H) stated on its website: "We acknowledge our subjectivity, but aim for pluralism and accurate news coverage … We aim to create a new medium in Finland, one that is an active participant in the creation of a new, better society", the STT (2006) website declares, "STT does not seek to influence public opinion. Rather, its mission is to produce information on the basis of which readers, listeners and viewers can make their own conclusions and form opinions."

The name Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto relates also to VAI's third aim, specifically, to transform the Finnish media landscape, which has been affected by media concentration and cross-media ownership (Herkman, 2004). As one activist argued (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006):

> VAI never intended to coexist with Hesari [Helsingin Sanomat - the biggest newspaper in Finland] and STT (Suomen Tietotoimisto – the biggest news agency in Finland), but to destroy them; at least in principle, that is.

In its mission statement, VAI (Appendix H), however, puts forward its vision in a slightly more moderate tone: "We want to offer a new perspective alongside the world view of the mainstream media. We want to democratize the political power of the news media." Thus, in part, VAI was born as an attempt to provide points of view different

from those in the mainstream media and in part as a reaction to the perceived problems in the Finnish mainstream media.

Concentration has affected above all the Finnish press (Nieminen & Pantti, 2005, p. 66); over 50% of the Finnish newspapers that are published 4-7 days a week are owned by two companies: SanomaWSOY and AlmaMedia (Nieminen & Pantti, 2005, p. 66). A prominent example of cross-media ownership in Finland is SanomaWSOY, which, after merging with the newspaper giant Sanoma Oy and a publisher WSOY in 1999, became the largest media company in Finland (Herkman, 2004). The company publishes newspapers, magazines and books, broadcasts TV and radio programmes, offers mobile and online services and owns a film distribution company and a bookstore chain, as well as a newspaper and magazine distribution network (Herkman, 2004). SanomaWSOY has also grown into one of the major media companies in the magazine market in Europe.

The consequences of media concentration in Finland are far from clear. As was argued about the Finnish media in the Council of Europe's Compendium report (2009), which provides information about national cultural policies in Europe: "It is difficult to assess how media concentration will affect the quality and diversity of cultural contents. It is assumed that media concentration, commercialisation and homogenisation of content supply go hand in hand." It must be noted that although concentration may lead to the homogenisation of content, it does not say much about the quality of a single media product. In the Finnish context, there are, for example, several newspapers that can be considered quality papers. Moreover, the public service broadcaster YLE is perceived to provide "high quality cultural programmes" (Council of Europe's Compendium report, 2009).

It is important also to note that, on the whole, the Finnish media system is more diverse than the above given examples of concentration of the mainstream media and cross-media ownership indicate. For example, although the two largest media companies have continued to grow, many local and regional newspapers are thriving and recent years have seen a surge of small book publishers entering the market (Nieminen & Pantti, 2005, p. 202). Despite the commercialisation of the media in Finland from the 1970s onwards, the Finnish public service broadcaster YLE with its four television and four radio channels holds a strong position in the media environment (Jyrkiäinen, 2008). The Finnish media landscape is further diversified by magazines and journals, of which 3,500 were published in 2007 (Jyrkiäinen, 2008). Of those, 154 can

be categorised broadly as alternative press, described by Jyrkiäinen (2008) as "opinion journals, reflecting issues in society, politics, culture, religion and other themes."

It seems reasonable to assert that alongside the mainstream media in Finland has burgeoned a relatively vibrant alternative media stretching from the 1970s punk movement-inspired zines and the 1980s opinion and cultural journals to the 1990s anarchists' publications and radical media of the environmental and animal rights movements (Mikola, 2005). By and large, their intention has not been to overthrow the mainstream media, but to co-exist with them; hence, against this background, VAI's declaration of a media revolution can be seen as a ground-breaking idea even within the alternative media scene.

4.1.1   VAI as a voluntary association

The VAI collective as an all-volunteer organisation corresponds with Harris' (1998) characterisation of voluntary associations. She argues: "A key distinguishing feature of associations is their essentially voluntary nature. Uncoerced activity and work without pay is manifest at every level in every aspect of an association, and voluntarism underlies many of the organizational challenges the associations face" (Harris, 1998, p. 154). The extent to which Harris' assessment applies to the two Indymedia collectives will be discussed first in relation to VAI and then to Indybay.

In line with the principles of the Indymedia network as a whole[15], VAI was intended to be non-hierarchical and the decisions within the collective were to be made based on a principle of consensus decision-making, whereby the people involved must reach an agreement through discussions where everyone has an equal say. One interviewee recalled, "It [VAI] was not really a democracy in any way, but it was largely like it often is in activist circles, kind of aiming at consensus" (Huhta, personal communication, January 29, 2007).

According to information derived from the interviews, it appears that the core group that was actively involved in the collective numbered between ten and fifteen people. No-one was paid for their work, let alone for articles on the website; the group relied on people such as those who would offer technical support, organise meetings or moderate the website. There was no formal leadership or management, an aspect that separates VAI from many of the voluntary associations described in research (Harris,

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[15] Coyer (2005) provides a useful discussion of the principles upon which the Indymedia network has been built.

1998; Milofsky, 1988). Although occasionally there were meetings where people who were interested in becoming involved in the VAI collective were invited to take part, most of the discussions concerning the daily running of VAI took place on the mailing lists, such as on a moderation mailing list, the members of which checked articles and comments posted on the VAI website. It seems that, at times, only a handful of people were involved, as one interviewee put it, "Too few, all the time, always" (Laakso, personal communication, August 24, 2006), which then meant that decision-making concerning VAI was in the hands of only a few of the most active people. Volunteers such as moderators could do as much or little as they wanted, which in reality, meant that the amount of responsibility people had varied greatly depending on how much time they were able or prepared to spend on VAI and how much responsibility they were willing to take. Similar to voluntary associations in general, in this sense, control was not exercised over volunteers' activities (Harris, 1998, p. 147). Lacking a clear decision-making structure caused tensions. Some interviewees implied that in a small voluntary association like VAI it is difficult to criticise decisions if you yourself have not made a significant contribution, but those other volunteers have. At the same time, those who invest much time and effort are not necessarily open to criticism from those less active than themselves.

A major difference between VAI and many of the Indymedia websites was a decision to reject the free open source software that the Indymedia network had developed (Meikle, 2002, pp. 106-108). Instead, a self-taught activist wanting to advance his programming skills coded the web application, as it was seen that in that way, the collective could have a website that was more appropriate for its needs than the one used by many other Indymedia collectives. It can be argued that perhaps in some other less technologically advanced countries, having access to a free template may be crucial for setting up a website, whereas in Finland it was possible to choose between coding one's own application and using the one that was available. The decision to reject Indymedia's software was not endorsed by all interviewees, though. As one of them put it, "It is pointless using resources developing your own application when there is a really good one developed by the Americans" (Vainio, personal communication, September 3, 2006).

Funding, another aspect of resources, and frequently cited as a challenge for alternative media (Atton, 2002; Hackett & Carroll, 2006), was not an issue for VAI, which did not even have a budget. Because people who were involved in VAI were not paid and the collective operated without an office space, the only cost stemmed from the

website. VAI activists themselves provided the server and domain name, both of which, according to the interviewees, cost only a nominal sum. Hence, it was possible for VAI to operate in spite of not having any revenue, for example, from donations or from advertising on the website. In keeping with the Indymedia network, placing advertisements on the website was something that the collective emphatically rejected. The case of VAI highlights how low not only the entry cost, but also the cost of running this type of online news medium can be, thus confirming the positive assertions of how the Internet provides an affordable means of distribution of social movements' media (Rucht, 2004, pp. 50-51).

Relying solely on unpaid volunteers to do all the work involved in keeping the website running can, however, pose a serious challenge for the sustainability of the organisation. Moreover, VAI's type of hierarchy-avoiding volunteer organisation is susceptible to many other challenges related to the practices of the collective, as will be discussed next in relation to the sustainability of VAI.

4.1.2   Sustainability of a volunteer model: VAI

There are a number of intertwined reasons that led to VAI's closure in 2003. The analysis of the interviews with people who were involved in the collective suggests that there was no a clear, shared vision guiding the future of the website, whilst at the same time, the number of people active in the collective had decreased. According to several VAI interviewees, especially towards the end of its existence, VAI had a shortage of people in the collective, whereas the website had increased in popularity. It is not possible to verify the growth of the number of visitors to the website because reliable data of the page views from the whole period when VAI was operational are not available. However, based on the findings of the research by Kokkonen (2006, pp. 41, 105), who analysed the content published on the VAI website in relation to the Gothenburg demonstrations during the EU Summit in 2001, it appears that a wider group of people outside of the activist circles became involved in content production - this applies in particular to discussions following articles (Kokkonen, 2006, p. 41). It seems likely that the widened reporter-base corresponds not only with a wider, but probably also with a larger reader-base.

One activist described the tension caused by the popularity of the website combined with lack of people active in the collective (Nikkanen, personal communication, September 1, 2006):

> … it was that the number of visitors [on the VAI website] grew and the numbers of stories grew and the public interest grew. But after a certain point, the number of people who were actively involved did not grow and at some point, it began to decrease, in particular, because it is easier to just completely disappear than to reduce how much you do. Therefore, it is an impossible equation as, in a way, the number of working hours needed steadily increases, but the involvement and the number of key people reaches its height and then begins to fall.

One of the problems VAI had was that several of those activists who had been at the core of the collective withdrew from it, as they and those who made the decision to close the website down no longer believed that what they were doing was worthwhile; they were not satisfied with what the website had become. This finding, by and large, corresponds with Harris' (1998) observation:

> The fact that members can vote with their feet if they are not totally happy with their associational participation gives rise, for example, to the need to pay close attention to members' motivations and sociability needs, to strive to reach a consensus in decision making, and to avoid upsetting them in any way – even when this is at the expense of meeting longer term or broader goals or of enacting organizational change. (pp. 154-155)

Although the VAI website appears to have been popular, the collective, in addition to losing its members, was unable to recruit new people to help in running it or in launching a desperately needed new and improved version of the VAI website that would have made moderating it less labour intensive. Thus, not using the standard Indymedia software turned out to be a problematic decision, because the person who had developed the application was the only one who knew how the whole system worked. At that point, when the website would have required major technical transformation, he had no time to instigate the necessary changes, due to other commitments. Continuing to run the website without improvements was not seen as an option.

Technical problems and the inability to solve them were not, however, why VAI was closed down – besides, changing to Indymedia's freely available software would have solved these problems. There was serious friction between a few activists who had been involved in VAI from the beginning and a person who, by posting articles on the website and actively taking part in discussions in the comments section, and as a moderator of the website, had become a prominent figure in the collective. In this small group of active participants there were different opinions, for example, about the

editorial principles and their implementation, and about how the website should have been improved (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006; Kojo, personal communication, January 15, 2007; Rainesto, personal communication, January 10, 2007). The generational gap between some of the original participants in the collective and a considerably older activist who also did not share the alter-globalisation standpoint of the activists who had launched the website, nor their critique of "objectivity" (as will be discussed in Chapter 5), presented a further obstacle in finding a solution to disagreements.

The direction in which some of the people who had become active in VAI after its launch were trying to take the website was too distant from how the alter-globalisation movement activists had envisioned it. An activist who was involved in making a decision about closing down the website put forward in an interview one solution to the problem which the collective, however, did not implement. According to him (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006):

> It is in a way one of the things that I have perceived when working in many organisations and projects, that really an organisation, when it is a very loose and informal organisation, the measure of its maturity is, brutally thinking, its ability to throw people out...

The tendency of voluntary associations to find it difficult to make decisions concerning individuals and their management was also noted by Milofsky (1988) and Harris (1998) in their research on volunteering.

Failure to breathe new life into VAI was seen by some interviewees to reflect a weakening of the alter-globalisation movement from whose ranks VAI had emerged. This may offer a partial explanation, as the period of nearly three years when the collective was active saw the alter-globalisation movement in Finland flourish and decline though, as Lindholm (2005, p. 168) points out in his research on the movement in Finland, the weakening had begun already after the Genoa demonstrations in July 2001 and the terrorist attacks in the USA in September of the same year. It seems justified to argue that although the life cycle of the alter-globalisation movement cannot be held responsible for the closing down of VAI, the weakening of the movement meant that there were no activists from within the movement to fill the gap left by those who had launched the website and who wanted to step aside. Moreover, whilst in some interviews it was implied that VAI was a project, that is, it came to its end and the activists involved in it moved on to other projects, or as one reporter noted, people did

not really "think that far ahead" (Sardar, personal communication, January 30, 2007) when they launched the website, in some interviews it was clearly noted that it was not planned to be for the short term. The former attempt to explain VAI's closure echoes Fenton's (2007) concern that contemporary social movements tend to lack long-term vision and, thus, as she argues, "We are left with an unending sequence of new beginnings" (p. 238).

It appears that the dual identity of VAI, on the one hand as the media of the alter-globalisation movement and, on the other, as media activism, caused tension. VAI was not exclusively the medium of alter-globalisation movement activists, although they provided much of the content, in particular at the beginning. When more people from outside the activist circles began posting on the website, VAI shifted from reflecting mainly the interests or views of the alter-globalisation movement to reflecting those of a wider group of people. Although the consequences of the open publishing ethos are discussed in detail in the next chapter, at this stage, it is useful to note that this was not a development all activists who had launched VAI welcomed, not least because, along with a broader contributor base, problems such as spamming intensified. As more content of varying quality was posted on the website, so more time was required to moderate it. Some of the core group of people who had been involved with the VAI website from the beginning wanted to close it down, as continuing to maintain a website that the activists felt they could no longer support was not seen as an option.

Some of the difficulties that VAI had were concerned with poor organisation. As one activist in charge of coding the software for VAI argued (Aho, personal communication, August 31, 2006):

> In my view, a fundamental problem was that it was so much a "dis-organisation" or a kind of non-community in that it was just a bunch of people … there was no core group, which somehow would have taken the concept forward and would have dealt together with the problems that there were.

Another interviewee noted, "The organisation was so loose that it operated only, or by and large, only on mailing lists" (Öberg, personal communication, January 30, 2007). These comments imply that VAI was an organisation without much organisation. Although a few of the people who were actively involved met frequently, and although there was an occasional meeting, as some interviewees recalled, it appears that there was not much face-to-face interaction within the entire collective, which used mainly mailing lists for keeping in touch. A sense of not having a feeling of belonging to a

community because communication was mainly computer mediated may be linked to why there were not enough people who were sufficiently committed to take responsibility for running the website. It has been strongly argued in some research on virtual communities that in comparison to offline ties, online ties are more difficult to sustain (see, for example, Rice, 1987).

With VAI, one problem seems to have been that despite the media activism philosophy, there were not enough people wanting to focus on the media democratisation aspect of VAI. Instead, some viewed the website as another activists' medium. It also seems that, by the time the VAI website closed down, not many social movement organisations were actively providing content to the website. Those contributions would have been in keeping with VAI's social movement origins and could have helped the website regain its news orientation.

4.2   Launch of Indybay: Media Democratisation in the San Francisco Bay Area

The Indymedia website in San Francisco was launched at the beginning of 2000 and one of the first events of which it offered wide coverage was the demonstrations for communication rights during the annual Radio Convention of the National Association of Broadcasters. On the Indybay website (Appendix J), the collective states its aims as follows:

> We strive to provide an information infrastructure for people and opinions who do not have access to the airwaves, tools and resources of corporate media. This includes audio, video, photography, internet distribution and any other communication medium.

> We support local, regional and global struggles against exploitation and oppression. We function as a non-commercial, non-corporate, anti-capitalist collective.

As the statement of aims indicates, the main purpose of the collective is to offer a platform for contributions from people that do not have a voice in the corporate media. It highlights the detachment of the collective from commercial values by providing non-corporate coverage in support of people's struggles. In comparison to the VAI collective, which saw itself as the challenger to the mainstream media, the collective in San Francisco set itself against the corporate and commercial media. This difference reflects the differences between the media systems in Finland and the USA, that is, the democratic corporatist model of media and politics in the former and the liberal model in the latter (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 143-248). A dominant characteristic of the

liberal model of the USA is that both print media and broadcasting are, in the main, commercial enterprises, and non-commercial media, including public service broadcasting, exist in the margins (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, pp. 198-199).

The Indymedia collective in San Francisco is part of what Hackett and Carroll (2006, pp. 93, 96-97) call the "democratic media activism" wave. The target for media activists is, according to them, (Hackett & Carroll, 2006) "media's democratic deficit in its various manifestations" (p. 93). In the USA, this has meant perhaps most noticeably advocating a public interest communication policy and individual communication rights (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, pp. 96-97). Media Alliance, formerly the San Francisco, nowadays the Oakland-based advocacy centre and media resource for social justice activists and organisations and media workers, played a major role in supporting the launch of Indymedia in San Francisco. A concrete example of the close links between the two is that an employee of Media Alliance became a member of the core group of activists in the collective.

Through Media Alliance, which was founded in 1976, the emergence of Indymedia in San Francisco links to a broader democratic media activism movement in the USA. Since the mid 1960s, the movement has gone through different phases, each of which has had its own focus. The late sixties/early seventies saw a mushrooming of the alternative press and at the centre of attention were the civil rights of, for example, women and minorities, such as gays and lesbians, whereas the rest of the 1970s cultural sovereignty and North/South imbalances in the postcolonial context were the target of activities (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 93). In the 1980s, market-liberal conservative forces, as part of an attack on what they perceived as a left-liberal bias in the media, were able to push forward a relaxation of the broadcasting, cable and telecommunications regulations (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 95). After the 1990s post-communist media reform focusing on fighting for freedom of expression in former authoritarian societies, the turn of the decade was dominated by a struggle to influence neoliberal communication policies in the digital era (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 95).

Those calling for media reform in the USA base their critique on the consequences of antidemocratic media policy making, which has intensified in the USA since the 1980s (McChesney, 2004). As McChesney (2004) argues: "The rigorous drive for so-called deregulation is based upon the 'neoliberal' view that markets and profit making should be allowed to regulate every aspect of social life possible" (p. 49). The consequences of deregulation, the critics argue, have been dire. Perrucci and Wysong (2003) claim: "The information industry consistently delivers news and information that

effectively reinforce superclass and corporate interests – at the expense of working-class interests in an informed citizenry and participatory democracy" (p. 167).

It is debatable whether the failure of the liberal model of the USA has been as extensive as the above scholars suggest, and the issue cannot be resolved here. What seems evident, however, is that the emergence of the Indymedia network in the North American context can be seen as a reaction to problems with the corporate media and critiques coming from many quarters of the critical political economy approach, such as, in addition to the above, Herman and Chomsky (1994). Indymedia in San Francisco was born to break the mould, where such media are seen to reinforce the status quo. Hence, the aim of the website was to offer both individuals and social movement organisations making their own media in their own way an outlet for their contributions, whether text, audio, video or photography. From the beginning, Indymedia in San Francisco emphasised their position as an alternative to the corporate media, which, as many Indybay interviewees in this study argue, are falling short of the ideal in a number of ways in the USA.

By and large, criticism focuses on three key issues, namely, bias, entertainment, and advertising, and thus mirrors to a large extent criticisms from the critical media studies, as was discussed in Chapter 2. Bias is seen as leaning heavily towards supporting neoliberal views or giving preferential treatment to the perspective of elites and, therefore, rarely giving access to dissenting voices, including those of activists and leftist intellectuals. As one Indybay contributor explained in the context of why he reads the Indybay website (Livingston, personal communication, November 25, 2006):

> I wanted to know what activists in San Francisco were thinking. Not the people who control the city, the political heads, the business heads, but the street activists, what they were interested in, and it [the Indybay website] was a source to find out. In such a big city … we have so many interesting people doing such a diverse range of things, and we don't know what the others are doing often times. And if you rely on the mainstream media to know, you get a very distorted picture…

As an indication of bias, the corporate media are seen to overlook views and topics that are of importance to those people who are, broadly speaking, promoting change.

Some interviewees refer to the so-called dumbing down of the media through the endless circulation of, for example, celebrity gossip. As an Indybay contributor argued about what is news in American media (Robertson, personal communication, December 3, 2006):

This business of showing Britney Spear's divorce and stuff is, like, is dumbing down the whole nation [laughs]. When the media acts like that's news, that's just so sad, you know. To me that's so sad. It's almost like, "Let's think about Britney Spear's divorce instead of about the fact that people are being tortured", you know [laughs].

Corporate media's dependence on advertising revenue and their close links to other businesses and government sources were seen as a way in which the news coverage in the corporate media is compromised. A radio show host who posts her programmes on the Indybay website asserted (Cadman, personal communication, June 12, 2007):

But there's no doubt that advertisers have a huge influence on the news because they're sponsoring a lot of radio and television and other stations. But there's also the element of radio and television outlets being owned by people who have a political agenda and who push the news in a certain direction… I mean, you know, I think Rupert Murdoch owns Fox and there's no doubt that his view of world is what is being presented on that station.

However, although the corporate media critique and democratisation of the media are the ideological sentiments upon which Indybay is built, an Indybay activist explained that, on a practical level, the website serves the needs of activist circles (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006):

…activists have always made a big effort to keep in touch with what's going on in the community. There's a march; they like to know about it. There's a meeting or a film, music, benefit; people want to know about those things. There's a natural tendency to go looking for that information, and they find it with us [the Indybay website]. We have a calendar that has almost every left wing event going on in San Francisco, and we have coverage of a lot of those events after the fact. So people like to go to a demonstration, like to know where it is, like to know where the march is going to go; and afterwards, they want to see pictures of it.

According to many of the interviewees, one of the most important and valued elements of the Indybay website is the calendar, as it brings together a large number of events organised by a fairly broad array of leftist, progressive communities, NGOs and social movement organisations in the San Francisco Bay Area. On any given day, several events are listed on the Indybay website, which indicates the vitality of activism and social movement activities in the area. However, the Indybay website is not only a place to obtain information about upcoming and past events; it has another important function. As one volunteer from the Indybay collective argued (Carpenter, personal

communication, November 24, 2006): "There's a lot of things that encourage people to actually take part in an action, to do something, rather than just read, you know."

4.2.1 Indybay as a voluntary association

Similarly to VAI, the Indybay collective is an association that is dependent on people volunteering, as it does not have paid staff. Interviews with people active in Indybay indicate that the collective aims to be non-authoritarian and it is organised in such a way that people have different tasks. For example, a volunteer can be responsible for the technical maintenance of the Indybay server, develop the website code so that it better serves the needs of people posting on the website, have a role as a photo coordinator or work as an editor as part of an editorial group of the website. Unlike VAI, the San Francisco Indymedia did not attempt to create their software. Their website is based on the web application that was used by Indymedia in Seattle. Over the years, programmers have modified and updated the code to suit their particular needs. Amongst improvements to the original application have been the addition of sections that help in dealing with spam and making changes that make it easier to add more pages to the website. Because, over time, the geographic area that the Indybay website covers has grown, the web application has had to evolve to accommodate increased use. Hence, the constant evolution in how the website functions has been important.

A group of editors is responsible for editing the centre column of the Indybay website and for moderating the incoming posts. At least occasionally, volunteers have held media activism workshops for aspiring contributors needing help in honing their skills. According to one key member of the Indybay collective, the collective works as follows (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006):

> All decisions are made by a collective, and we work on a sort of blocking, so that if one or two people are seriously opposed to something happening, and they can stop us, we have to reach a consensus where you have a full agreement of the collective on an important matter. The structure is that there are, in the editorial collective and in the other groups, there's a set of co-equal coordinators… But there's nobody who's telling the people who work in those areas what to do. Generally, we like to go by volunteering to do something rather than telling somebody else to do something. So what happens is based on the desire of somebody to do it, rather than a compunction you have to do this because the person in charge is telling you what to do.

Thus, within the Indybay collective, work is shared based on people's interests. This obviously does not mean that the workload is distributed equally between those people who are active in the collective. As with the VAI collective, the amount of time volunteers spend on Indybay work varies.

Based on the interviews with people active in both Indybay and VAI collectives a distinction can be made between those who spend some hours a month on the work of the collective, and those whom Rochester (1999), in his activist model of volunteer associations, calls "the inner group of very active volunteers on whom the association is heavily dependant" (p. 15), and whose contribution is several hours most days. One of the key differences between VAI and Indybay, however, is that people active in the Indybay collective have each a jointly decided responsibility, which they have taken up voluntarily. Therefore, the assignment of tasks is not random, as what needs to be done has been identified and the responsibilities for the tasks assigned. As research on voluntary organisations suggests, regardless of how much it may be frowned upon, some level of structure is necessary for an organisation to succeed (Handy, 1985, 1988).

Since its emergence, Indybay has ventured into making radio programmes and publishing a free, bi-monthly newsmagazine called *Fault Lines*. Neither of these, however, is still operational. The website has retained not only its key position in the work of Indybay throughout the years the Indybay collective has been operating, but it has also expanded as new areas around San Francisco, such as Santa Cruz which used to have its own Indymedia website, have become an autonomous part of Indybay. Depending on the variety of functions, the work of the collective has required varying levels of monetary resources. Previously, the collective rented an office space, but for the past few years it has managed well without one. An Indybay activist described the current organisation (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006): "Without an office, without any paid staff, without any of these that you find in an organisation, it just sort of exists in cyberspace." The funds for maintaining this lightweight organisation come from donations given during fundraising campaigns and from money that people can donate through the Indybay website.

4.2.2   Sustainability of a volunteer model: Indybay

Indymedia in San Francisco experienced a similar situation to that of VAI, where people involved in the collective debated the future direction and did not agree. In 2004, the Indymedia collective in San Francisco separated into two after disagreements

between some members of differing political positions about how the collective should operate. After the split, one group kept the name San Francisco Indymedia and the website address http://www.sf.indymedia.org/. The website is, however, no longer operational. The other group chose the name Indybay, which some members of the collective had already been using as a nickname for the San Francisco Indymedia. Consequently, they took on a website address http://www.indybay.org/.

One of the volunteers (Sousa, personal communication, August 6, 2007) who was actively involved in the Indymedia collective in San Francisco at the time of the split described what happened as follows:

> There were some personal conflicts, and … I would say, a mix of personal conflicts and sort of, like, political views. One group was definitely more into closing the collective and making it more private and really kind of getting a little bit, I think, like paranoid and sort of, like, this security culture kind of thing, which made it really difficult for new people to get involved.

A "tendency of members to fight their own corner rather than to think in terms of the association's long term goals", as Harris (1998, p. 147) puts it, and a reluctance to accept change tend not to be uncommon characteristics for voluntary associations (Bishop & Hoggett, 1986).

It appears that trying to find a solution to disagreements through computer-mediated communication did not help the Indymedia collective in San Francisco before it finally split. As an activist pointed out (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006): "If you have a problem with a group that communicates by email rather than by telephone, or by face-to-face, it's that you tend to use stronger language in emails, and tend to be more rhetorical and argumentative, and that happened to us." What is referred to here is "flaming", that is, posting insults and attacking individuals or groups. Research comparing face-to-face and computer-mediated communication (CMC) tends to suggest that flaming is more common in the latter type of communication, which is seen as more anonymous (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978; Joinson, 2003; Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Spears, Lea, & Postmes, 2001). However, to explain flaming in the case of Indybay with the use of CMC is unlikely to offer an entirely plausible explanation. As Spears, Lea, and Postmes' (2001) research suggests, the norms a group adopts in general affect how it interacts online.

One activist from the Indybay collective pointed out that there are several people who are actively involved in the work of the collective, for example, as editors, but who do not attend meetings (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007). He also argued

that, on the one hand, "It is hard to keep the group going when you don't have a feel of a strong group", but, on the other, "because there's less of a feel of a coherent group, that actually helps in terms of people posting" (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007). Hence, it is easier to get people to contribute to the website, whether individuals or representatives of organisations, when they do not perceive it as the project of a tightly knit group. Indybay's focus on being a media outlet for a broad range of individuals and organisations is likely to be a strategy that has helped it to carry on.

One of the key reasons why Indybay has grown and become so dynamic appears to be that the website is open to people representing a fairly broad range of views and interests, whereas the other collective in San Francisco adopted a stricter approach on who and what could be published and on who could become involved in the collective. It seems that the Indybay collective has found a balance between keeping the collective open to new participants and the security culture that activists adopt to protect those who are involved in illegal action from persecution by the police. The negative effect of the security culture that is a common aspect of social movement organising is put forward by Starr, Fernandez, Amster, and Wood (2007), who argue:

> Secretive planning is just one of many dimensions of what activists call "security culture". Surveillance has in fact caused security culture to *replace* organizing culture, with devastating impacts. The hallmarks of organizing culture are inclusivity and solidarity. The hallmarks of security culture are exclusion, wariness, withholding information, and avoiding diversity (p. 17).

Excessive measures regarding the security culture can lead to a situation where aspiring members of a collective are treated with suspicion about their motives and information is kept from them. This, in turn, tends to discourage new people from becoming involved, and if the collective hopes to expand, it may become difficult (for a discussion on the security culture of the alter-globalisation movement see Fernandez, 2005).

The Indybay collective appears to have a weaker association with the alter-globalisation movement than had VAI. This does not mean, of course, that there have not been alter-globalisation movement activists posting on the website or involved in the collective, but rather that the website has been aligned with the ideal of the democratisation of the media, as the collective wants to provide everyone who adheres to its editorial policy with an opportunity to contribute. The group that keeps the Indybay website running is small, but based on the interviews, they seem dedicated to media activism and appear to know that their contribution is important for the

collective. As one activist noted (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007): "My motivation is, if I don't keep on doing it, the site might not survive."

4.3 Launch of OMN and OMNI: From South Korean Media Activism to Showcasing the Concept of OhmyNews to the World

OMNI is an English-language participatory journalism website that was launched in 2004. It forms part of a South Korean media company OhmyNews, which was founded by Oh Yeon-Ho, a seasoned journalist for a progressive South Korean magazine *Mal*. He believed that the Internet had the potential for collaborative news production. It had not gone unnoticed by Oh that in South Korea households were increasingly having broadband access and that the younger generations especially were becoming avid users of the Internet (Gillmor, 2006, pp. 126-127). Yet, in his view, the print media in South Korea did nothing to capitalise on this potential, as by republishing their print editions online, they did not attempt to facilitate new ways of making news (Oh, 2004).

In Oh's view, practising journalism should not be left to established news organisations and their professional reporters. Rather, in his opinion, everyone should be able to take part in news production, and contributions ought to be judged based on the quality of the media content rather than on who the contributors are, or which media organisations they represent. Oh (2004) describes his vision of OhmyNews as follows:

> I wanted to open a place of fair competition where people who wanted to share news with one another could do so through the Internet. I wanted to establish a culture where the quality of news determined whether it won or lost. I wanted to start a tradition free of newspaper company elitism were news was evaluated based on quality, regardless of whether it came from a major newspaper, a local reporter, an educated journalist or a neighborhood housewife. I wanted to realize through the Internet the motto "Every citizen is a reporter," something that couldn't be done through printed newspapers. (p. 8)

Oh's (2004) assertion reflects his own experiences as a reporter for Korean alternative media, which meant restricted access to sources and writing articles that were not assessed by their merit because they had not appeared in the mainstream media that were higher up in the hierarchy in the South Korean media system. The option to launch an Internet newspaper rather than a print publication made it economically feasible for Oh, who had managed to accumulate some funds, to start up OMN (Oh, 2004).

The way in which OMN invites people to become involved in media production and how, to a large extent, it relies on peoples' contributions – the company calls them

citizen reporters - from all over the country, sets it apart from the traditional progressive media organisations in South Korea such as *Mal*, where Oh used to work, as in them, media production is in the hands of staff reporters. On the other hand, what sets OMN apart from participatory media such as Indybay and VAI, and makes it an interesting experiment is that the content of OMN is a mixture of articles written by in-house staff and articles editorial staff select from material submitted by reporters, who receive a modest compensation for articles that are published on the website.

The emergence of OMN in South Korea must be considered in its historical context. After 26 years of military dictatorship ending in 1987, during which newspaper censorship was extensive and access to the market was heavily restricted, the period of democratisation that followed was left with a conservative-dominated newspaper market (Kern & Nam, 2008, p. 14). Consequently, the launch of the progressive online news service OhmyNews can, at least to some extent, be seen to have filled a gap in the market for an alternative to conservative media. What is more, OMN facilitates an online space for communication amongst citizens, and thus creates opportunities for people to exercise "the right to communicate", which the proponents of media activism see as one of the democratic rights (Hackett & Carroll, 2006, p. 13). Although OMN is not part of a social movement but a media company, its aims and the way in which it has emerged to challenge the conservative media in South Korea, correspond with the aims of media activism.

According to Oh (quoted in Ismartono, 2007), people use OMN for discussing political issues:

> Certainly, politics is the most popular subject in OhMyNews because as you may know in Korea during the 1970s, 1980s and thru the early 1990s, we were not able to enjoy freedom of speech, especially on (the subject of) politics. But thanks to democratization, the democratic movement during that period and thanks to the internet, we are enjoying total freedom of speech. So, Korean people enjoy discussing political [political] issues and OhMyNews is a kind of a playground for people, especially since our very good coverage of the 2000 presidential elections. That's why OhMyNews is strong in politics and why many readers visit the OhMyNews website to know about political issues. (p. 2)

It appears, then, that the emergence of OMN can also be explained by people's desire to exercise freedom of speech, a freedom that had been denied them for decades.

Since its launch, OMN has grown in popularity and acclaim in South Korea. At the end of 2000, the website had 7550 contributors and, two years later, the figure had

nearly tripled to over 21000 citizen reporters (Joyce, 2007, p. 18). In 2009, OMN has reportedly over 70000 contributors (Woyke, 2009a). An average page views per day in 2009 was 2.5 million (Woyke, 2009a). In 2005, OMN was ranked sixth in the annual survey conducted by *Sisa Journal* to identify the most influential media in South Korea (Sutton, 2006, p. 8). On the other hand, in the same year, the three biggest conservative newspapers *Chosun-Ilbo*, *Donga-Ilbo* and *Joongang-Ilbo* still dominated the newspaper market with their combined circulation of 60% (Kern & Nam, 2008, p. 15).

An enlightening assessment of why OMN's publishing model has succeeded in the competitive South Korean media market is put forward by Kern and Nam (2008), who argue:

> On the one hand, as a progressive newspaper, *Ohmynews* receives the support of many civic organizations, such as the CCDM [the Citizens' Coalition for Democratic Media] and movement activists, who contribute content and articles. On the other hand, it tries to make a profit by competing with established offline newspapers. In our interviews with citizen reporters, we found that the business orientation of the organization often leads to conflict with the community orientation of the contributors. However, it seems to work because the founder of *Ohmynews* maintains close relations with civic groups as well as professional journalists. From one side he receives contributions and articles, and from the other side, professional recognition. (p. 28)

Due to the abovementioned wide ranging support, OMN has a constructive relationship with the South Korean movement for media democratisation and civic organisations more generally, which is likely to be a vital element for its success. However, as Kern and Nam (2008) suggest, it is a balancing act for OMN as a participatory media company that needs to make enough profit to remain operational, to earn credibility in the eyes of both the mainstream media circles and the social movement activists. If OMN is considered as a rhizomatic media, retaining its independence despite being a commercial enterprise is of vital importance for the company.

While Seoul-based OhmyNews caters for Korean-speaking readers and contributors, whether in South Korea or abroad, OMNI, an English-language edition of OhmyNews, was launched to showcase the concept of OhmyNews – every citizen is a reporter - not only to a potentially global audience, but more importantly to people wanting to contribute to OMN in the English language. It seems no coincidence that the launch of the international edition in 2004 coincided with the moment when people outside of South Korea had begun to learn about OMN from coverage in the mainstream media. Among the first well-known major news organisations to run an

article about OMN were *The New York Times* (French, 2003) and the BBC (Gluck, 2003).

The motivation of OMN to launch an international website is explained by the Director of the International Division of OMN as follows (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007):

> It's [OhmyNews International] more like an experiment to globalise a news order, but, at the moment, we've decided to maintain it as a showcase, because so many people want to know about us and how it's doing, so it gave them a chance to join us as a citizen reporter. So that they would get to know better about what kind of system's is in place. So it's more like a showcase. So, if you are visiting OhmyNews International, you are not really looking at the bigger picture, but the simplified or modelised form of OhmyNews model. The real operation is going on in Seoul and Tokyo.

As Min (personal communication, July 1, 2007) implied, an increased interest amongst English speakers regarding OMN created the momentum for launching an international edition. With OMNI, the company has been able to respond to this interest and to have a website from where non-Korean speaking foreigners, not least the press, are able get an idea of what OMN is about. Yet, it is worth noting here that OMN sees the international edition as a showcase though there are some fundamental differences between the ways in which the two editions operate, the most obvious being that OMNI does not have staff reporters. Why Min (personal communication, July 1, 2007) asserted that OMNI is a "simplified" version of OMN becomes clear in the next section where consideration is given to how else these two editions differ. On the other hand, the editions are at least in one way not very different. As a reporter notes about both editions: "Just average people write about a lot of different things" (Kang, personal communication, July 4, 2007).

The two "real" operations to which Min (personal communication, July 1, 2007) compared OMNI are its Korean edition and the website that OMN launched in Japan in 2006. According to him (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007):

> …we aim to enter each country one by one in serving this local news audience in their own local language, like Japan. And OhmyNews in Japan is doing exactly the same thing as did OhmyNews in Korea. And then you are serving that Japanese audience with the Japanese language. So if you go to any other country, we want to do that, the same thing, instead of serving this global side. Global audience is a kind of fuzzy concept.

Hence, Min (personal communication, July 1, 2007) stressed that OMN's future strategy is to launch country-based websites rather than to develop OMNI.

4.3.1   OMNI as rhizomatic media

Unlike the South Korean edition, OMNI, because of its broad geographic reach, can bring together news, views and analysis from a broad range of reporters from many parts of the world. In that sense, it corresponds with the notion of rhizomatic media, as suggested by Carpentier et al. (2003; also Bailey et al., 2008), which provides a central hub for streams of information flowing in from people who provide content on the website. It has the potential not only to inform its readers about various issues that affect people in their localities, but also to engage them in discussions following articles. The extent to which the latter materialises on the website is questionable. At least in the interviews with the USA-based reporters of OMNI about the articles they had published on the website, a modest amount of evidence emerged to support a view of extensive discussions amongst the readers.

As a rhizomatic media, OMNI can also facilitate the formation of connections between people, because reporters can be contacted by sending a message to them via the website. More often than not, the interviews with reporters did not point to any significant use being made of this facility, or that the contacts made through the system would have led to the formation of larger networks. On the other hand, for some interviewees who had been invited to the citizen reporters' forum in Seoul, the event, based on their accounts, had provided valuable opportunities to network with fellow reporters and others from South Korea and around the world. My observations when attending the forum in 2007 supported this finding.

The international edition differs from the Korean edition not only because it is aimed at a world-wide English-speaking audience, but also because it has editors, but not reporters, working for it. Because OMNI does not operate in the limited geographic area like OhmyNews, it therefore is not possible for it to have in-house journalists who could cover events as they unfold. Yet, "by combining in the staff professional journalism, and citizen journalism" as Min put it, the news media, according to him, "can be much more interesting" (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007). Moreover, he (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007) also argued that: "We don't … We are not saying that citizen reporters' contribution alone would be good enough to survive as an attractive news media." In addition to mixing contributions by staff reporters and people who post content on the website, OMN has invested resources in enhancing the quality of the content provided by the latter by offering newsroom

training sessions and, since 2007, journalism training in its own journalism school near Seoul (OMNI, 2007). It seems justified to argue that the key ideas upon which OMN is based do not materialise in OMNI, as the website is unable to provide content by staff reporters. Nor it is feasible to organise training sessions for citizen reporters who are scattered around the world.

The number of contributors for OMNI has doubled in the past two years. In summer 2007, according to the senior editor of OMNI, the website had approximately 3,000 contributors (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007) and the reporters submitted between ten and twenty articles per day (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007). An article published by *Forbes* in March 2009 stated that 6,000 contributors were writing for the international edition *(*Woyke, 2009a*)*. In an email interview with the senior editor in 2009, he estimated that the number of regular contributors posting more than once a month is, however, only 50-80 reporters (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009). Hence, frequently, only a relatively small number of reporters provide the majority of the content of OMNI.

One method that was used to boost the range of news available on the OMNI website was OMNI displaying links to top news stories on *The International Herald Tribune* website. In turn, the newspaper placed on its website links to news stories on the OMNI website (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). The cooperation between the two news organisations has since been discontinued, but it was, however, an interesting attempt to find a mutually beneficial way for a participatory media and a mainstream media organisation to cooperate. These types of linkages, which do not lead to assimilation, are one of the characteristics of rhizomatic media.

The editorial control exercised by the OMNI staff over reporters resembles the hierarchical systems found in the mainstream news organisations. In that respect, although OMNI can be seen to democratise communication as it invites anyone to post content, it does not provide a new balance of power, but rather reproduces the power imbalance likely to be found in many news rooms. In comparison to Indybay and VAI, OMNI is a more hybrid form of participatory media, as its aim shows characteristics of media activism, whereas in how it operates on a day-to-day basis, it resembles the mainstream media. To illustrate this point, it is necessary to consider OMNI's key organisational basis.

The staff of OMNI take care of the day-to-day running of the website, most notably editing the incoming articles, which come almost entirely from its reporters around the world, and keeping Talk Back Forum, where people can post content without

registering, spam free. OMNI aims to steer clear of any political leaning, although individual articles, in particular those labelled "opinion" may portray many types of views, some of which, as reading them reveals, are heavily biased. The senior editor (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007) described OMNI's political position as follows: "Well, originally we wanted to have no left or right leaning stance … we try to hit the centerish line, like kind of a BBC line."

Other ways in which OMNI, in its approach, 'borrows' from the mainstream media, as it were, and is different from VAI and Indybay, is how, until February 2009, when OMNI switched to awarding the three best articles monthly, reporters were paid a modest sum, up to $20 per article for contributions that editors had accepted to be published on the website after fact-checking and editing (OMNI, 2009a). OMNI rewards its reporters also by inviting some of them to a trip to a yearly Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul with most expenses paid (flights, accommodation, meals, and programme). The forum enables reporters to share their experiences with other reporters from around the world including with reporters of the South Korean edition. Participants also get to hear about and to debate participatory journalism, as the programme consists of presentations by reporters themselves, as well as by experts and facilitators of other participatory journalism platforms from around the world. According to the senior editor of OMNI, invitees to the Forum are selected by OMNI staff "based on their reputation with us editors" (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009). Based on the interviews with OMNI reporters, it became obvious that even those who knew about OMNI rewarding reporters this way were not aware of the criteria according to which reporters are invited to Seoul.

OMNI relies on OMN for the resources at its disposal. Predominantly, editors of OMNI have been based in OMN's newsroom in Seoul, although until recently, the international edition had an editor who was working in the USA. There is no clear division between OMNI and OMN regarding some of the resources. For example, OMNI uses the same web application as OMN although, to some extent, programmers hired by OMN have adapted it to the needs of the international edition. Operating from the same space as the staff of the South Korean edition has its financial benefits as, for example, the two editions can share office equipment and, occasionally, the staff of the Korean edition can help on certain aspects of the international edition. The relationship between the two editors is explained by the senior editor of OMNI as follows (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> Anytime that we get a video that's submitted by a citizen reporter, I'll take that video to OhmyTV, which is two desks over and ask them to upload it or clean it up and add captions, whatever, and they are happy to do that if they have time. Similarly, if I have a little element on our website that I want to tweak I'll talk to the developers and they work for Korean OhmyNews, so we're all just one big happy family, I guess. But there are drawbacks, too, because OhmyNews International always takes the back seat to anything the main site [OMN] is doing.

As the above indicates, although the international edition may be a showcase to the English-speaking population of the world, the Korean and OhmyNews website in Japan are the main priorities for the company. As will be discussed next, this is something that, obviously, limits the progress of OMNI.

4.3.2 Sustainability of rhizomatic media: OMNI

As part of a larger media company, OMNI is dependent on OMN for resources, such as funds to pay staff and reporters, equipment and office space. Those in the company with decision-making powers decide the funding OMNI receives. The decision-making process in media organisations is described by Louw (2001) as follows:

> Funding and staffing issues are often related – for example, deciding who gets to expand their team ('empire building'). Those viewed favourably by boards and CEOs are granted funding to employ staff, deploy new technologies and establish pet projects – that is, they are granted the organisational capacity to influence meaning-making…So, within media organizations, funding decisions (like staffing decisions) impact upon the direction of discursive production. (p. 158)

Although this appears a fair assessment of how resources may be allocated in media organisations, decisions concerning resources also depend on how much funds are available to be shared. The financial stability of OMN has had a direct impact on the international edition. It is, therefore, useful to discuss briefly the financial structure of OMN and how the company has performed since it was launched.

Approximately two thirds of OMN's revenue comes from advertising (Woyke, 2009a). Other sources have been an $11 million investment that it received from SoftBank Corp in 2006 (Ihlwan, 2006). The money was used mainly on the OhmyNews website in Japan, but also on the international edition (Ihlwan, 2006). The company made a profit for the first time in 2003, but has reported that it has struggled financially since 2008 (Woyke, 2009a). The website in Japan was re-launched in 2008 with a

"lifestyle focus", as the original Japanese edition did not succeed (Woyke, 2009b). As Min (quoted in Woyke, 2009b) explains: "We discovered that Japanese people want to talk about products and services … News models should be adapted to local needs." Thus, despite Min's optimism in 2007, replicating the news model of OMN in Japan was challenging.

During a period of financial certainty in 2006 due to the investment from SoftBank, OMN invested in the resources of OMNI. A former assistant editor of OMNI recalled that when money was not tight, OMNI editors were being paid a fairly generous wage (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007). Moreover, editors could place on the front page everything they saw fit, whereas at one point, the number of stories allowed on the front page was limited to seven (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007). The restriction was imposed because OMNI paid $20 per piece to reporters for front-page articles, and a large number of articles being accepted as front-page articles resulted in a substantial expenditure for the company (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007).

Unlike OMN in South Korea and Japan, the international edition at the time did not have advertising on the website, which meant that the money spent on OMNI came from other operations of the company. The senior editor noted in relation to advertising (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> Originally, Mr Oh was very supportive, he said, "Look, we've got enough money coming in from the main operation that you don't have to think about that; just build your readership, build your citizen reporter base and establish your reputation."

Nowadays, when the company is struggling, OMNI has some advertising on the website though not to the same extent as the other two editions.

However, it is not only the approach towards advertising that has changed. Since 2007, the company has severely cut expenditure on the international edition by making the majority of its editors redundant. Of the two editors who were left, one more has since been made redundant (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009). The remaining senior editor asked reporters if they would like to become volunteer editors (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009). As a result of his request, OMNI has four volunteers who help out with the editing (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009). Interestingly, through having unpaid volunteer editors, OMNI has shifted closer to the way in which Indybay operates.

As noted earlier, OMNI made major cutbacks to its payment system at the beginning of 2009. It no longer pays reporters for articles that they submit. Instead, it awards a prize to three of the articles published on the OMNI website each month. Of the selection criteria, the OMNI website states (OMNI, 2009a): "The main prize will be awarded to the article that generates the most 'buzz' in a particular month, while the other two will be the editor's choice based on the quality, timeliness and overall excellence of the reporting or analysis." The value of the prizes, with a 1st prize of 300,000 won (in May 2009 approximately $235) and 2nd and 3rd prizes of 100,000 won each (in May 2009 around $78), appears to be more symbolic than monetary.

What the impact on OMNI of withdrawing the payment for articles will be remains to be seen. Already, it appears that new articles appear on the front page less frequently than in the past, which indicates that the OMNI website may be struggling. The following plea posted on the OMNI website implies that the staff anticipate a reduction in the number of articles offered for publication: "Despite this change [discontinuing its cybercash payment system], we sincerely hope that you'll continue sending in your stories and contributing to a very special type of journalism. Citizen journalism is yours to foster!" It is too early to say what the long-term consequences of this major change to the payment system will be. One can speculate that if the number of articles offered for publication decreases, and the editors have fewer to choose from, it may in turn affect not only the number of the articles that are published, but also their diversity, and even their quality.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has explored the key similarities and differences between the organisational basis of VAI, Indybay and OMNI as participatory media that aim to foster communicative spaces for civic engagement. As Dahlgren (2009) has suggested, such spaces are vital for people to be able to engage in civic talk. The chapter has attempted to demonstrate that it is necessary to go beyond noting the importance of the existence of such spaces and to understand how they operate and under which conditions. The sustainability of communicative spaces obviously is important, thus the factors that matter for the survival of the three participatory media organisations were also explored.

What all three organisations, despite their many differences, have in common is that they rely on having people willing to contribute content to the website. Without

reporters, whether individuals or in the case of VAI and Indybay, people representing various civic and social movement organisations, participatory media cannot function. A vital aspect of sustaining such media organisations, apart from mobilising contributors, has to do with the media organisation itself and most notably how it manages its resources, as evidence from research on the voluntary sector strongly indicates.

For fully voluntary organisations like VAI and Indybay, the most important resource is the volunteers, and as the research on voluntary associations suggests in turn, "voluntarism underlies many of the organizational challenges that associations face" (Harris, 1998, p. 154). For VAI and Indybay, having motivated volunteers, whose skills and interests correspond to the tasks required in maintaining an online service for participatory media and who are prepared to invest time in media activism, is vital for their survival. Although they need money to run a web service, without an office, paid staff, or payments to reporters, as is the case with both collectives, the need for monetary resources can be very modest and can be met by raising money from donations from members of the collective or the general public. Thus, for both collectives, access to financial resources has been minimal, yet no evidence was found to suggest that this would have been of hindrance to them. The finding contradicts much of the research on alternative media and media activism, where shortage of monetary resources is seen as a persistent problem (Atton, 2002; Hackett & Carroll, 2006).

Not surprisingly, and as has been suggested by many scholars before, the Internet is able to facilitate the running of cost-effective media. However, although the Internet provides an affordable means of information dissemination and communication for a voluntary association type of media organisations like VAI and Indybay, it does not reduce the importance of the availability of resources, most notably volunteers. Although not discussed in this chapter, a few interviewees indicated that despite supporting in principle a voluntary model with no payments for any work performed, on a personal level, not being compensated for their own work was not always practical.

As research on various types of voluntary organisations suggests, to be able to function, they need some structure, otherwise they run the risk of becoming ineffective, which typically can lead to problems, such as burn-out of the most active members in an organisation (Handy, 1988, p. 8). An analysis of the two Indymedia organisations indicates that a fairly small number of people can form a capable collective, if it is organised and is careful about the use of resources. In this respect, several differences were found between Indybay and VAI. For Indybay, delegating responsibilities whilst at

the same time preserving an anti-authoritarian decision-making process has proved a good strategy for coordinating work on a practical level. In the VAI collective, in contrast, distributing responsibilities was less formalised, which was also likely to add to the difficulties when it needed to make decisions about the future direction of the website. Moreover, the VAI collective spent resources on coding its application, whereas the Indybay collective spent theirs on improving the existing code.

As the case of VAI indicates, the lack of a common vision to which volunteers are committed is a recipe for failure to keep the collective operational. VAI closed down largely because of a conflict between the people who were involved in the collective about the future direction of the website in a situation where its current state was not acceptable to alter-globalisation movement activists. The finding is in line with research into associations that has indicated how negotiating with members' competing interests can consume the human resources of an organisation, paralyse its decision-making process and, ultimately, have fatal consequences for the existence of an organisation (Klausen, 1995; Knoke, 1990).

In contrast with VAI, the people who formed Indybay after the Indymedia collective in San Francisco split appear to have been committed to a vision of an inclusive website. It seems that a shared vision has continued to motivate volunteers to work together, as a number of the people involved in Indybay during the split are still active in the collective. It may even be that having to choose between the two Indymedia websites reinforced the commitment to their chosen website of at least some people active in the collective and of reporters.

In the Finnish context, the notion of media activism at the time when VAI emerged was relatively new. Hence, the VAI collective was not born as part of a larger struggle to democratise the media, unlike Indybay, which through its links with organisations such as Media Alliance was rooted in a wider wave of democratic media activism. Moreover, VAI emerged at a phase when there was a shift in at least some social movements' relationship with the media, and it would appear there was tension about whether VAI was to be mainly another activist media or media activism. Although for both VAI and Indybay collectives, providing a space for self and collective representation can be seen as one of the key aims of the collective, in VAI it was far from clear to whom, beyond the alter-globalisation movement, the space was to be extended. In fact, it seems justified to argue that one of the key reasons for VAI's closure was the ambiguity about its role. Thus, for some who had been launching VAI,

it was the medium of the alter-globalisation movement, whereas others saw its value in its ability to reach beyond activist circles.

The emergence of OMN in South Korea forms part of a larger struggle to democratise the media by providing alternatives to a dominant conservative press. It appears justified to argue that following the period of dictatorship and lack of freedom of speech in South Korea, there was a need for OMN's type of new media where people could take part in media production and in discussing matters of public interest. By providing such opportunities, OMN connects to the national media reform movement, and, as suggested by Kern and Nam (2008), consequently draws media activists to post content on the website.

OMNI, on the other hand, was launched because OMN wanted to showcase its concept of journalism to the English-speaking world. It appears that, despite the showcase purpose, the company has had few plans for investing in developing OMNI. This is, by and large, because, as a media company, OMN has seen that opportunities for participatory journalism flourish on country specific platforms, rather than for an international edition. In part, this view is based on the limitations of OMNI in comparison to the South Korean edition in that it cannot provide a mixture of content supplied by reporters and in-house staff. Another reason is that an audience for an international edition is not seen as being as evident as the audience for a website that focuses on a well-defined geographical area.

Due to its hybrid qualities, as a part of a media company providing people from around the world with opportunities to post content on the website and to communicate with each other, and by experimenting with cooperation with the traditional media organisations, OMNI portrays several characteristics of rhizomatic media (Carpentier et al., 2003; Bailey et al., 2008). OMNI also shows the risk of assimilation involved with this type of media. Based on the analysis presented in this chapter, OMNI appears to have very little autonomy. It is dependent on OMN for all of its resources and it would seem justified to argue that it also lacks any long-term planning and broader goals that would provide a clear direction to the international edition.

Despite the financial difficulties the company has experienced in recent years, OMN has retained the international edition. Sharing facilities such as office space between OMN and OMNI undoubtedly helped in keeping costs down. Although the international edition is a showcase, of the three editions, OMNI resources seem to have been cut the most in the past two years. After making redundant all editors except the senior editor, the company most recently discontinued paying reporters of OMNI for

articles published on the website. Another change is that, like the other two editions, OMNI currently has advertising on the website. In an attempt to compensate for the lack of paid editors, OMNI has recruited from amongst the reporters unpaid volunteers to help with the editing. The impact of discontinuing the cash payment system on the numbers of articles offered for publication and their quality will determine how much OMNI is going to be using volunteer editors. It is interesting that when the company's business model falters, it moves closer to a volunteer model though not for reasons related to organisational values and culture, which is the case with VAI and Indybay, but with the aim of surviving in the competitive media market.

The analysis indicates, as could be expected, that different types of participatory media organisations have different strengths and weaknesses. However, comparing VAI and Indybay shows how the outcomes for two participatory media organisations, both volunteer associations, part of the same network, undergoing similar challenges and launched the same year, can be widely divergent. This observation should encourage healthy scepticism when considering both celebratory and disparaging accounts of this type of participatory media, not least the ones concerning the Indymedia network itself. Moreover, it highlights the need for empirically grounded research not only on the network level, but also on the level of collectives forming the network. Similarly, as the analysis on OMNI demonstrates, musing over the successes and failures of OhmyNews, reveals only a little about the different editions.

5   The Publishing Process on the VAI, Indybay and OMNI Websites

The emergence of Indybay, VAI and OMNI undeniably has extended access to the production of media content beyond professional journalists working for the mainstream media organisations, thus challenging their role as gatekeepers of information. Of interest in this chapter is how this access is shaped by the ways in which the participatory media operate, more specifically, how the publishing process works in these three media organisations.

In the civic culture framework, the interest in the chapter is therefore the exploration of the workings of "the spaces of civic culture that provide communicative access to others for civic encounters" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 124). As Dahlgren (2003) has argued: "Identities of membership are not just subjectively produced by individuals, but evolve in relation to social milieus and institutional mechanisms" (p. 159). Thus, it is essential not only to examine participatory journalism as a mode of civic engagement from the reporters' perceptive, which will be the focus in Chapter Six, but also to investigate the role of participatory media organisations as facilitators of such an engagement. Another dimension to the civic cultures analytic framework that is considered in this chapter is trust, in particular, the role trust plays in relationships between the moderators/editors and reporters.

The two research questions that are answered in this chapter are:

- How do editorial principles and procedures differ between Indybay, VAI and OMNI and what are the wider implications of these differences for participatory journalism?
- To what extent does the publishing process of participatory journalism in Indybay, VAI and OMNI disrupt or reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy?

In the context of the media that aim to be participatory, the notion of participation is in itself central, and must be considered by analysing the mechanisms that enhance or impede reporters' involvement. The notion of media power and how it is manifested on an organisational level in VAI, Indybay and OMNI relates to the first question. It has been argued that news organisations "develop particular strategies to deal with the environment in which they operate, and these working arrangements have implications for the nature of what they produce" (McCullagh, 2002, pp. 85-86; see also Curran, 2002). Of interest here is how these "working arrangements" are negotiated by

participatory media organisations that are dependent on the voluntary contribution of reporters for content.

The research questions draw on the critique of what Atton (2008b) calls the "celebratory approach to alternative media" (p. 218) in which the emphasis is on how the alternative media differ from the mainstream media, not least because "they offer participation in media production. They encourage amateurs and recognize the knowledge and expertise of those amateurs" (p. 216). Yet, as Atton (2008b) argues, little is known about the working practices of alternative media beyond the level that they "emphasize media participation as a good in itself" (p. 217). The research on Indymedia on the network level, for example, tends to cite it as having succeeded in creating online spaces where, through participation, voices that are often unheard in the mainstream media can surface (e.g., Hackett & Carroll, 2006; Meikle, 2003). The key to this success is perceived to originate in the principle of open publishing, which refers to a process in which not only the editorial decisions are made transparent to the users, but people are, at least in principle, also invited to become involved in making those decisions, as well as to contribute stories; the filtering and modifying of which is kept to a minimum (Bruns, 2005; Couldry, 2003, pp. 46-47; Langlois, 2005; Meikle, 2003).

On the other hand, open publishing has been noted as having become Indymedia's liability, for reasons such as attempts to misuse the websites for discriminatory purposes, and the pressure on the Indymedia collectives for even greater transparency and accountability concerning moderating and editing decisions (Beckerman, 2003; Langlois, 2005). Another important challenge regarding open publishing that will be explored in this chapter is highlighted in these questions: "Is it [Indymedia] only a site for global justice activists and their point of view, or is it a democratic public space where all points of view are welcome? Is Indymedia responsible for promoting free speech at all costs?", as Langlois (2005, p. 54) has asked. To add to the list, if it turns out that Indymedia does not promote free speech for all, then whose free speech does it promote, why, and how?

The Indymedia network has become known for challenging conventional media principles, most notably the ideal of objectivity, by defining itself instead as "a democratic media outlet for the creation of radical, accurate, and passionate tellings of truth" (Indymedia, 2005). Thus, the journalism on websites such as Indymedia, which McNair (2006) has said represent "iconoclastic amateurism", has been, according to him, "founded on alternative principles of having less to do with the values of objectivity and reliability than subjectivity, immediacy, and independence from, even

rejection of, established journalistic institutions" (p. 119). The contributors for Indymedia have been noted to favour personal eyewitness accounts of events such as demonstrations, and intellectual analysis (Atton, 2007; Platon & Deuze, 2003). Allan (2006) has argued that "for many of the reporters involved what matters most is the message being communicated" (p. 128). The extent to which the publishing process in the two Indymedia websites in this study echoes these perceptions, will be of interest in this chapter.

Although reporters submit practically all of OMNI's content, as in Indymedia, the rest of what is known about the news production process appears less experimental. With in-house editors who determine what is accepted for publication on the website, the publishing process appears to resemble that of the conventional news organisations (Haas, 2007). The reason for OMNI's approach is explained by Joyce (2007) as follows: "The OhmyNews model for news production uses editors to increase both credibility and readability" (p. 7). Thus, the editing arrangement in OMNI is designed to enhance the content it publishes on the website.

Reporters are encouraged to cover stories that have not been reported in the mainstream media, and are known to write on a range of topics based on what is of interest to them (Allan, 2006). A significant departure from the mainstream media is seen in the way in which reporters for OMN are invited to write from their point of view (Allan, 2006). According to Allan (2006), this approach has drawn opposite reactions. As he (Allan, 2006) notes in relation to the South Korean edition: "In the eyes of the critics, this makes OhmyNews appear less professional than it should be, but its advocates consider this departure from the bland structures of impartiality to be a virtue" (p. 131). By facilitating subjective reporting, but keeping editorial control, OhmyNews editions can be seen to attempt to achieve the best of both worlds.

In this chapter, the aim is to provide a close examination of the publishing process in VAI, Indybay and OMNI. The analysis is based on the operationalisation through three components of the publishing process. These are, as seen in Table 7, the principles, the process and the implications of the publishing process. The table shows the key concepts that are employed as well as the key questions that inform the analysis in this chapter and that utilise the questions that were asked in the research interviewees. Because of the focus on the publishing process, the discussion on principles draws on the documentation provided on the websites for reporters, and the analysis of the process and the implications of the interviews mainly with people who are, or in the case of VAI, were active in these collectives and the staff of OMNI.

Table 7: Operationalisation through three components of the publishing process

Component	Key concepts	Key questions
Principles	• Participation • Alternative/mainstream dichotomy	• Who is invited to post content? • What requirements there are? • What guidelines are available to reporters? • What information is given to reporters concerning how the content of the website is moderated/edited?
Process	• Antagonism • Agonism • Power • Alternative/mainstream dichotomy • Participation • Trust	• How is the website edited? • What benefits are there? • What challenges are there? • Does the publishing process draw from the mainstream practices?
Implications	• Trust • Participation	• What implications are there for a participatory media organisation? • What implications are there for reporters?

Each of the three cases is explored in turn starting with VAI, which of the three cases has fewest editorial procedures, as the website was moderated, but not edited. Then, the publishing process of Indybay, the website of which is both moderated and edited, is examined. Finally, the focus is on OMNI, in which the editorial principles are more defined and the editing process more extensive than in either VAI or Indybay.

The discussion of each of the three cases begins with an overview of the editorial principles as guidelines, as laid out on the websites, followed by a brief assessment of an approach to the quality of the content. Then, the focus is on how agonism and antagonism, as envisaged by Mouffe, come into play on the website. In relation to Mouffe's radical pluralism framework, VAI in particular provides a compelling case for assessing the viability of an agonistic online space within a Finnish context. As VAI, Indybay and OMNI differ in how the publishing process works, the analysis of Indybay and OMNI, but not of VAI, includes a section analysing the editing process of the website and whether it reinforces or disrupts the alternative/mainstream dichotomy. This part of the discussion on OMNI in the chapter is more elaborate than that of Indybay, because the editing process in OMNI has several aspects to it that are absent from Indybay.

After all three cases have been explored, a model is put forward that, by drawing on Putnam's (2000) notion of thick trust and thin trust, aims to highlight the role of trust, one of the dimensions in Dahlgren's (2009) framework of civic cultures, in

relation to editing and moderating the website. After a discussion on social trust, the challenges in maintaining trust for each of the three participatory media organisations in turn are explored. The final section of the chapter provides an overview, in light of the theory, of the key ways in which and the extent to which the three participatory media organisations are alike or differ.

5.1   Open Publishing: VAI

5.1.1   The principles and the guidelines

Everyone was invited to publish content on the VAI website as long as they complied with its editorial policy. Reporters could post either articles or comments, which appeared after each article as a thread of messages, without any requirement to register, though contributors were able to register if they so wished. By providing a name and an email address, registered users were able to customise their user experience. They could, for example, choose different themes from the content, and decide the number of articles shown on the page. When submitting an article, it was left to reporters to decide whether they wanted to use their real name or a pseudonym, and whether they wanted make an email address visible to the readers. They were not required to disclose information about themselves to the collective.

Editorial guidelines were in place and the key points were as follows. As in Indymedia in general (see, example.g., Langlois, 2005), racist, sexist and homophobic posts were not accepted, nor any content encouraging the violation of human rights or that contained advertising (Appendix I). It was also stressed that material was not allowed if the copyright belonged to someone other than the person who had provided it (Appendix I). Moreover, the policy stated that the content should meet certain quality criteria; hence, a text full of spelling mistakes, swear words and text not containing any substance would be removed from the website (Appendix I). The last part of the policy regarding substance was left open for interpretation by the group of moderators responsible for implementing the editorial principles.

In addition to providing guidelines to reporters, the policy document contained moderation principles. The key rules were that decisions to remove content were public and were made after publishing (Appendix I). Deleted content was viewable through the content management system (Appendix I). It was also specified that the group of moderators would do all in its power to stop spamming and that content that clearly was not accurate was not accepted on the website (Appendix I).

The collective set itself apart from the mainstream media and their self-proclaimed objectivity, which, the VAI collective stated on the website, is an "illusion" (Appendix H). Instead, it stressed that whilst being openly subjective, its mission was to provide diverse and accurate reporting (Appendix H). In subjective reporting, the aim of the writer is often either to raise awareness of something important or to encourage people to take action for or against something. This type of journalism, often called native reporting, is described by Atton (2002) as follows: "Native reporters are at the centre of things as participants, and their work is precisely to feed discussion and debate from the perspective of the colonised and, crucially, to provide 'information for action'." (p. 113) Although VAI's "native reporters", who were activists posting articles, for example, from demonstrations, may have wanted to persuade people to act, at the same time, some interviewees implied that people, when forming an opinion, should exercise their critical abilities with VAI, as with any other media.

5.1.2   An approach to the quality of content

Some reporters posted news on the VAI website, some analyses, some opinion writings and some translated articles from other Indymedia websites. A particularly popular feature on the website was the opportunity to comment on articles. When the number of articles and comments posted on the website, and probably also the number of reporters grew, so did the variety of quality of the posts. The moderators would either delete content that was considered very poorly written, or occasionally, they returned the article to the writer to be "tidied up". As one VAI moderator (Nikkanen, personal communication, September 1, 2006) noted:

> Every now and then there were some eager writers who wrote really poorly and what one had to do with them was remove the article and approach them via email saying, "Please write this article again, because we cannot really start editing it, but if you really want to write an article this extensive then one ought to, for instance, run it through a spelling and grammar checker."

Another interviewee, herself a freelance journalist, had a different take on VAI's approach in relation to correcting the writing skills of reporters. She (Weckström, personal communication, January 31, 2007) recalled:

> No-one ever said anything about anyone else's grammar, so it [VAI] did not require good language skills or careful use of language. In my opinion, it is sensible that if the intention is that anyone can write, then it would be quite

nasty to [say], "But listen, you do not have commas in the right places, so we will not publish this." So, if everyone is allowed to write, then everyone is allowed to write. Everyone writes in their own way. Quality requirements were not proposed.

This statement indicates that restricting what was published based on what someone might perceive as being of poor quality would have contravened VAI's decision to be open to anyone who wished to publish. Thus, in open publishing, different styles and levels of competence were seen, at least by some, to come with the territory. Yet, as one interviewee noted, writing skills matter because there may not be an audience for a poor writer. As he (Kojo, personal communication, January 15, 2007) put it: "Of course it matters how well you can write. If you cannot write, very few bother to read."

Unlike some other Indymedia collectives, which offer people guidance in using technology and honing writing skills, VAI, as a very small collective, did not provide training. Reflecting on how VAI could have been improved, one of its moderators argued (Öberg, personal communication, January 30, 2007): "Vaikuttava [VAI] almost certainly would have worked better if it had been founded by a larger group of people taking journalism seriously or more experienced people, or if training events could have been organised."

5.1.3   Agonism and antagonism in open publishing

Some contributors came to contest activists' opinions on the VAI website. What followed was the need for activists to engage in a debate with people who were challenging their views. This was not seen by all interviewed activists as something negative. As one of them noted (Nikkanen, personal communication, September 1, 2006):

> Activists learnt to explain more clearly and more audaciously what everything is about and what their opinions are … in a way they learnt to understand that one cannot feel offended if someone asks them for justification.

Some activist-reporters (Nikkanen, personal communication, September 1, 2006; Weckström, personal communication, January 31, 2007) considered it positive for activists to have to debate and defend their ideologies and actions in a public arena. To use a notion from Mouffe's (2005a) model of "agonistic pluralism", they situated themselves in the position of an adversary because there was an attempt to respect their

opponent – to the extent that they would go to the trouble of explaining their position and the reasons behind it, though without surrendering their opinion. As one activist reporter put it (Weckström, personal communication, January 31, 2007):

> It [VAI] opened the door to things such as, this is what I have written, but you can disagree and you can tell me if you do, and I can then say, "Oh well, this is the way I thought."

Some activists took the view that they would respect the right of people not in agreement with them to express their views on a website that had been launched by the activists and was run largely by them. Moreover, as in Mouffe's (2000b) model of agonistic pluralism, it seems that some activists active in VAI accepted that with the plurality of views there would be confrontation.

Not all activists took the above approach. Some interviewees argued that there were also those who became so frustrated with what they perceived as verbal attacks on their contributions from people who did not, in their view, understand their positions, and with what ultimately appeared to them to be the general decline of the website, that they chose not to contribute any longer (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006; Huhta, personal communication, January 29, 2007). These reactions indicate how difficult it can be in practice to broaden an activist-led sphere to include people who do not share the same visions or have the same experiences. In relation to her account of Indymedia in Australia, Pickerill (2007) implies that Indymedia's principle of openness does not necessarily lead to it being inclusive. Hence, despite the best of intentions, fruitful interactions between activists and "others", as it were, may not always materialise.

It appears that antagonism in the sense that Mouffe (2005a) uses the word – that is, to refer to a relationship between enemies – came into play on the VAI website, as there were people, though probably only a few, who seemed to set out to destroy the VAI website by causing as much disturbance as possible, for example, by sending a large number of often confrontational messages in a short space of time (Huhta, personal communication, January 29, 2007; Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006; Kojo, personal communication, January 15, 2007). However, it was not just the volume of messages and their criticism of activists that was a worry; it was the general tone of many of the postings. As one reporter noted, "A bad thing was that so many published articles were, so to speak, bad stuff, kind of a negative debate"

(Stranius, personal communication, August 29, 2006). Another reporter argued (Tuominen, personal communication, September 4, 2006):

> People used that freedom [to publish freely] for totally the wrong kinds of things. Instead of deliberative discussion, there were terrible quarrels and accusations were made, all these sorts of things. It [the VAI website] turned into a place for trolling [posting provocative or insulting messages online] in a way.

This quotation demonstrates a desire for the Habermasian (Habermas, 1964/1974) sense of space where people would deliberate rationally without lending themselves to "terrible quarrels", as the interviewee put it. It can be argued that this model of deliberative democracy, albeit far closer to the Finnish notion of how the democratic process should work than to Mouffe's (2000b) "agonistic pluralism" model, is still distant from the Finnish reality. In particular, political discourse in Finland is characterised by consensus, that is, the aim to reach mutual understanding, for example, through recognising shared moral and what sometimes appear to be presented as indisputable economic realities, and by avoiding conflict at the expense of debate (see, e.g., Jokinen & Saaristo, 2002; Kirby, 2006).

Jokinen and Saaristo (2002) note that, in Finland, various social movements and organisations of citizens have, by pushing forward issues that are important to citizens, traditionally played an important role as intermediaries between the state and the people. However, it has been noted that the position of this so-called third sector has weakened in recent years. Among the reasons for this development is that certain issues, such as those advanced by the environmental movement, have become part of the agenda of political parties and have been widely reported in the media (Jokinen & Saaristo, 2002). A further argument explaining the decline of the importance of the third sector draws attention to individualisation, which, the argument goes, has led to the erosion of community-based organisations (Jokinen & Saaristo, 2002). At the same time as the media have been seen increasingly to act in the role previously reserved for the third sector actors, they have been criticised for failing to provide an arena for discussion (Jokinen & Saaristo, 2002).

It may be that, in part, the VAI website became a popular place for debate because there was a call for VAI's type of open publishing platform in Finland in a situation where the third sector had become weakened and the media had not succeeded in taking their role. Although it is impossible to be certain who the contributors were – people could use false names, one person could use several names or someone else's name, and

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they could disclose any email address or no address at all – based on the interviews, a wider group of people, beyond what can be described as the activist circles, was involved in content production, or at least in posting comments. This finding is supported by the study on VAI by Kokkonen (2006, p. 41, 105).

It appears that many of the non-activist contributors were either young people whose social awareness had begun to develop or older radicals whose background was in the left-wing and socialist movements. A third main group of contributors consisted of those who came to the website to challenge the views of activists. A fourth group were people who wanted to cause chaos without an apparent intention to discuss. It is important to distinguish between the latter two groups of contributors. To use Mouffe's (2005a) notion of an adversary, people who disagreed with activists, sometimes fundamentally, but wanted to debate, acted as adversaries, but people who attacked the website with, it seems, the intention of stopping it from functioning, acted as enemies. Thus, elements of both agonism and antagonism came into play on the VAI website.

Against the consensual characteristic of Finnish political discourse, the emergence of VAI in part as an antagonistic space is intriguing. However, as has been demonstrated in other studies on computer-mediated communication, such as the Usenet discussion groups, argumentative comments are not uncommon (Connery, 1997; Wilhelm, 1998). One probable reason there was so much trolling on the VAI website is that it may be easier to challenge people when one is able to do so anonymously online than when discussing matters in person. This notion of the consequences of anonymity is supported by some of the research on computer-mediated communication (see, e.g., Hill & Hughes, 1998). On the other hand, it is important to note that not all contributors were using pseudonyms. Several interviewees posted at least some of the time under their actual name. Some of the interviewees were strongly in favour of using one's real name. For example, one activist reporter of VAI argued (Weckström, personal communication, January 31, 2007): "In my opinion, one has to be able to stand behind what one writes."

VAI's decision not to require contributors to register or disclose information about themselves to the moderators, let alone to users of the website, was a policy that was likely to have increased not only the number of argumentative postings, but also the intensity of their argumentativeness. However, there appear to be more reasons why VAI in part developed into an antagonistic space. It may be that some contributors' desire to challenge activists on the website at least partly originated in an activist-unfriendly atmosphere that was linked to the bad press some activists and groups had

received for their use of illegal direct action in the latter half of the 1990s, such as attacks against fur farms (Rasimus, 2006, p. 244). As Rasimus (2006, p. 250) argues, these types of action, which harmed the property and livelihood of the target, did not bring sympathy to activists, but had the opposite effect.

On the other hand, it is possible that some of the hostility towards VAI from outside the activist circles was related to its radical initiative of bringing about a media revolution by contesting traditional journalistic ethics and practices. If the Finns' trust in the mainstream media is any indication of attitudes towards media in general, it seems that many Finns did not share the activists' criticism of the mainstream media. As, for example, the results in the Eurobarometer 2006 study show, Finns trust all four media – TV, radio, press and the Internet – considerably more than people do on average in all other EU countries (Eurobarometer, 2006, p. 14).

Based on the case of VAI, it seems that for radical pluralism as put forward by Mouffe (2000a, 2000b) to be able to function, several conditions must be met. First, the clarity about the aim of the media to provide people with an agonistic online space followed by a commitment to this goal both by those running the website and by those publishing content on it, is vital. It is, of course, possible that people belong to both of these two groups; thus, in the case of VAI, many of those active in the collective were also activists providing content on the website.

Second, when the aim of participatory media as an agonistic space has been agreed upon, unambiguous guidelines and procedures concerning the publishing process need to be in place so that the risk of misunderstandings is minimised. It can be argued that an utmost clearness in the guidelines and in their interpretation and also in who has the right to interpret the guidelines and to implement them is particularly important for a space that aims to cater for people who represent very different views and who may feel passionately about the issues they debate. In the case of VAI, editorial guidelines were in place and readers and potential reporters were given an explanation of how the website was moderated. However, it appears that the information was too open to interpretation and that, as will be discussed later in this chapter in the section of trust, after the volume of content posted on the website had grown, there was a significant departure from how the moderating process was laid out on the website. Finally, the case of VAI points to a socio-cultural context having a bearing on how argumentative a space that emerges between participants can become.

To return the discussion to VAI, when, arguably, the "bad stuff" on the website became dominant, most VAI activists grew to realise that the ideal of unrestricted open

publishing does not work in practice. One activist expressed his disillusionment (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006) as follows:

> With hindsight and, in fact, for a long time when VAI was already functioning, not from the beginning though, my opinion was that it would have been more expedient to abandon that Indymedia principle [open publishing] and to start with the premise that we publish what we feel like. Still publish fairly liberally, but not claim that we publish everything, because that led to a certain kind of intellectual dishonesty; I do not know if it bothered us more than it did other Indymedias.

By "intellectual dishonesty" the activist refers to how the open publishing principle was in conflict with the collective not wanting to publish everything. It also refers to the fact that, on many Indymedia websites, a genuine open publishing area, usually called "newswire", is located on the right-hand side of the website (for an example, see Appendix B), whereas on the VAI website (Appendix A), every article and the comments following an article received equal treatment, as they all appeared in the central column in the order in which they had been posted there.

Several activists in the VAI collective were unhappy with the way in which long discussions on the VAI website drew attention away from the news articles, features and analytical writings. Consequently, VAI shifted from being a news website to a discussion forum, a development that not all of the activists who had launched VAI welcomed. A considerable amount of work would have been needed to make a number of what were seen by activists as vital changes to the website. The discussed alterations included adjusting both the editorial guidelines and the website structure, as well as installing a technical fix that would have made moderating the website less labour intensive. However, VAI never made it to the stage where these types of solutions to the problems it was facing would have been implemented, as the website was closed down.

Many Indymedia collectives, in a similar way to VAI, have been reported to have undergone a process where it eventually becomes clear to the collective that unrestricted open publishing does not work in practice (Open Journal Montreal, 2004). Some collectives have reacted by putting into action clearer, and as a result, often more restrictive, publishing policies that allow a more efficient filtering of content (Open Journal Montreal, 2004). Some collectives, such as Quebec Indymedia in Canada, have reportedly begun using software to validate content (Open Journal Montreal, 2004). The next two sections discuss how the Indybay collective has interpreted and implemented open publishing principles.

5.2   Open Publishing: Indybay

5.2.1   The principles and the guidelines

The Indybay collective invites anyone adhering to its editorial policy to post content on the website (Appendix K). As in VAI, reporters are not required to register; they can decide whether or not to post anonymously or provide their email address to readers. The two ways in which people can contribute are by posting their work on the newswire, which appears on the right hand side of the website, or by commenting on newswire posts and articles in the centre column of the website. The editorial policy of Indybay states that members of the editorial group are allowed to stop flamewars and to hide contributions that are seen to oppress marginalised groups and comments that are abusive or are spam (Appendix K). Copyrighted material is removed should the owner of the copyright request it (Appendix K). Moreover, the editors hide hate speech that, according to the policy, undermines Indybay's principles of unity.

The editorial policy places "right-wing propaganda", which editors are also permitted to hide, in the same category as hate speech (Appendix K). By excluding the "propaganda" of the political right, the collective appears to imply that the Indybay website is not to be an arena for a full range of political opinions, but is on the left of the political spectrum. A major difference between the two Indymedia collectives, therefore, is how Indybay, unlike VAI, frames unwanted content on its website in terms of the political leaning of reporters.

Other differences in comparison with VAI are that the guidelines Indybay (Appendix K) puts forward on the editorial policy website concerning newswire posts do not pose requirements regarding the quality of content; instead, it is noted that editors may correct spelling, grammar and typographical errors or format the text. Nor are there statements about objectivity or subjectivity in relation to posts. It is noted that one of the assumptions on which open publishing rests is that "People who post to the newswire will present their information in a thorough, honest, and accurate manner" (Appendix K).

When comparing the two, the editorial policy of the Indybay collective, more so than that of VAI, appears explicit about restrictions on what can and cannot be published on the website. The document also explains the role of the editorial group in monitoring content for violations of the editorial policy and how it will take action when necessary. It also makes clear how the website is maintained by the editorial group, such as what the principles are based on by which the newswire posts are

classified, as will be discussed shortly (Appendix K). An essential difference between the VAI and Indybay websites is that while the former was moderated, that is, contributions deemed inappropriate were hidden, the latter is both moderated and edited. Therefore, in the Indybay collective, the editorial group has many more responsibilities than had the group of moderators in VAI, as will be discussed after the next section.

5.2.2   An approach to the quality of content

In a similar vein to VAI, in Indybay, reporters post many different types of content. However, the difference is that in addition to text, Indybay reporters can upload onto the website photographs and video and audio files. The collective states on the Indybay website (Appendix K): "People are encouraged to 'become the media,' to use their own skills and abilities of observation, writing, and creativity in posting text, analysis, videos, audio clips, photos and artwork directly to the website." Thus, the collective refrains from stating what kind of skills are required to be able to post on the website or what level of quality is expected from content.

As noted in the previous section, the editors are permitted to clean text for grammar and related errors, which indicates that certain writing skills are at least desirable, if not required. Based on the interviews with volunteer editors of Indybay, it is clear that content that is perceived to be poor quality is not sent back to reporters for tidying up, but remains on the website whether cleaned for errors or not. The notion of quality, however, extends beyond understanding it as technical quality of the content. As one Indybay interviewee argues (Sousa, personal communication, August 6, 2007):

> I think high quality citizen journalism is useful to people. If the people in a town or city are using the information put forth by the journalist, then I think that is important. I think high quality citizen journalism uncovers injustice, it creates change in a neighbourhood or a city or in people's lives, it must engage people.

Although, the above conception of quality was not uncommon, several Indybay interviewees indicated that they were frustrated with the poor quality of some of the content on the Indybay website, and hoped that reporters would put more effort into what they post to the website, be it textual, visual or audio content. One interviewee explained (Ballis, personal communication, December 1, 2006) the approach to quality as follows: "We're saying that our media should look as good as commercial media

technically but with our message in it, with our story in it. And if it doesn't, people aren't going to want you." Thus, it is argued here that reaching the audience requires combining high technical quality with advocacy content.

5.2.3 Agonism and antagonism in open publishing

Similarly to VAI, the Indybay website has become a site of antagonism where its enemies are those who want to cause problems by posting content that is strictly forbidden. The ways in which the Indybay website is moderated and edited is based on the collective's realisation, similarly to VAI, of the challenges in offering an open publishing space for people's contributions. As a former active member of Indybay explained (Sousa, personal communication, August 6, 2007):

> Of course there's been this whole evolution in open posting and self-publishing where, you know, it's definitely more towards the editing, and where we realised that we needed to watch the newswire and – what do you call it - you know, where you classify things, edit it out, filter it, because, you know, any time, and this became evident fairly early on, any time you have a website that is read by a lot of people, you're going to get a lot of people that are kind of crazy or, you know, just like to abuse it, like the Internet bulletin board, which is like with any other Internet forum this happens, you know, you have a lot of disruption and non topical postings going on.

As the above indicates, soon after the website was launched, the Indybay collective realised that they needed both to moderate the newswire for violations of its editorial principles and to edit the centre column.

An active member of the Indybay collective explained what type of content editors hide and how the collective deals with spamming, as follows (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006):

> There's two or three choices. I think that they are duplicated, that's one… Hate speech is another. Commercial stuff, advertising. There's been a lot of spamming of pornography, which is truly obnoxious. If you find out that somebody is posting a lot of spam from one email address, you can block that person from posting. And they do that usually temporarily to stop an attack of spam.

Unsurprisingly, the editorial group does not tolerate advertising or spamming, which, however, does not mean that there would not be attempts to take over the website by, for example, messages containing pornography. Blocking emails from addresses that

post spam continuously provides a technical solution to spam attacks, yet not least because opening a new email account does not require much effort, it is likely to slow down the more persistent spammers only temporarily.

Whether the website should be reserved solely for people whose views are leftist or whether and to what extent it should offer a space for dialogue between people of different political orientations are questions to which editors are required to react. An editor of the Santa Cruz section of the website put forward a case for a restricted website (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007):

> I'm not really interested in folks from, from outside of that general sphere [leftist sphere], just because they, they can comment on if they want to, but we know their perspective. They run the *Sentinel* [a corporate newspaper in Santa Cruz]. They have their voice. I can read their voice anytime I want to, but is it too much to ask just to have, like, one space that we can actually, like, speak to, speak to our community and be able to, like, get our own voice out? … Do they have to, like, control all the newspapers, all the radio stations, all the Internet sites? No, I think it's fair for us to have, like, just one place where we can feel a little bit safe.

Here, the function of the Indybay website is seen to be to serve the needs of a leftist community because they are not perceived as having their voices heard in the corporate media. Another Indybay activist explained the position of the website (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006): "We don't allow ourselves to be a platform for right wing ideology."

However, decisions to hide posts appear to depend on how strong a right-wing leaning the editors perceive them to have. Hence, an editor argued (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007), "We'll tend to hide really right-wing things." On the other hand, according to the same editor, occasionally a debate between contributors of opposite political views is allowed to take place. He (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007) gave an example:

> …depending on the thread, you allow different arguments, so there's one about abortion. You sort of want to allow the right wing people to post on those threads, so people can argue back with them, especially if it's like there's a protest about this right wing group that's trying get kids to become these giant religious things, and the kids are posting on the site, so you sort of don't want to hide their stuff, so people can argue back and forth with them.

Thus, if an editor sees value for the collective, readers and contributors of Indybay in a debate that takes place in the comments section, occasionally it is tolerated. Mostly, the consensus amongst editors appears to be that the right-wing have their own forums online, and therefore, Indybay does not need to accommodate their views (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007). Another reason for keeping out the right-wing posts was put forward by an Indybay contributor, who argued (Borgström, personal communication, June 15, 2007):

> You know, they [right-wingers] pretend to be a left-winger. They give disinformation, or they just put obscene stuff like obscene comments on our website, and we don't want that. I wish there was the option of just having no comments on an article. I wish I could put an article on and have a no comment option, say, on my article; I don't want comments because of that.

Based on the argument here, not only spammers attack Indybay but also, at least occasionally, "right-wingers" whose intention appears to be to cause disturbance, rather than engage in a debate. Consequently, not all contributors perceive the comment function as something worth having, but quite the contrary.

In relation to Mouffe's (2000a) notions of adversaries and enemies, it seems that the Indybay website is of interest to two types of right-wingers. First, there are those acting as adversaries who fundamentally disagree with the left-leaning reporters of Indybay, but acknowledge their legitimacy, and are drawn to the website by an opportunity to debate. Second, are those acting as enemies, who attack the website to undermine the left-leaning reporters' legitimacy by posting obscene remarks or lies in the comments section after the articles. Thus, when considering how the people from the political right are perceived to be using the Indybay website, the emergence of both agonism and antagonism can be seen.

5.2.4   Editing the Indybay website

When people submit their work to the Indybay website, it appears instantly on the right hand side of the website in an area called newswire, but not in the middle part of the website (Appendix K). This centre column in the middle is reserved for so-called "blurbs", which are typically shortened versions of articles that have been posted on the newswire (Indybay, 2004). Members of the editorial group choose prominent stories from those posted on the newswire, and edit them to create a concise article, which usually includes a link to the original newswire post, as well as to the websites of

organisations that are related to the story. If there is previous coverage of the story available on the Indybay website, the editors aim to include in the blurbs links to the past articles, so that readers can keep track of the history of the topic (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

In addition to selecting topics for the centre column from the newswire posts, at least some editors seek relevant material from other websites. An editor of the Santa Cruz section of the Indybay website explained the reasons for this aspect of his work, as follows (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007):

> A lot of people, they'll… they'll publish their own photos on other sites like Facebook and MySpace rather than on Indymedia and it, it frustrates the hell out of me and Bradley [another editor of the Santa Cruz section] and other folks involved in Indymedia because all these people take all their time to, to edit their photos and take their photos and go to these events and all these organisations take all this time to write press releases, yet they don't publish it on Indymedia, even though they know about Indymedia.

Thus, sometimes editors repost articles on the Indybay website from social media websites with which Indymedia appears to be in competition. Encouraging more people to post their own material on the Indybay website by increasing awareness of it and by training potential contributors in how the website functions is one of the tasks that people active in the collective perform; in the case of Santa Cruz, it is the task of the editors of the website (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007). However, with a limited number of people active in the collective, there is not always enough time for the outreach work (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007).

As with VAI, what gets covered on the Indybay website is, to a large extent, random, as it depends on the topics on which people have posted material. In their attempt to ensure that certain events deemed newsworthy, such as strikes and demonstrations, are reported on the Indybay website, sometimes editors post blurbs on events that they have noticed in the mainstream media. An editor of Indybay noted (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007):

> I'm always amazed, looking at the nightly news, by what they choose to cover; they might cover some union going on strike that nobody has posted anything about on our site and it's like, hang on, how come nobody posted anything? Yeah, we sort of see ourselves as competition for the mainstream news in some ways, so when I see a story I am like, oh, no-one posted about that so I have to find the union's website, find their press release and repost it myself on our site so we have something.

Hence, sometimes, the reporting in the mainstream media can alert the editors of the Indybay website to something worth covering. However, as the above quotation indicates, the way in which an editor presents the story on the Indybay website is likely to differ from the way the news is presented in the corporate media.

Interestingly, coverage of the same events is not the only parallel between the Indybay website and the news in the mainstream media. In a message on the Indybay website advising people who want to write blurbs, they are described as follows: "Center column stories often have a more objective tone than newswire posts, since the Website Collective does not take positions on single issues—we often link to both sides of an issue from the center column, and tend to use a somewhat neutral tone" (Indybay, 2004). Hence, the editors are instructed to keep the tone of blurbs neutral and their content factual, but occasionally there may be different views about the appropriate tone. As an editor of the Santa Cruz sections of the website put it (Scott, personal communication, June 13, 2007):

> I mean, with Indybay there is just, you know, sometimes, you know, sometimes people have differences of opinion on whether, you know, how things are framed, how things are worded. You know? Whether or not people are perceived to be, you know, taking too much support… 'Cos, you know, you can, just within the features [blurbs] of Indybay, the way features are written, is without trying to use, like, a strong advocacy tone, but actually, more of, like, an almost typical news approach where, where we're trying to distinguish ourselves between the activists and the news…

In comparison to the VAI collective, which emphasised the value of "telling our truth" in reporting, the Indybay collective gives on the website a prominent position to news articles that are written in a neutral tone, and not from a certain perspective.

Another editor of Indybay explained (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007) why it is important to aim to have a neutral tone in blurbs:

> The central column links to the articles that tend to have strong opinions, so you can keep the column neutral and then link off to different views on something, but keep it somewhat neutral. People are more likely to get pulled in, and also it is easier to be an umbrella for all the groups in the Bay Area.

Hence, keeping the blurbs neutral helps the Indybay website to refrain from becoming seen as a representative for only certain activist groups. As an editor (Ogren, personal

communication, June 2, 2007) put it: "We don't like becoming associated with one specific activist tendency."

In addition to writing blurbs and moderating the newswire by hiding posts that violate editorial policy, the work of the editors of the Indybay website includes categorising newswire content. The newswire on the Indybay website has three distinct categories. The section called "other/breaking news" is where articles appear as soon as someone presses the button "publish" in the form on the website. The other two sections are for "local" and "global" news. The editors select for publication in these two newswire sections posts from the other/breaking news section that, according to the editorial policy, are "accurate and newsworthy stories fitted for syndication" (Appendix K). Posts in the local newswire have the San Francisco Bay Area focus, whereas the global newswire is reserved for content that is "not locally focused" (Appendix K). Posts that remain in the other/breaking news section after the editors have reviewed them "will have been deemed unworthy of promotion to any of the above wires" for example, because they are "not news stories, likely or factually inaccurate stories, unverified stories, postings of very poor writing quality, repostings of corporate media articles, and bulletin board type posts", as noted in the editorial policy (Appendix K).

The Indybay website manufactures more content than did VAI. The way in which the content is presented on the former is a result of editorial processes where posts are promoted, edited and hidden by the editors. The editors determine what the website looks like on a day-to-day basis. They hide posts and decide what is to be placed in the centre column and how these topics are to be represented in this prominent part of the website. They select which posts are promoted to the local and global newswires, which appear on top of the newswire section on the right hand side of the website, and which remain in the other/breaking news part of the newswire, therefore, showing at the bottom of the newswire. Thus, the difference in the layout between the VAI and Indybay websites is not only that the Indybay website has two separate areas, that is, a centre column and the newswire, but also that the way in which the Indybay newswire is organised allows the editors to promote certain content at the expense of other.

5.3   Publishing Process: OMNI

5.3.1   The principles and the guidelines

Similarly to VAI and Indybay, everyone is invited to contribute content to the OMNI website, although OMNI poses more requirements for people wanting to become

reporters than do the two Indymedia collectives. The major differences between OMNI and them emerge when considering registration and anonymity. OMNI requires all reporters who want to offer material for publication in the main sections of the OMNI website to register. The senior editor of OMNI described the process (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007): "We need a valid e-mail address, real name, legal name, and we need their address, their city, country, telephone number if they've got one, and some kind of photo ID that they have to upload or e-mail." All registered reporters write under their real name and readers can send them messages through a link in an article or post a comment, which will appear on the website after an article. After successful registration, reporters gain access to a reporter's desk, which they can use for submitting stories, checking the number of page views per story, having a chat with other reporters, getting tips from editors on ideas for articles and for access to messages from readers, to list the main functions.

When people sign up with OMNI to become reporters, they are required to agree to the "Membership Registration Agreement". The agreement stipulates that potential reporters must not present false information about themselves or their application will be rejected, and that those under the age of 14 must have the consent of their legal guardian (see Appendix L). The reasons for OMNI terminating a contract are listed in the agreement and include, for example, insulting and criminal behaviour, and behaviour that is either "contrary to public order or good morals and manners" or "injurious to another individual" (see Appendix L). Violations of the conditions of use of OMNI may lead to the suspension or termination of a contract (see Appendix L).

Although OMNI guarantees that it will not pass on the personal information of its reporters to third parties unless it is required to do so by a state agency for the purpose of a criminal investigation, it retains the right to share such information "with sites with which OhmyNews has signed cooperative agreements" (see Appendix L). Another significant point about the agreement is that by signing it, reporters agree to allow OMNI, at the request of advertisers, to send them advertising by email (see Appendix L). What is notable here is that reporters are not presented with an option to decline being subjected to marketing. Two further important aspects of the agreement are that OMNI retains a right not to inspect all the material that is posted on the website and that it reserves the right "to refuse to edit or post material or information either partially or entirely" (see Appendix L). The copyright of the material posted on the OMNI website is owned jointly by OMNI and the reporters (see Appendix L). This means that

reporters may offer material published on the OMNI website for publication in other media, or, for example, post it on their blog.

In addition to the registration agreement, all reporters of OMNI must observe the code of ethics that informs reporters of many issues similar to those covered in the registration agreement, such as the rule that reporters must not use vulgar or abusive language (see Appendix M). Other points include refraining from making unwarranted assumptions and misrepresenting facts, as well as not writing articles that violate other peoples' privacy (see Appendix M). If an article contains quotations, a reporter must identify their source (see Appendix M). The code of ethics also states: "Legal responsibility for acts of plagiarism or unauthorized use of material lies entirely with the citizen reporter" (see Appendix M). If reporters work in marketing or public relations, they are expected to disclose that to the readers (see Appendix M). Moreover, OMNI (see Appendix M) prompts reporters not to conceal that they are reporters covering a story when they collect information for it from various sources. On the other hand, the code of ethics prohibits reporters from printing name cards that would imply that they work for OMNI (see Appendix M). Reporters are also expected to adhere to the code that states: "I recognize the editorial authority of OhmyNews' in-house editing staff" (see Appendix M). In practice, this means, that once reporters have sent an article to OMNI, the editors control whether the article is published, where on the website it is published and how it is edited.

5.3.2   An approach to the quality of content

Approximately 30% of the stories that come in to the OMNI website are either returned to the author so that all or some parts of the story can be re-written, or are rejected outright (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). According to the senior editor of OMNI (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007), it is rare that people stop offering stories and when that happens, it is related to articles being rejected because they do not meet the required level of quality. As he (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007) put it, "Everyone tends to improve. There are only a couple of guys I think who never really took our advice to heart and they continually got rejected so they left." He continued (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> I'm very happy to say that we have very few people who complain or anything about our [editors'] input. And that's a miracle in a sense because,

again, we're using a lot of text, a lot of e-mail. It's easy to misunderstand or, if I'm pressed for time, I might only be able to send a two-sentence e-mail, which could easily be interpreted as terse or dismissive.

Because of the physical distance between the reporters and OMNI's editors, by and large, support is offered through email and online instant messaging, but sometimes also through voice services available online, such as Skype. Although interviewed OMNI reporters appreciate that they can correspond with editors by e-mail, it represents the second best way of communication, at least for some. As one reporter noted (Jacquot, personal communication, November 17, 2006):

> You know, he always answers me as soon as I write to him and, um, so it's good, you know. I mean, it's always better to talk to that person in, in person but it's … you know, when you're doing it in that kind of format online, um, that's the closest it comes to really being able to interact on a personal level.

Although the majority of the reporters never meet the editors, for those who receive an invitation, an opportunity to interact with OMNI staff in person becomes available in the yearly Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul.

The Director of the International Division, who has been working for OMNI since its launch, noted about the role of OMNI in training reporters (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007), "We want to give them [OMNI citizen reporters] some minimal, at least a minimal level of writing and communication skills so that their stories can be more effectively communicated to our readers." Yet, he (Min, personal communication, July 1, 2007) also argued:

> The biggest education and training happens among themselves [citizen reporters]. They learn from each other, they learn from this example so if they follow our news site every day, they will gradually know: "Oh, this writing is good, I'll try that". So learning from this example is the biggest part of the education process and the best way to write better is to write as many [articles] as possible.

The above statement puts the emphasis on learning by example and learning through doing, in this case by writing more, as the key ways of becoming a skilled reporter rather than emphasising editors' support. The possibility that reporters may learn successfully by practising and by observing their fellow reporters is an important point, but it does not undermine the value of offering appropriate support for those reporters who require it.

For example, for reporters not confident that their English language skills are of a level required for writing a journalistic piece, the advice that editors offer is valuable. In 2007, the senior editor of OMNI estimated that 80% of the contributors were non-native English speakers (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). For editors of OMNI, having the majority of the stories coming in from contributors whose first language is not English means that correcting articles for spelling, grammar and punctuation is a central part of their work. This aspect is absent from the two Indymedia collectives, where, by and large, people write in their native language, that is, in VAI mostly in Finnish and in Indybay mainly in English.

5.3.3   Agonism and antagonism in a more conventional publishing process

Requiring reporters to publish under their real name, as in the mainstream media, having registration as a prerequisite for becoming a reporter and editing the website content can be seen, on the one hand, as ways to reinforce the credibility of the published content on the OMNI website and, on the other, as trying to prevent the website from suffering from the type of problems similar to those to which Indybay and VAI, as less controlled publishing spaces, are prone. Thus, it can be presumed that one of the reasons for OMNI to employ strict editorial principles is to prevent the website from sliding into an uncontrolled state of antagonism.

Not allowing people to post anonymously is likely to draw on the school of thought that asserts that reporters are more likely to stand behind what they write and less likely to spread unconfirmed information or lies if they are required to use their own name. On very few occasions, editors have, though, allowed reporters to have an anonymous by-line to protect them from persecution. Typically, this has been in cases where revealing certain information could have compromised the safety of a reporter, for example, because of the restrictions on women's freedom of speech in some countries. In addition to there having been a good reason why a reporter needs anonymity, editors have to have known the reporter well, so that they can have made an informed decision about the integrity of an article (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007).

A former assistant editor of OMNI argued that the consequences of requiring reporters to register and to write under their real name are not entirely positive. According to her (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007):

> I just think the fact that we would only take stories from people with their real names, I think that really limited us. Because I think, I don't know whether this is a gender thing, but I think some people, maybe women, are not going to really feel confident.

She based her view on her own experiences as a reporter for participatory media websites, as well as on her observation that OMNI was "really lacking female writers" (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007).

The perceived shortage of female contributors possibly has to do with the abusive comments they would sometimes receive on the articles. The editor described the situation (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007) as follows: "I mean we ended up with quite a few feminist type of stories on the front page, mainly because I was putting them there … but then you get abusive comments, you know, and that kind of put them off writing." A similar view was put forward by a New York-based reporter for OMNI, who recalled how she sent a supportive message to a Nepalese female writer, who had received some "vicious comments", as the interviewee put it, on the article she had posted on OMNI and that was placed in the top stories (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006). Thus, it seems that, at least occasionally, the system fails to prevent offensive comments from appearing on the website, although OMNI endeavours to keep the comments section clear of abusive content, as editors moderate comments on articles, and people are prompted on the website to "refrain from personal attacks and profanity". As has been argued, for example, by Kitchen, (1998), computer-mediated communication is prone to gender inequality, and it seems that spaces for participatory journalism may not be an exception.

Another area where people can contribute content to the OMNI website is a section called the Talk Back Board (OMNI, 2009b). It invites people to publish articles, such as news and opinion pieces, as well as photographs. To be able to post, contributors must provide an email address and a name, though it can be any email address and any name, such as a pseudonym or, for example, part of a real name. Readers are invited to evaluate the contributions by clicking either the "I Approve!" or the "I Object!" buttons, which appear on the website after a post. They can also comment on articles on the Talk Back Board. Readers and contributors are reminded that OMNI has the right to edit the posts or publish content taken from the board on the main page. In practice, the role of an editor is to moderate the posts. As the senior editor explained (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2009):

It's just a free-for-all forum. I only delete spam, not the posts. The comments at the bottom of articles are a different story. I try to delete all personal attacks etc. from there, in order to foster a pleasant atmosphere for our readers to engage each other. It's tough, needless to say, as there are plenty of kooks out there.

In those parts of the OMNI website where people can post anonymously and without registering, the challenge posed by spamming appears very similar to what Indybay and VAI have faced. Thus, it seems that in minimally controlled online spaces, both agonism and antagonism, as Mouffe (2000a) uses the terms, come into play. This further reinforces the similarities in findings between this research and other studies on computer-mediated communication that suggest that anonymity tends to increase argumentativeness (Hiltz & Turoff, 1978; Kiesler et al., 1984) and that a confrontational style is not atypical for posts in various spaces for discussion online (Connery, 1997; Wilhelm, 1998).

5.3.4   Editing the OMNI website

The discussion thus far has demonstrated that, in comparison to the two Indymedia collectives, the reporters of OMNI are expected to adhere to more rules before they can post content on the website. Based on how reporters are prompted on the OMNI website to write in a standard news style, Haas (2007) has argued that "Ironically, while OhmyNews was launched to offer a distinct alternative to the conventional, mainstream news media in South Korea and abroad, the site's editorial policies mirror those of mainstream news organizations" (p. 156). This section aims to demonstrate that expectations concerning the style of reporting news on the OMNI website are only one of the many ways in which the website draws on the mainstream media for its editorial practices. However, the starting point is not the same as for Haas (2007), who appears to deem mirroring the mainstream news organisations as something inevitably negative. Rather, the intention is to explore in more detail the basis for these practices and their implications for the organisation and its reporters. The discussion below is divided into five sections: 1) editing, checking facts and separating them from opinions; 2) payments to reporters; 3) assignments; 4) featured writers; and 5) style. What is discussed here is mainly the staff editors' role in the publishing process, rather than that of the volunteer editors whose tasks are limited to editing and fact-checking articles.

1. Editing, checking facts and separating them from opinions

Although, potentially, anyone who agrees with OMNI's registration agreement and the code of ethics can offer articles for publication, not all contributions are selected for the OMNI website. It is left to the discretion of the editors to decide which articles are placed on a website and in what section of it they appear. Moreover, editors categorise articles, similarly to the mainstream media, not only by topic, such as sports, interviews, world, entertainment, art and life, but also when they are not news articles, by their approach, such as analysis and opinion. The senior editor explained the process (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> We also try to put a very prominent opinion stamp on every opinion piece. We try very hard to let the readers know that they're not getting hard news from that particular story. Yes, it's a centre stance and we try to mix it up a bit so the main page will have a variety, politics and arts.

It seems that the way in which OMNI distinguishes between "hard news" and opinion pieces seems to be designed to enhance the credibility of the website. This is obviously very different from the stance taken by VAI where there was no attempt to separate facts and opinions and the notion of objective reporting was rejected. In Indybay, the approach again is different, as they aim for a neutral tone in the centre column with links to web pages of organisations that may be biased. OMNI's approach appears to conform to those mainstream news organisations that aim to separate facts from opinion as part of employing objectivity as, arguably, the key professional norm of journalism (McQuail, 2000, p. 152).

Although all content on the OMNI website is moderated by the editors, only articles that are published on the main sections of the website are edited. Editing involves both checking that the facts in an article are correct and fine-tuning the text. Other typical tasks performed by an editor include preparing reporters' pictures for publication, and changing headlines and captions for the reason that "caption writing is an art, as is the headline, so headlines generally are changed as well", as the senior editor noted (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). According to him, the fact-checking process depends on whether the reporter is trusted by an editor. As he explained (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> I cross-check facts with other reports from the AP [Associated Press] and big papers. If it's a story with original reporting, I'll go by the citizen reporter's

reputation. If I know them and trust them (some people have been writing for us since the start ... 2004) then it'll usually go out with minimal need for editing. If they're new, I'll often send an email or IM [Instant Messaging] (if available) to confirm who's who and other details. Stories like those can usually wait a day or two while I double-check before publishing…

Hence, editors tend to take more time to check thoroughly the facts in articles submitted by newcomers with whose work they are not familiar.

One part of the editing process is checking that articles are not rehashed from other sources, because such contributions are rejected (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). A former assistant editor described the situation, in this case in relation to Nepalese reporters (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007):

They would take the story, just regurgitate it, sometimes even just a straight copy and paste, [and] submit it to us. We would then have to do a plagiarism check. We would then discover that it had come out of a Nepalese newspaper and then email them and sort of say, you know, I'm so sorry, you know, we didn't publish it, but it's rather similar to this story.

It appears that the problems with plagiarism are linked to the payments to reporters.

2. Payments to reporters

When OMNI was still paying reporters, articles that appeared on the first page would earn a reporter $20 and content published on the second page half that. Based on the discussions with the two editors of OMNI, payments encouraged some people from undeveloped countries where $10-20 is a significant amount of money to submit stories that were not always original. Thus, as a former assistant editor explained (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007): "Money was the problem because we were paying such a high fee for stories, you know ... extremely high fees by the standards of India, Nepal, Pakistan." This, in turn led to a situation where "it was kind of like battling against plagiarism and, and people just trying to milk the website for money" (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007). She pointed out that this is a challenge for participatory journalism websites that aim to have contributors from around the world. As she noted (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007):

And I do think that a citizen journalism website that wants to work on an international level has got to deal with this problem, because, you know, westerners were, like, you know, this is a ridiculously low fee; you expect me to do a lot of stuff for this. And, and then someone in a very poor country, who could feed his family for a month on $10, naturally would send us anything just to get the money.

Getting paid for stories appeared to distort competition amongst reporters regarding whose articles would be published. As the senior editor explained (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

Oftentimes, we have a couple of sort of hotspots, Nepal, South Asia, Pakistan, where we have a lot of writers who are interested in similar things sending in quite similar stories and we'll do our best to try to run as many as we can, if they have slightly different views on a particular issue, try to give it a nice balance for our readers. But sometimes they're pretty much the same thing, which by necessity we're going to select the one that has the best English, let's say, or the one that requires the least editing. So there's a balance there. So I would say Nepal stories get rejected on average more than say a story from Angola where we only have one story coming in.

Thus, payments increase the number of articles submitted to OMNI from some countries and, as a consequence, there is an oversupply of stories on certain topics especially when, as the above comment indicates, often people would be interested in writing about similar issues. On the other hand, at the same time as there may be too many stories on certain topics, there may be not enough coverage on certain others. Consequently, the content of the OMNI website tends to be a random collection of articles, as the selection of articles published on the website depends on what reporters offer for publication. In an attempt to overcome this deficiency, the editors tip off reporters about topics.

3. Assignments

Although OMNI does not have reporters who can be assigned to write an article on a specific topic, editors inform reporters of what is happening in their localities in the hope that they might want to take it up. Reviewing other media for interesting news stories in places where OMNI has reporters and prompting reporters to write about them seems to be an integral part of the editors' work. The senior editor described this part of his job as follows (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

It's one of my most important roles, then, to try to keep in mind this vast, relatively vast network of citizen reporters we have and where they are in the world. And I have a very detailed database of everyone. And since I've been here from the start, I've been able to keep track of the personalities and the interests that a number of our top writers have. So I'm always scanning the news and sending out e-mails all day long, letting them know that there's this story that they might be interested in, letting them know that they might take it up.

The above comment highlights how beneficial it is for the editors to know where the reporters are based and what their interests are, but also that what reporters are encouraged to write about is prompted by coverage in the news media. The editors may occasionally suggest that reporters from the same area organise the coverage amongst themselves. For OMNI, such coordination increases the probability of receiving coverage of a broader range of topics, whereas the benefits for reporters include the reduced possibility of an article being rejected because too many similar pieces have been offered for publication.

4. Featured writers

Similarly to the mainstream newspapers, not all reporters of OMNI have the same status. Editors of OMNI have selected as featured writers approximately twenty reporters, who submit "solid stories at a consistent rate", as stated on the website (OMNI, 2009c). These reporters have their own page on the website, which shows their biography and a picture, as well as a list of published stories. "Featured Writers of the Week" have their name, picture and a recent article listed on the right-hand side of the first page of OMNI. As is noted on the website, the selection process of featured writers "may appear somewhat subjective" (OMNI, 2009c). For aspiring featured writers, the website offers the following advice: "To catch the eye of the editors, you'll need to show an ability to convey complex topics with clear analysis. An easy-to-read, distinctive voice is also essential. Featured writers' stories tend to be longer than 600 words" (OMNI, 2009c).

5. Style

An interesting aspect of OMNI is that although, on the one hand, reporters are given advice on how to employ a news style – there is a style guide for reporters on the website giving them tips on better hard news writing, and also on spelling - on the other

hand, it encourages the emergence of a "distinctive voice". A USA-based reporter for OMNI explained how he saw these two requirements (Hahn, personal communication, August 10, 2007):

> Quality in citizen journalism must entail high-quality grammar and sentence structure, as well as a consistent and unique tone or "voice". It also entails keen insights and perspectives on stories, as well as an ability to convey stories in order to make them relevant to both those who are unfamiliar with the news in general and that story in particular, and those that are familiar with them. A citizen journalist needs to be able to use solid and consistent grammar, write in their own voice, and use various resources effectively to gather as much information as they can about their story.

The requirements in relation to grammar and sentence structure are the same as in any journalistic writing. When the requirement for a "unique tone", as it is put by the reporter, or "distinctive voice", as noted on the OMNI website, is added, it makes a combination that appears to indicate a departure from the neutral tone that tends to be seen as an ideal in much news reporting in the mainstream media.

A former assistant editor for OMNI drew attention to another way in which reporters' reporting can be different from that in the mainstream media. According to her (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007): "I don't think it's necessary for citizen reporters to write in the upside down pyramid style. But they do need to know how to express themselves. Or they need an editor who can help them." The "upside down pyramid style" refers to the way in which newspaper stories are usually written, that is, summarising the story's most important facts at the top. These findings challenge Haas's (2007, p. 156) argument that the editorial policies of OMN and OMNI copy those of the mainstream media.

5.4 Trust in Publishing Participatory Media

In Dahlgren's (2009, pp. 112-114) scheme of the civic cultures framework, trust is largely approached through a review of its role in various political and civic contexts in late democracies. For example, as Dahlgren (2009, p. 114) points out, although it is necessary for people to trust civil society organisations and political institutions to some extent, some caution is also required to keep these organisations and institutions in check. Consequently, "the optimal ratio of trust/mistrust has to be worked out according to specific circumstances" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 114). Dahlgren (2009, p. 114), noting Putnam's (2000) work regarding the trust and civic involvement in his framework of

social capital[16], emphasises that social movement organisations, activist networks and citizen groups all need at least some degree of interpersonal trust to be able to function.

When considering participatory media, the concept of trust is important in at least two ways. It has a bearing on how the system of content production functions within participatory media organisations, and in audiences' relationship with participatory media, most notably through the extent to which they trust the information provided by participatory journalists. Thus, in relation to the latter, the fundamental question with regards to participatory journalism, or actually to any journalism, is: "How can we know what to trust?" as Gillmor (2009, p. 9) puts it. This aspect of trust of participatory media has to do with the claims that participatory, or citizen journalism, as many of the critics seem to prefer to call it, is of varied, if not poor quality (e.g., Freedman, 2006; Keen, 2007; Lemann, 2006). The argument goes that, consequently, participatory journalism cannot compete with journalism as it is practised in traditional media organisations by "professional journalists", as the critics are keen to term them to accentuate the divide between professionals and citizen journalists as amateurs (e.g., Freedman, 2006; Keen, 2007; Lemann, 2006). However, it is likely that not all readers' expectations concerning all media content are the same, and that expectations vary depending on the personal preferences of readers regarding the standards typically associated with journalism, such as accuracy, objectivity and impartiality. Moreover, the principles guiding journalism, be it participatory or traditional journalism, appear to be in a state of flux (Allan, 1997).

What is of interest in the discussion that now follows is whether trust is required for a participatory media organisation to be able to function. By trust is meant "a relationship between two entities, the trustor (the entity who trusts) and the trustee (the entity being trusted)" (Bakir & Barlow, 2007a, p. 10). When considering the publishing process, some level of trust is required between those who are authorised to make decisions regarding the content on the website, which, in the case of VAI was moderators, in Indybay volunteer editors and in OMNI staff editors and, more recently, also volunteer editors as trustees, and, as trustors/reporters, other people involved in the media organisation, as well as the readers of the website. Mostly, the trust between the readers and moderators/editors is not based on direct contact. What it is that readers trust, as was briefly discussed above, is a complex question about whether the readers

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[16] Putnam refers to what in the social sciences is the widely adopted and debated concept of social capital as "social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity" (Putnam, 2000, p. 21).

trust the content published on the website of a media organisation. Thus, in this sense, trust has to do with the credibility of the media organisation more generally.

The relationships between trustors and trustees in the publishing process of participatory media are illustrated in Figure 1, which draws on Putnam's (2000, pp. 136-137) notions of thick trust and thin trust in which the former refers to trust between people who know each other well in person and the latter to trust either between acquaintances or between individuals and anonymous others. In Putnam's (2000) theoretical framework, which aims to address how and why social life has changed in the USA and what he sees as an erosion of various modes of civic engagement, Putnam (2000) discusses thick and thin trust as social trust between people rather than people's trust in political or social institutions.

The graph depicts how the moderators/editors are, by and large, trustees in participatory media organisations because other moderators/editors, other members of the media organisation or staff, reporters and readers should all have confidence in their ability to make fair judgements about the content published in the media and be assured that they do not abuse their power to make moderating or editing decisions. The relationship within the group of moderators/editors, between them and the other members of a collective or, in the case of OMNI, other staff and the management of the company, is based on thick trust, although, as the graph aims to illustrate, depending on the frequency of interaction and the level of personal engagement, the level of thick trust between these groups varies. The relationship between moderators/editors and most reporters and readers, on the other hand, shows thin trust because reporters and, to a lesser extent, readers, are unlikely to know moderators/editors in person. However, as sometimes reporters and occasionally even readers of the website may form a deeper relationship with the moderators/editors, these relations may move to the realm of thick trust.

Figure 1: Volunteer or staff editors/moderators as trustees
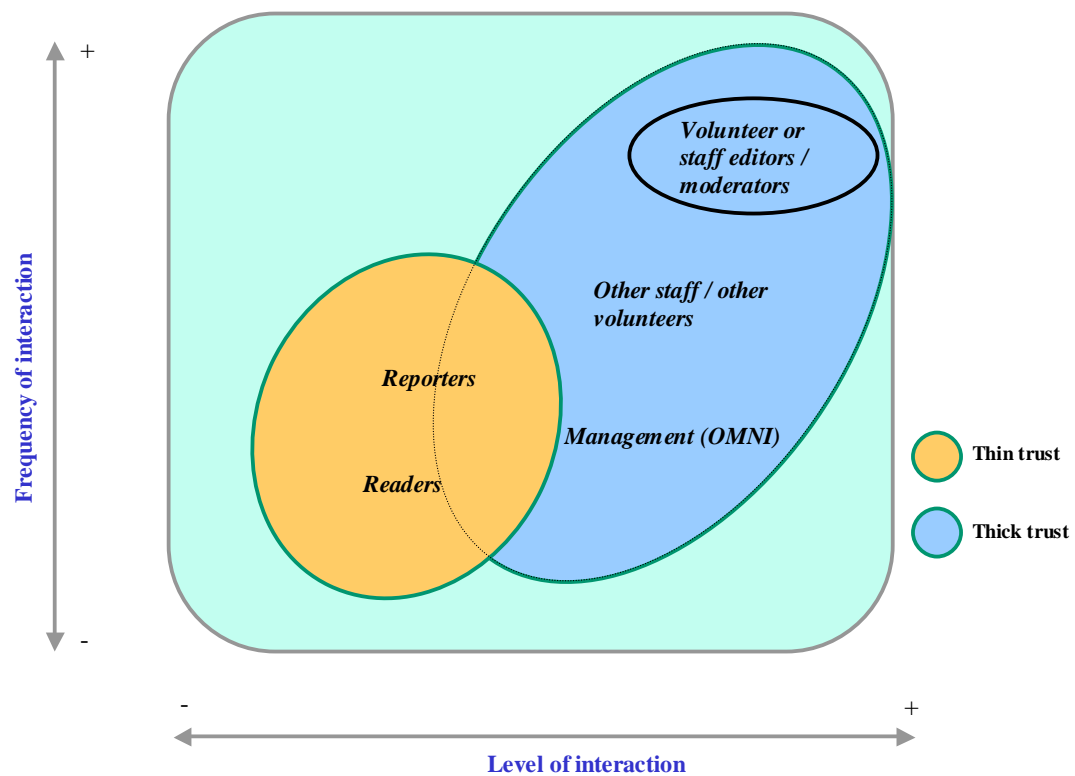
Because it is assumed that moderators/editors usually know each other in person and are in contact with each other frequently either offline, online or both, they are, therefore, in the upper right quadrant of the graph showing both the highest level of personal engagement and the frequency of interaction of all the described relationships. At the opposite quadrant are the readers of the website because they are least likely to be in touch with the moderators/editors. The position of the management, in this case that of OMNI, in the lower part of the graph is explained by how the management probably does not have a high level of, nor frequent personal engagement with staff editors and even less so with volunteer editors, although they are likely to know at least staff editors personally. Trust can be seen to work in two ways, that is, not only amongst the group moderators/editors, but also between them and reporters, though this is not captured in the graph. Thus, ideally, moderators/editors may hope they can trust reporters to follow the editorial guidelines and their advice concerning the content.

In the following section, the implications for trust of the ways in which VAI, Indybay and OMNI implement their editorial principles and guidelines will be discussed with emphasis on how trust can, and in a few cases has been, broken.

5.4.1   Trust in open publishing: VAI

Although VAI stated in its guidelines what type of content was considered inappropriate, those who were responsible for removing such material from the website faced a difficult task due to the sheer number of contributions. The members on the moderation mailing list, who were trusted to make decisions concerning the content, in the beginning checked articles and comments after they had appeared on the website. Some of the interviewed former moderators indicated that later, because of the increased volume of all sorts of content and spam, the system was changed and contributions began to come to moderation list members, who would then let through to the website those they considered appropriate.

One of the ways in which open publishing in Indymedia has been reported to work, for example, by Bruns (2005, p. 96), is that newswire posts are filtered only after they have appeared on the website, as was noted also by the VAI collective in its editorial policy. The system that VAI began using indicated a departure from this principle, and could have been perceived by reporters as a violation of trust. This view is put forward in a message by a reporter of the VAI website to a Portuguese Indymedia mailing list, where the VAI collective is accused of blocking the newswire posts because of ideologically motivated censorship (IMC Portugal, 2002). It was indicated in the message that the reporter, together with a friend, was spamming the website because, in the opinion of the writer, it violated the principles of open publishing (IMC Portugal, 2002). The situation in VAI echoes what Langlois (2005, p. 56) has noted about Indymedia collectives – that is, they often find themselves in the crossfire of criticism from those for whom the website is not moderated enough and from those for whom it is moderated too much.

The case of VAI indicates that maintaining trust between reporters and moderators can be challenging, and can depend on a number of reasons, such as available resources and the clarity of guidelines based on which moderators make decisions. As interviewed moderators of the VAI website stressed, manual moderation of the VAI website was time and labour consuming and the principles based on which contributions were to be allowed or removed were open to discussion, which made moderating slow. One interviewee recalled that there were one to three people who moderated the articles and postings, and that when it came to comments on the articles, moderators would make decisions on their own about what was removed from the website and what was not (Öberg, personal communication, January 30, 2007). Whilst

clearly offensive contributions were removed, the issue of whether to tolerate postings that were strongly at odds with the activists' own views was a cause of internal debate because the editorial guidelines were not clear, as one activist noted (Aho, personal communication, August 31, 2006).

As already indicated, it appears that the lack of explicit editorial policy provoked some reporters to test which stories moderators would let through and which they would not. These contributors then posted messages on VAI, highlighting everything they perceived as inconsistent in the editorial policy. It seems justified to argue that the thin trust between some reporters and moderators was broken, not necessarily because any of the moderators had deliberately abused that trust, but because the moderating process was not well thought out. It seems that it was not designed to cope with a large number of incoming posts, nor with posts that were at odds with activists' views or with posts of varying "quality".

5.4.2   Trust in open publishing: Indybay

Indybay's different take on open publishing compared to VAI means that, through the editorial group, the collective is able to control what is published on the website. The arrangement means that the editors on the Indybay website carry a great deal of responsibility. Although the design of the website, decided by the collective, directs the way in which information on the website is presented, the decisions editors make concerning the content shape it on a day-to-day basis. What follows is a need for the collective and the reporters to trust editors to make those decisions. As one Indybay editor noted (Scott, personal communication, June 13, 2007):

> At least within Santa Cruz, at least within Indybay, editors are basically trusted and empowered to make decisions based on their own best, you know, kind of feeling and their interpretation of the editorial policy and the principles of unity and the guidelines of the website and the, and the tone of the comment.

Hence, how the guidelines are interpreted is based on a subjective evaluation of the editors. In some cases, decisions to hide posts, for example, when they are hate speech or advertising, can be fairly straightforward, yet, at other times, less so. Deciding if a post falls into the category of right-wing propaganda, and thus should be hidden because it undermines the principles of unity, appears to correspond with the latter scenario.

Editors occasionally disagree amongst themselves about what should be hidden. As an editor of the Santa Cruz section of the Indybay website noted (Scott, personal communication, June 13, 2007): "If somebody is to hide something, somebody else can, you know, unhide it." Hence, the moderating process is such that editors are able not only to observe each others' decisions, but also contest them. The editors' judgement can be questioned also from outside the editorial group by reporters.

An example of a situation were there has been tension between a reporter and editors is provided by a long-standing activist for the rights of the homeless, who, in her opinion, has been wrongly labelled as a right-wing Republican because of her advocacy of Israel. She argued that her contributions have been removed from the Indybay website without a valid reason (Johnson, personal communication, June 11, 2007). Moreover, according to her, sometimes people have been allowed to post attacks on her on the Indybay website, whilst at the same time, her IP (Internet Protocol) address has been blocked, preventing her from responding (Johnson, personal communication, June 11, 2007). She recalled (Johnson, personal communication, June 11, 2007): "Now there were people who'd write these inflammatory comments under pseudonyms and I could kind of guess who they might be, but I couldn't really know for sure … just horrible, horrible things that they'd say about me. And I couldn't refute it."

The reporter noted that after confronting the editors, she received a letter from them in response to her enquires about what was happening, and she is now allowed to post on certain issues, such as the situation of the homeless, but some of her posts are removed (Johnson, personal communication, June 11, 2007). She pointed out that she sees the situation as a violation of the freedom of speech. As she argued about the view taken by the editors (Johnson, personal communication, June 11, 2007): "You can have freedom of speech on those issues that you agree with me on, but none on the issue you don't. I mean, I would call that being against freedom of speech, you know." As this example of problems indicates, building and maintaining trust between editors and contributors can be challenging, not least because the principles of open publishing are open to interpretation and because open publishing may sometimes be confused with freedom of speech.

5.4.3 Trust in a more conventional publishing process: OMNI

It seems justified to argue that a relationship between editors and reporters in OMNI is based on trust and mutual dependency. A reporter should be able to trust an editor's

ability to make sound editorial decisions that result in an enhanced article, and that they are fair in their judgement concerning what is selected for publication on the website. An editor may hope to trust a reporter to follow the guidelines and, for example, not to distort intentionally information that is provided in an article, or to offer for publication a rehashed article. A reporter is dependent on an editor for advice and for getting articles published and an editor relies on a reporter to provide content for the website. Hence, although editors control what is published on the OMNI website, reporters have power over what, if anything, they offer for publication.

In OMNI, a strong element in building trust between the editors and the reporters, but also between the website and the readers, is the requirement for the reporters to register. The senior editor explained the consequences of this requirement (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> I think it's a balance and we weigh it; we say, okay, do we want fewer people signing up because they don't want to give their real information as opposed to having people stand by their work and having valid work? And I think that balance is okay for us. We have fewer people signing up; I mean, look at Now Public. In a couple of years they've, it's ballooned to 100,000; we're still sitting at 3,000. But, at the end of the day, I trust our news reporting and our citizen reporters more because we have that information at our fingertips.

Hence, although knowing who the reporters are helps editors assess the validity of the articles reporters offer for publication, as implied by the senior editor, it may discourage some people from contributing to OMNI.

In an online participatory media organisation such as OMNI, where, in most cases, reporters and editors are located far away from each other, computer-mediated communication provides the means for being in contact. Operating globally across cultures poses challenges for an editor. As the senior editor explained (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007):

> You have to learn the art of diplomacy through text because it's very easy for people to misinterpret what you're saying, especially as often they're not native speakers either, so it's a double whammy. As an experienced online editor, I would always take into account which region they're [reporters] from and how to phrase something so that they're not going to misunderstand. For example, a German citizen reporter could take the cold hard facts in their stride, whereas if I were to do that to a Chilean citizen reporter, he or she might take it as a personal affront and there are cultural things to take into account.

As the senior editor indicated, taking into account cultural differences when building a relationship of understanding and trust between editors and reporters is of vital importance (for research on cross-cultural communication, see Bowe & Martin, 2007; House & Kasper, 1981).

5.5   Conclusion

Following from Couldry's (2006a, p. 65) criticism of how Mouffe's abstract political theory does not address how agonistic spaces may come about, nor how and under what conditions they may be sustained, this chapter aimed to explore, by considering the case of VAI, the latter two questions. Thus, Mouffe's model of agonistic pluralism with its notions of antagonism and power framed the discussion on VAI. Taking into account the socio-cultural context in which VAI operated expanded the analysis; it was discovered that context does affect what type of confrontation emerges in an agonistic space, and how intense it becomes. Consequently, context cannot be ignored, but has to be explored with an aim to take into account the many elements shaping such a space.

In the case of VAI, it seems reasonable to argue that part of the reason VAI had so many provocateurs coming to the website was the negative atmosphere in Finland towards activism. It may also be that VAI's aim to democratise the media and to challenge the mainstream media did not resonate particularly well with the majority of the Finnish public, many of whom appear to trust the (mainstream) media. Two different perceptions of the ideal type of discussion emerged from the interviews. On the one hand, some activist-journalists assumed the role of an adversary in relation to others who confronted them about their opinions and challenged their views, whereas in some reactions, confrontation in a debate was seen as being destructive and Habermasian rationality-based deliberation would have been preferred. Moreover, it appears that in Finland, where the ideal of political decision-making has traditionally been consensus, the acceptable level of conflict is fairly low.

Of the three participatory media organisations in this research, VAI, with its minimal restrictions over who could publish on the website and what, showed greatest potential for developing into an agonistic online space that would bring into the same arena people of radically differing views. However, not only agonism, but also antagonism came into play, as there were those who acted as enemies in relation to the VAI website which, it appears, they wanted to see devastated by spamming and trolling. The findings, apart from the instances of the constructive uses of a conflictual online

space, highlight the difficulties in sustaining such a space. Maintaining a minimally controlled open publishing space where competing opinions clashed and passions could run high, and where activists' views were being challenged and the content of the website became increasingly dominated by comments at the expense of articles, proved not to be feasible in the long term for the VAI collective. One of the reasons was that it is difficult for an agonistic, and thus, maximally inclusive open publishing space like VAI to operate without there being explicit guidelines in place concerning what can be published and by whom.

As the case of VAI shows, in circumstances where people of radically different opinions take up an opportunity provided to them to come together online to debate, not only are clear guidelines essential, but it is also crucial that the people responsible for ensuring they are followed and for taking action if they are not, are consistent in their approach. Yet, perhaps even more important is that an organisation is fully committed to an inclusive publishing ethos; it is something that must be perceived as being inherently valuable. Without clarity about the aim of participatory media, it seems not possible for it to operate without people active in an organisation ultimately losing their commitment to the website. In the case of VAI, there was no clear agreement about whether the website was an activists' media or media activism.

The editing process of Indybay acts as a mechanism that permits a degree of control over the "wrong opinions", as it were, and therefore, keeps the website as a space serving the communities from a broad spectrum of the political left, who can publish news, promote events, express their views and debate issues. The aim appears to be to create a communicative space for the political left where, by restricting who and what is published, they "can feel a little bit safe", as one of the Indybay editors put it (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007). As Indybay wants to be a maximally inclusive space for a wide variety of social movements and activist groups, the collective has been careful to refrain from becoming associated too closely with any particular activist group or movement. This strategy is reflected in the way in which the tone of the blurbs editors post in the centre column is kept neutral.

Based on the analysis of the editing process on the Indybay website and the principles that guide it, it seems justified to argue that the Indybay collective and some of the reporters do not see value in creating an agonistic public space. To an extent, this echoes Mouffe's scepticism in relation to the ability of the new media to facilitate such spaces, as she suspects that from the wealth of information available online, people have a tendency to seek sources that strengthen their opinions (Carpentier & Cammaerts,

2006, p. 968). Thus, a pleasant atmosphere is created for the leftist communities to engage with the Indybay website as users and as reporters. Having to serve certain communities, however, is likely to mean that the Indybay website presents fewer opportunities to engage in challenging debates or to offer content that does not reinforce at least to some extent existing views, which relates to Mouffe's criticism of the online spaces (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006). Interestingly, OMNI presents opportunities for people to engage in an exchange of views and news for a group of people representing broader viewpoints than does Indybay. That is because OMNI places no limitations on who posts and what regarding the political views reporters represent.

In VAI, Indybay and OMNI, one can observe different levels of connections between them and the practices of the mainstream media. At one end of the spectrum is VAI, in the middle, Indybay, and at the other end, OMNI. In relation to OMNI and to a lesser extent, Indybay, it can be argued that they disrupt rather than reinforce the alternative/mainstream dichotomy. Indybay, somewhat surprisingly, draws on the mainstream media in several ways, not least in how much the organisation relies on the editors and how the prominent place on the website is given to news written in a neutral tone. OMNI, on the other hand, adheres strongly to the format of the mainstream media and has many elements in its publishing process that aim to enhance its credibility and that are familiar from the mainstream media. For example, the website has featured writers, reporters are provided with style recommendations, and the editors aim to separate factual content from opinions, to check facts, and to rewrite headlines and captions.

Unlike much of the research that uses as a starting point the assumption that if the media are offering an alternative to the mainstream in terms of content and who is invited to provide that content then their production must also be very different from the mainstream media, the findings in this chapter indicate that such a presumption is not sound. Except for VAI, the cases of Indybay and OMNI suggest that such media may have more in common with the mainstream media than some might expect. This point has also been implied by Atton (2008b) in his call for research on alternative media that takes into account the possibility that "Alternative media practices might be drawn from mainstream media practices, from history and from ideology, just as they might challenge those practices or effect 'new' forms of communication" (p. 224).

When considering the editorial process, in some ways, Indybay and OMNI resemble each other more than do VAI and Indybay, although the latter two are part of the same network. However, in relation to the notion of participation, the opposite is the

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case. In comparison to VAI and Indybay, where opportunities exist for contributors to become involved in the collective, OMNI offers no ways for people to participate in the organisation, except for a few volunteer editors, as explained in the previous chapter. Another major difference between the two Indymedia websites and OMNI is that, in the latter, reporters who submit articles for publication in the edited section are competing against each other because editors do not publish all incoming articles. In VAI and Indybay, everything is published, although in Indybay, editors then decide the ultimate location of the post on the website.

OMNI's requirement that the reporters of the edited main sections of the website must register and write under their real name is another element in which the Indymedia websites and OMNI differ. On the other hand, OMNI offers surprisingly many ways for people who want to protect their identity to put forward their views and news on the website. In Indybay and VAI, despite the many challenges that would appear to become magnified because people can post anonymously, the benefits of allowing anonymity are seen to outweigh the disadvantages. OMNI's stance is different, and is designed to enhance the credibility of the website. However, as a former assistant editor indicated, not allowing reporters to post anonymously may have a disadvantage because it can discourage at least some women from offering articles for publication.

There are many theorists and theories of trust in social sciences (see, e.g, Bakir & Barlow, 2007b; Cook, 2001; Häkli & Minca, 2009); however, in the discussion of trust in this chapter, Putnam's notion of thick and thin trust was drawn on because it provided an appropriate approach for exploring social trust between agents in the publishing process. As the discussion indicates, trust is a crucial element in the editing process and comes into play in relationships between the moderators/editors, usually as bearers of trust, and various other players in the process, such as readers of the website. It can be argued, though, that most important for the participatory media organisation and also most fragile, it seems, is the thin trust between reporters and the moderators/editors; if it is broken, the consequence may be the shortage of reporters without whom no media that hope to be participatory can survive.

6   From Advocates to Media Makers: Practising Participatory Journalism

This final empirical chapter aims to unpack reporters' involvement in participatory media by addressing the remaining four of the six dimensions in Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures analytic frame. Hence, in the previous two chapters, spaces and trust were discussed, whereas this chapter explores identity; practices, including skills; knowledge; and values, though it refocuses some of these dimensions to facilitate the analysis of participatory journalism as a specific mode of civic engagement. Although all the interviews conducted in this research informed the analysis, this chapter largely centres on the reporters' perspective of participatory media, and thus, draws mainly on the data from the interviews with reporters of Indybay, OMNI and VAI. It takes into account, where pertinent, the role of a participatory media organisation in relation to the dimensions of civic cultures.

Dahlgren (2009) acknowledges how various types of volunteer journalism form an integral part of the current media landscape, and he has argued about participatory/ citizen journalism that:

> It is easy to see how it potentially can deepen civic culture; it touches base with all six dimensions, not least being based on knowledge and offering practices that depend on computer and net skills that many citizens now have. (p. 177)

In the discussion that follows, the aim is to provide an outline of how the abovementioned four dimensions of civic cultures have been addressed in this chapter. Each of them is discussed in relation to Dahlgren's analytic frame in the order that they are presented in the text. Another structural aspect to be noted here is that, dissimilar to the previous two, in this chapter, the analysis of all three cases is presented together; hence, there is no separate section under each topic for Indybay, OMNI and VAI.

Identity is at the heart of civic cultures. In the framework, identities are seen as the ability of people to see themselves, in Dahlgren's (2009) words, as "active members and participants of democracy" (p. 118). The way in which the notion of identity is explored in this study is based on the premise that unless civic engagement is satisfying at least on some level, it is unlikely that people will become and remain active - in the case of this study, as reporters. The dimension of identity is thus discussed, with reference to research on alternative and participatory media, by presenting a reporter typology, which draws on reporters' motivations to post content on the website.

Motivations and aims are seen as the key elements that underpin reporters' ability to see themselves creating media. It is suggested in this part of the chapter that not all types of journalism practices and reasons for creating media indicate the same type of civic engagement. More interesting aspects of reporters' identities are revealed in the discussion of their views on the terms "citizen journalism" and "citizen journalist", which were employed at the beginning of this research, but later rejected in favour of the terms "participatory journalism" and "reporters".

Following Dahlgren's (2009) civic cultures framework, in this chapter, practices are approached by providing an overview of the ways in which reporters create content for the VAI, Indybay or OMNI website, and of the types of content they create. Their other journalism-related activities are also considered. Thus, the discussion on practices aims to gauge the reporters' "concrete, recurring practices" (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 116). Reporters' patterns of media usage are also discussed briefly as another aspect of reporters' practices in relation to the media.

In this thesis, the analysis of skills is given more prominence than it has been given in Dahlgren's framework where it is presented as an element of the practices dimension. This is because it is seen to have a significant bearing on reporters' involvement in participatory media. The previous chapter already touched upon the issue of skills mainly in relation to the media organisations' approach to the notion of quality and to what support the three participatory media organisations provide for reporters. In this chapter, the skills dimension is explored by focusing on those skills that, based on the interviews, were identified as important for the practice of participatory journalism in VAI, Indybay and OMNI. Consequently, after discussing the notion of skills in relation to the three websites in general, there is an examination of what skills are required in uploading content to the website, as well as the language skills needed. Moreover, reporters' levels of skills are discussed with an emphasis on the factors that affect them.

Knowledge in the civic cultures framework refers mainly to people's access to and ability to make sense of various documents and debates that facilitate peoples' acquisition and accumulation of knowledge (Dahlgren, 2009, pp. 108-109). However, as the focus in this thesis is on participatory journalism as a specific form of civic engagement, the dimension of knowledge is considered by exploring reporters' access to the range of information that is necessary for reporters' to able to practise journalism. The role of a participatory media organisation in "knowledge acquisition", to use Dahlgren's (2009, p. 108) term, is also explored in relation to how Indybay, OMNI and

VAI have helped reporters to access sources. The findings in the section on knowledge are compared to those Reich (2008) puts forward in his illuminating and groundbreaking comparative study on the practices of citizen reporters and mainstream reporters in Israel.

An approach to values in this chapter represents a significant departure from the way in which Dahlgren (2009) refers to it. Dahlgren (2009) discusses values as universal principles and virtues that, through people's commitment to them, support democracy and thus allows there to be a civilised co-existence even between people who represent deeply dissimilar views. In this study, the dimension of values has a tighter and narrower focus, which derives from the interest in the routines and practices of reporters from their perspective. Thus, values are taken to refer to how reporters understand and negotiate ethics in relation to their journalistic activities. The discussion on values, with reference to the principles that guide traditional forms of journalism, consist of several sections: differentiating between news and opinion, reporters' detachment or attachment regarding what they provide coverage on, and what their approach is to using facts and sources.

The final part of the chapter, before the conclusion sums up the key findings, brings the discussion back to the notion of civic engagement. Reporters' modes of civic engagement other than creating media are considered with reference to Bennett (2008) and Dalton's (2008) models of the changing citizenry in late modern democracies. Although there are a number of different ways in which people can enact their civic engagement, in this final part of the analysis, a few examples are considered, which were selected because they seem relevant to participatory media: voting, doing volunteer work other than journalism, and membership in organisations that are part of civil society.

To re-establish the focus, it is valuable to recap the four research questions to be addressed is this chapter. They are:

- How and why do reporters of Indybay, VAI and OMNI engage with participatory media online and media in general?
- What are the principles that reporters employ in relation to journalism ethics?
- What kind of skills and knowledge does the practice of participatory journalism require?
- When considering reporters' different modes of civic engagement, does the evidence support a theory of a shift in the ways in which people are politically active?

The discussion begins with an analysis of reporters' identities, which, as Dahlgren (2009) has noted "can be seen as the centerpiece of civic cultures" (p. 119).

6.1 Identity: Reporter Typology

As Dahlgren (2009, p. 102) argues about civic agency, for people to see themselves as participants, civic engagement must be meaningful for them. In the context of participatory journalism, the question that arises is why it is that reporters are involved in, and what drives them to spend time providing content to a website for participatory media? The practices of reporters are approached in this section through a typology that uses as a starting point the main motivation for involvement for those reporters in participatory media who post original content on VAI, Indybay or OMNI. What is meant here by original content, is content that requires a reporter's creative input; thus, people who, for example, translate articles from other sources or provide links to other websites, but do not post original content, are not included in the typology.

Based on the analysis of the interviewees' reasons for practising journalism and what they hoped to achieve by their activities, two main types of journalists emerged, as shown in Table 8. These were labelled either "advocate" or "media maker". For the former group, reporting is a means of promoting some type of change, be it political, social or cultural, whereas for the latter, it is the process of media making that in itself is important. To explain the difference further, for the advocates, making media is a tool, sometimes one amongst many, that is employed in the hope that it will help in achieving a goal. Several VAI and Indybay interviewees in this study were activists, who appeared to shift between different activities, such as organising activities in social movements or advocacy groups, and demonstrating and making media. Some of them, however, indicated that their main or even preferred means of involvement was producing media content. For media makers, on the other hand, the *key motivation* is the enjoyment that reporters gain from expressing themselves in the media. This is not to suggest that reporters placed in the category "media maker" never try to achieve anything with their reporting, but more often than not, their primary motivation has to do with the personal satisfaction that making media provides, in the case of the reporters in this study, due to a passion for writing.

Table 8: Reporter typology based on motivation

Main reporter type	Main motivation	Sub-categories	Stance	Involvement	Main characteristics or reporting
Advocate	Promoting change through reporting	Activist VAI=67% Indybay=82% OMNI=0%	Sees reporting as a way of challenging the dominant parameters of citizenship and/or traditional media practices.	Either personal involvement in what a reporter covers, or strong sympathy for the cause of people/ communities, the affairs of whom s/he reports.	Giving voice to the voiceless. Emphasis on documenting and archiving events/struggles for current and future generations. Highlighting the wrongs of society.
		Citizen VAI=33% Indybay=18% OMNI=56%	Sees reporting as a way of contributing to the building of a better society in the framework of (global) citizenship.	Reporting from a fresh perspective. May be sympathetic to the cause of people/ communities whose affairs s/he reports.	Reporting on what is overlooked by the media. Investigative reporting.
Media maker	Enjoys expressing her/himself in the media	Writer VAI=0% Indybay=0% OMNI=22%	Reporting as a passion and/or a hobby.	Giving an insight into something that is of personal interest to a reporter.	Covering a variety of topics depending on a reporter's interest.
		Aspiring professional VAI=0% Indybay=0% OMNI=22%	Learning to be better at making media is the key motivator.	Detachment from what a reporter is covering.	Professional-style reporting on a variety of topics.

The advocate group was divided into two subcategories, namely, "activist" and "citizen", whereas under "media maker", the two subtypes that emerged were labelled "writer" and "aspiring professional". The table shows the percentage of reporters per case study whose activities corresponded with each of these subcategories. For analytical purposes, it was useful to distinguish between the reporter types based on the *main reason* why a person participates in the process of making media and then by listing the characteristics typical of each subcategory. However, the boundaries between the categories, in particular between the subcategories, are not as clear-cut as they

appear to be in the table. For example, an individual reporter can exhibit characteristics of more than one subcategory. To clarify this point even further, although the table indicates that reporters of Indybay and VAI did not fall under the categories of "writer" and "aspiring professional", this does not mean that none of them exhibited any ambitions to make a living by working in the media - in fact, a few interviewees did work in the media, mainly in alternative media - or that creating media would not be something that reporters of Indybay and VAI enjoy. It is, perhaps, also helpful to note that approximately four years after their involvement in VAI, the majority of VAI reporters interviewed for this research were writing articles, some infrequently, for various media and a few of them were freelance journalists. Thus, at least for some former VAI reporters, the motivation to promote change had not cancelled out pursuing journalism as an occupation.

Activists, by promoting social change, tend to perceive themselves doing so from outside the dominant parameters for citizens' participation. Activist-reporters were challenging the traditional media practices and what they perceived as imbalances in media power, which have been noted to be characteristics of alternative media (Atton, 2008a), not only through their own involvement in making a new type of media, but many also by trying to create opportunities for others to take part. Thus, they operated within the frame of media activism, as it is called by Hackett and Carroll (2006), where expanding the right to communicate, and giving a voice to those whose voices are rarely seen to reach the mainstream or corporate media, is in itself important. Typically, the interviewees belonging to the category of activists, in addition to publishing content on the website, were or in the case of VAI, had been involved in the work of an Indymedia collective also in some other way, such as being a moderator.

On the other hand, there is not always unanimity about whether the primary if not only aim of activism on a movement level can be democratising media. For example, a VAI interviewee noted that although, for some, media making can be a political act, for him "just disseminating information does not help, if there is no political action connected to it" (Lähde, personal communication, August 30, 2006). On the level of the individual, for an activist type of reporter, media making is a way of taking action for social change. As one former VAI activist who was involved in the alter-globalisation movement (Laakso, personal communication, August 24, 2006) replied when asked about what he wanted to achieve by contributing to VAI as a reporter: "I wanted a change and a better world. I believed and still believe that critical information in this respect matters."

Activists are, as the label suggests, in some way involved in, or at least associated with one or more social movement organisations, an advocacy group or a community group. For example, some of the Indybay and VAI interviewees took part in various movements and sporadic actions whereas some of the activists had a specific concern about which they felt particularly strongly, be it campaigning against the war, raising awareness of environmental issues, or improving workers' rights. Thus, activists often report from inside a movement, as it were, and so, they typically provide "information for action" by doing native reporting to use Atton's (2002, p. 113) term for this type of activist-originated media. In these abovementioned three cases, all of which are examples of the situations of certain interviewees in this study, a reporter can thus write from the point of view of someone who is an anti-war activist, is involved in an environmental group, such as Friends of the Earth, or is a dedicated Labour Movement activist. Thus, activists, through their aim to promote a certain cause or several causes, correspond with the notion of "advocacy journalism" where the aim is to provide information and news from a particular perspective (Schudson, 1999, pp. 119-120).

Two interesting factors that are related to the motivation of reporters emerged from the interviews with the activist type of reporters. First, some activists in this study were interested not only in making media for social change, but some of them stressed that learning new skills and becoming better at what they did was what motivated them to contribute. It appeared that because of their skills and interests, these activists tended to assume in an organisation or a group the role of a reporter, and were striving to provide reporting, be it a written article, photo or video coverage or a radio programme that did justice to the organisation and its members.

The second factor was the aim to document events. For some activist reporters, it was important to ensure that events related to struggles did not go unnoticed, nor that they were forgotten, at least not because of a lack of coverage. Hence, they wanted to document events and to make sure that the reports were archived so that coverage would be available online to anyone interested, even if it were a long time after the report was posted. As Indybay editors include in the edited front-page articles links to related or previous coverage on the topic, their work is invaluable in helping readers to find older content that may enlighten them about the background or history of an event. An important aspect of reporting on events is that people who have taken part see their efforts being acknowledged. How individuals react to the coverage in which they appear is another matter.

Reporters in the second subcategory of advocate, which is labelled "citizen", practised journalism because, like journalists, they hoped to achieve something by making media. They tended to see their journalistic activities as a way of contributing to building a better society in the framework of (global) citizenship. However, citizens, whilst choosing what they cover based on what they perceive as missing from the mainstream media coverage or reporting it from a certain angle, do not usually report on events as insiders in the same way activists do. Citizens also tend to have a fairly broad range of interests, which relates to the point that they may provide coverage on events organised by groups, such as social movement organisations, advocacy groups or community groups, but they themselves are not necessarily active participants in them. They may, however, be sympathetic to the aims and objectives of such groups. On the whole, for citizens, their negative perception of the state of the mainstream and corporate media motivates them to do what they can to improve the situation, which generally speaking, is also the sentiment upon which the alternative media are built (e.g., Atton & Hamilton, 2008, pp. 9-40; Dahlgren, 2009, p. 176). This was one of the aims identified by Ugille and Raeymaeckers (2008, p. 8) in their study aiming to discover who the bloggers in group blogs in Belgium are and to reveal their motivations, and by Sutton (2006, p. 24) in his study on the motivations of reporters on the OMN website. Given the history of South Korea in relation to the freedom of speech and the press, the findings in the latter study certainly are not surprising.

An OMNI reporter explained her aims with regards to her journalism activities as follows (Hauben, R., personal communication, November 3, 2006):

> I thought what I'm trying to do in the articles is somehow presenting some of what isn't usually presented… I thought there's a need to sort out what, how there can be a better press and that's some of what I feel I'm trying to do in terms of the writing and the work I do as part of citizen journalism.

A citizen, such as, for example, this reporter, may be motivated to do investigative journalism, typically, it appears, on issues that, in their view, have been misreported, insufficiently reported or ignored altogether in the media. Moreover, it would appear that a citizen more often than an activist seeks information from different sources and aims to provide a balanced account in an article. Thus, the citizen reporters' approach echoes the ideals in what Schudson (1999) has termed the "trustee model" (p. 120) of journalism, the key characteristics of which are that professional journalists seek to present the truth, aim to be fair, and exercise critical judgement for the benefit of the

public. The interviewed OMNI reporters' accounts revealed that a further motivation to contribute was the aim to provide information to the rest of the world about what is going on in the USA, on the one hand about the democratic spirit of American people, and, on the other, about the reality of American society. As one OMNI reporter noted in relation to why he contributed to OMNI (Lyon, personal communication, November 2, 2006): "maybe to give a little of my thoughts, my feelings and like, you know, to open up a window into something that may not be provided of the American dream in the media … I think that it's an important role. I don't take it lightly."

The category of media maker is divided here into two subcategories: writer and aspiring professional. For both, the main reason for involvement in media production is that they enjoy it. For writers, media making tends to be a leisure time pursuit that writers find personally rewarding. One interviewee categorised as a writer explained what motivated her as a reporter to contribute to OMNI (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006):

> My impetus to do this is that I really have written all my literate life, and it is a wonderful outlet. I also find that I enjoy events more if I feel that I am also there to be eyes and ears for others. I am a writer, and I have to write.

This motivation corresponds with "fondness of writing" which in Ugille and Raeymaeckers' (2008: 9) study emerged as a reason for some bloggers' involvement.

The topics writers covered tended to demonstrate a wide range of interests, but most typically they seemed to draw on reporters' own experiences or observations on something that was of interest to them. Hence, often, a writer provides an insight into what is happening in her/his environment, although also a keen interest, which might have led to some level of expertise, can influence what a writer focuses on in her/his reporting. Consequently, writers, depending on their interests, cover a wide range of topics from film reviews and travel stories to politics and current affairs, to name but a few. Amongst writers, there are free-lance journalists or reporters who have been professional journalists at some point in their past and have returned to journalistic activities. Both of these are examples of interviewees in this research. For freelance journalists, the motivation to publish in an outlet for participatory journalism seems to be that it permits more freedom to cover issues that are of personal interest to them, or to write an opinion piece, than what is likely to be granted by the corporate or the mainstream media for which they otherwise work (also Harcup, 2005). Writers' approach to journalism ethics appears to correspond with values that are usually held

high in traditional, liberal conceptions of journalism, such as accuracy, fairness and keeping opinions separate from facts (Harcup, 2009).

An aspiring professional is a reporter who sees practising participatory journalism as a possible stepping stone to becoming a writer, whether a journalist or another type of writer. Although, in this study, the interviewees belonging to this category were interested in writing, there is no reason why an aspiring professional could not equally be, for example, a photographer or someone doing radio work. Moreover, it must stressed again that although no Indybay or VAI reporters were coded to this, or to the writer category, as the coding was based on the *main reason* for a reporter's involvement, it does not mean that amongst Indymedia reporters there would not be people who either already are, or want to work in the media for a living.

The motivation of an aspiring professional has to do with either an aim to pursue a career in journalism or with having a goal to learn to be a better writer to be able to have work published elsewhere, as was the case of one OMNI interviewee, who wanted to publish a book. As he noted (McCann, personal communication August 6, 2007):

> I'm just kind of, you know, kind of refining my skills … and I love to get some feedback, because that's the whole point. It's to improve … I'm looking more, actually, for people who don't enjoy it versus the ones who do, because I'm looking to improve my skills, expanding the audience, because again, this is all just to work toward a book.

Thus, for aspiring professionals, practising journalism is a way to hone existing reporting skills and to learn new ones. Receiving feedback on their reporting in general, and from someone whose professional opinion they value, such as, in the case of OMNI, the editor, is important for an aspiring professional whose aim is to reach a higher skills level. This finding corresponds with that of Ugille and Raeymaeckers (2008, p. 5), although in their study, the value of feedback provided by professionals related to bloggers who had a degree in journalism and were seeking to pursue it as a career, whereas aspiring professionals in this study did not have any formal training in journalism.

It must be noted that, in all of the above categories, there could be people ranging from more seasoned reporters to people who have recently become interested in making their own media. Although the skills are discussed later in the chapter in more detail, it is worth noting here that, based on the reporters' accounts, how competent they feel about their skills in journalism varies. At one end of the spectrum are those who do not perceive themselves as being particularly good or as having a passion for journalism.

Nevertheless, they may contribute because they feel that without their effort, certain topics that they deem important may not make it to the media because other reporters ignore them. At the other end are reporters who are highly motivated. Some have years or even decades of experience in making media often not only as volunteers, but also as paid reporters for alternative or for mainstream/corporate media. The length of current involvement in journalism does not, however, necessarily determine how proficient a reporter is, as indicated by the case of one interviewee, who, once a professional journalist, became involved in participatory media after retiring from her job in advertising. To make a further point about skills, reporters who have not been involved for very long, but have the motivation and time to invest in learning, seem to be able improve their skills a great deal in a short space of time.

6.1.1 Identity: reporters' views on terminology

As was indicated in Chapter 1, this research project began as a study of citizen journalism and with the aim of interviewing citizen journalists, yet the validity of these terms was soon questioned. In part, the apprehension regarding the use of the terms stemmed from the review of the growing body of literature on the phenomenon published largely since 2005, when the research was initiated, and on how the mainstream media tend to portray citizen journalism. It was realised that in both of these discourses there was a developing tendency to see a citizen journalist as an accidental witness of something worth communicating as news, or to focus on how at least some mainstream media organisations provide audiences with more opportunities than before to become involved in content production. However, journalism and media organisations in this study do not agree with these characterisations, as the aim has been to explore ways of practising participatory journalism beyond the sphere of the mainstream media, and these acts of journalism, more often than not, are planned rather than accidental and occur repeatedly rather than a few times at most. Thus, for this reason alone, replacing "citizen journalism" with "participatory journalism" was seen to be justified.

Yet, it was necessary to reject the term "citizen journalism" also because it became apparent that many of the interviewees were not comfortable with the term, as will be discussed in this section, and in fact, not all reporters were familiar with it at the time of the initial face-to-face interviews. The differing levels of unfamiliarity with the term "citizen journalism" seemed more common for the USA-based reporters than for

those in Finland. This discovery was somewhat surprising, because the term was seen if not to originate in the USA, as implied by Couldry (2010), who describes "citizen journalist" as "the US term" (p. 139), at least to be widely used there in the public domain. However, as the discussion that now follows indicates, it may be that the rejection of "citizen journalism" and "citizen journalist" may have occasionally been masked by what seemed to be an unawareness of the terms.

In Finland, the term was problematic mainly because a direct translation of citizen journalism "kansalaisjournalismi" means to some people, especially those familiar with journalism theory, approximately the same as public or civic journalism. That is a specific type of journalism practised by professional journalists, as was discussed in Chapter 2. However, for some people, the meaning is the same as in English. When interviewing people in Finland, it was important to explain which meaning of the term "citizen journalism" was used. Once it was clarified, Finnish interviewees, by and large, did not express disapproval of the term, although one of them noted (Huhta, personal communication, January 29, 2007): "Concepts with a 'citizen' prefix are not much appreciated amongst people who have been active (for instance, after the alter-globalisation movement weakened) in Free Movement and migrant issues." A problem with the prefix "citizen" was also put forward by an American Indybay reporter (Sakharov, personal communication, November 29, 2007), who explained:

> …the term "citizen" is problematic in this era of immigration debate. We are not looking for citizens as opposed to immigrants or illegal aliens, so perhaps where "citizen journalism" meant the same thing as "popular journalism," some years ago, the implication now would be that it was for legal residents.

In these critiques, the term "citizen" is associated with the legal status of a citizen of a nation state and thus was found inappropriate for describing journalism that aims to be inclusive.

Although, on the whole, OMNI reporters were more comfortable with the prefix "citizen" than were Indybay interviewees, there were both Indybay and OMNI interviewees who rejected it often because of various associations attached to the word "citizen". An OMNI reporter (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006) noted "'Citizen' sounds a little off-putting to me, brings to mind 'Comrade' somehow." An Indybay reporter traced the use of the word "citizen" to American right wing organisations, which used it for promoting their business interests (Borgström, personal communication, June 15, 2007). One former Indybay reporter argued that the term

"citizen" does not correspond with many Indymedia people's radical, counter hegemonic project. As she (Sousa, personal communication, August 6, 2007) put it:

> …Indymedia people generally feel that they are working outside of the established system and that they are creating a new system–a people's information network. The term "citizen" implies that you are working within the existing political system and most Indymedia people probably consider themselves more radical than that.

One Indybay interviewee (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006) provided another reason why, in Indymedia circles, the term "citizen journalism" tends not to be popular: "I think 'citizen journalism' is a term invented by liberal observers to describe something Indymedia pioneered but will not receive credit for."

In addition to plain "reporter", many Indybay reporters, usually those aiming to advocate social or political change proposed instead of "citizen journalist", terms such as "activist journalist", "advocacy or advocate journalist", "media activist" and "Indymedia reporter". Some of the somewhat more neutral suggestions were "ampro" (amateur professional), "Internet journalist", and "media maker", as well as "independent journalist", which is what both one Indybay and OMNI reporter proposed.

Several OMNI reporters argued that the term "citizen journalism" had come to imply, as one reporter put it (Hauben, J., personal communication, November 2, 2006), amateur and "folksie" reporting, which in turn was seen to detract from its value. There were, however, also a few OMNI reporters who had their doubts about the use of the word "reporter" or "journalism". It was argued, in the words of one OMNI reporter (Hahn, personal communication, August 10, 2007) that:

> The unwillingness to accept those titles are most likely because "reporters" and "journalism" are words that attribute a sense of responsibility and status, which casual writers are probably not too keen on taking up. Most of them already have full-time positions, while writing articles is an avocational activity that does not require much responsibility from them, and being any kind of reporter or journalist would sully that sense of leisure, if only psychologically.

Moreover, one OMNI reporter (McCann, personal communication, August 6, 2007) pointed out, "I would not call myself a citizen reporter just due to the fact that it is more of a hobby for me than anything else." A former OMNI reporter implied that because there are websites and blogs of all sorts and all claim to be providing journalism, what

in these days is called journalism is becoming too broad (Andriotis, personal communication, August 9, 2007).

A few reporters from OMNI and one from Indybay suggested the use of the neutral term "reporter". An OMNI reporter (Jacquot, personal communication, November 17, 2006) provided the rationale for this preference: "Getting rid of the 'citizen' component gives it more legitimacy and signals that our work should be taken as seriously as that of full-time journalists." This point also takes us back to the vision of OhmyNews' founder about how all journalism should be assessed by its merits, as was discussed in Chapter 4. In this study, the switch to "reporter" as a term was made because it is neutral, and thus is less likely to lead to positive or negative expectations of its practitioners through various associations than are many other terms, not least "citizen journalist".

6.2   Reporters' Practices

The main way in which reporters of all three participatory media organisations were involved was by posting what could be called "original" content, meaning media that require at least some level of creative input from a reporter and that are typically created for the website in question. Examples of such content are articles, photo reportage, radio programmes, and audio and video footage. Other types of contributions in relation to all three websites are involvement in discussions following original content, and with regards to Indybay and VAI, posting on the website translated articles or links to other websites as well as posting content on the events calendar. Some VAI interviewees mentioned also press releases, and a few Indybay interviewees noted that they occasionally repost on Indybay something that they have come across on other websites and want to share with readers of Indybay. Based on the interviewees' accounts of their activities and corroborating their recollections where possible by searching through the website for their contributions and reading them, it seems that the majority of all the interviewees involved in creating content had contributed original content and some of them had, in addition, posted other types of content. A small minority had not posted original, but only other types of content. For example, one VAI reporter translated articles into Finnish from other Indymedia websites, but did not post other types of articles on the website. All interviewed reporters for OMNI were registered reporters and had had their articles published on the edited sections of the website.

What topics reporters cover varies a great deal even in a small sample such as the one in this study. However, certain types of coverage came up in the interviews more often than did some others. In the case of VAI and Indybay, these were the coverage of protests as well as reports on events of the progressive and leftist communities, such as various civil society organisations. Finding such a focus is not surprising given that many of the reporters at least associate themselves with these groups; they provide coverage of their activities and may be active members in them. Based on the interviewees' accounts, with OMNI, there is no single coverage type that stands out in a similar way; however, quite a few reporters seemed to write articles based on their observations, experiences and personal interests.

Table 9 shows the different content types created by interviewees involved in creating content in VAI, Indybay or OMNI. As it was possible to submit only text to VAI, without contacting those who had administration rights and could place photographs and video clips on the website, most of the interviewed reporters posted text. Of the reporters for the three websites, Indybay reporters had the widest spread distribution of different content types ranging from text and photographs, which the majority of the Indybay interviewees contributed, to a few reporters who posted radio programmes or other audio material. One obvious reason for this is that various types of content can be uploaded to the Indybay website. The variation in the content types of Indybay reporters' contributions also appears to reflect how many of the reporters have a preferred format. For example, some interviewees create videos and one interviewee's radio programmes are posted on the Indybay website. The latter also highlights one of the characteristics of Indybay, that is, it can be used as a distribution channel for media content originally produced for another medium, in this case, for Free Radio Santa Cruz (http://www.freakradio.org/), an unlicensed radio station in California.

Table 9: Different content types created by reporters per case study

	Audio	Photos	Radio	Text	Video
VAI	0	1	0	11	0
Indybay	1	10	1	13	4
OMNI	0	3	0	9	0

Another example of synergy between Indybay and other alternative media is content in Indybay that has been originally published in *BeyondChron* (http://www.beyondchron.org/), which describes itself as San Francisco's alternative online daily, that is, as an alternative to *The San Francisco Chronicle*

(www.sfgate.com/), northern California's largest daily newspaper. A further example of the symbiotic relationship between Indybay and other alternative media is provided by the editor of a monthly progressive newspaper in Fresno, California, called *Community Alliance* (http://www.fresnoalliance.com/), who in the following quotation highlighted the key benefit of Indybay for him (Rhodes, personal communication, November 30, 2006):

> The thing I like about Indymedia is it's so immediate. Um, we're [*Community Alliance*] a monthly publication; our website isn't set up so that, you know, we change it all that often, except for the calendar of events. You know, people wouldn't necessarily go there to look for information that's happening today whereas you go to Indymedia, um Indybay, and you see stories about things that are happening today. I like to write stories about things that happened that day, post pictures, get it on Indymedia and then let people know that it's there so that it actually gets there before any other news source so they see it from my perspective first.

It seems justified to argue that one of the contributing factors to Indybay's success has been its alliance with at least some other alternative media in the area within its reach.

Indybay's embeddedness in what can be described broadly as 'civil society' does, however, go beyond how it is linked to alternative media, that is, to the connections Indybay has through reporters of the website to a variety of civil society organisations, groups and networks. These associations were discussed in the previous section on reporters' identity. It seems justified to argue that these interconnections are not only important for the sustainability of participatory media, but also act as a safeguard, protecting participatory media organisations and reporters from commodification in addition to annihilation. These points have also been put forward by Carpentier, De Brabander, and Cammaerts (2009), who have argued about citizen journalism that "the embeddedness in participatory organizations, which are in turn part of a rhizomatic civil society, is seen as necessary to protect citizen journalism" (p. 172).

As seen in Table 9, all interviewed OMNI reporters were contributing text; however, a few of them would also take photographs, usually to accompany the articles. It seems that, on the OMNI website, prominence is given to written articles, which is likely to explain why text is clearly the main content type for the reporters of OMNI. To sum up, amongst all the interviewed reporters, there were several who seemed to favour a certain type of content, be it text, photographs or video footage. A few either mixed different types in an article, typically text and photographs, or shifted between different

content types. For example, a reporter could post photographs one time and an analysis another time.

In addition to the content they provide to a website that is of interest in this study, the interviewees were asked about the other types of journalism or related activities they were involved in elsewhere. Table 10 shows these activities of interviewees involved in creating content in VAI, Indybay or OMNI at the time when the research interviews were conducted. In relation to VAI, the table shows in what type of journalism-related activities the former VAI reporters were engaged approximately four years after the website was closed down. Writing articles and blogging were the two most popular journalism activities for the former content producers in VAI. A few of those who had a blog suggested that blogging was a natural progression for VAI, but without its problems, such as spamming.

The majority of VAI reporters wrote articles for various types of media from alternative to mainstream media at least occasionally, some as freelance journalists. This seems to be because a few, during the time they were involved with VAI, were either writing for media as freelancers or were activists who were providing content to media to support the cause of the movement with which they were affiliated. Moreover, on rare occasions, VAI seems to have provided reporters with their first experience in media work, and after VAI became inactive, these reporters shifted to contributing to other media. One former VAI reporter reacted to the closing of VAI by launching his own website, together with a few other reporters, called Vaihtoehtouutiset (in English "Alternative News", http://www.vunet.org/), where they provide content on topics as varied as local and foreign news, experimental music videos, an endorsement of the Juche ideology of North Korea and erotic images of women.

Table 10: Reporters' other journalism or related activities per case study

	Articles for media	Radio work	Book	Own column	Blog	Own website	Newsletter	TV
VAI	7	0	0	0	4	1	0	0
Indybay	5	2	2	0	2	4	0	1
OMNI	1	0	2	1	4	1	3	0

Indybay reporters' other journalism and related activities were more varied than were those of reporters who used to provide content to VAI. Hence, there were reporters who, in addition to contributing to Indybay, frequently wrote articles for other alternative media, such as the editor of *Community Alliance*. Some reporters did radio work, one hosted a cable TV show called *Labor on the Job*, one reporter had had books

published and another one was about to self-publish a book online. Interestingly, not many had taken to blogging, but some had their own websites where they tended to archive their contributions to other media. Several OMNI reporters had a blog. Other types of journalism-related activities in which some OMNI reporters were involved were writing a book, writing articles for media other than OMNI and having a newsletter that was either published online or distributed via email. One reporter had her own column on a website for creative writing called Open Writing (http://www.openwriting.com/). What was absent from OMNI reporters' repertoire of journalism-related activities was radio and TV work. One reason for this is likely to be that OMNI reporters are not usually activists, whereas some Indybay reporters' involvement in broadcasting is likely to do with it being an established means by which the various radical movements in the USA can communicate their message (Howley, 2005; Stein, 2001).

6.2.1   Practices: Reporters as media users

Considering that the people who create media content are themselves an integral part of the media environment, it was deemed valuable to reflect on how they use media or consume media. Therefore, this section, by drawing on reporters' interviews across the cases, offers a brief discussion of the broad trends in reporters' media usage. By and large, throughout the three case studies, more of the interviewed reporters explained that they consumed various types of media from mainstream to alternative media and both online and offline than did not. On the whole and perhaps not surprisingly given their own involvement in the production of alternative media advocating social or political change, most Indybay and VAI reporters appeared to be using various alternative media more, and more frequently than were OMNI reporters. This positive correlation between activism and alternative media usage has also been noted by Rauch (2007) in her research on how activists use various media.

Even if a reporter's general attitudes towards mainstream media, or the corporate media as several Indybay interviewees called them, were in general negative, it was hard to come across reporters who, when discussing their own media usage, were not using mainstream media at all. One of the reasons for following the mainstream media, which is put forward also by Rauch (2007, p. 1003), for those who are keen to point out their flaws, was explained by an Indybay reporter as follows (Zeltzer, personal communication, December 4, 2006): "I watch, you know, um, commercial television,

you know, and listen to the radio … if you want to understand how people are being affected by the media, you have to know what the media is doing and saying. So, it's very important." On the other hand, several interviewees seemed to use the mainstream media to serve their needs for information and entertainment. For example, many former VAI reporters explained they were regularly reading the biggest mainstream newspaper in Finland either in print or online while they were contributing to VAI. What kind of mainstream media reporters explained they would mainly use, such as which newspapers they would read, seemed to depend, in part on their political leaning, and in part on what was available to them.

Several interviewees said that they watched television either rarely or not at all. For example, one VAI interviewee noted (Öberg, personal communication, January 30, 2007): "I can't stand TV … in my opinion, it is quite simply a total waste of time." The reasons for rejecting television varied somewhat and, for example, explanations of why television news was not of any interest ranged from news being old by the time it is broadcast on TV to an argument that the television news prevents rather than helps one to understand what is happening in the world. The latter point was put forward by one of the VAI interviewees as follows (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006): "It [TV news] prevents you from being informed about the world events because it is so fragmented and has a 'just now' type of content that in most cases is in no way meaningful." For some, only certain TV programmes were of interest. Thus, some reported watching documentaries or television dramas; one USA-based Indybay interviewee noted he bought them on DVD to avoid watching advertisements, of which there are many in commercial American television broadcasts.

It is not known to what extent the criticisms of TV and the claims of not watching it reflect the reality of interviewees' media consumption. Evidence provided by Rauch (2007) strongly suggests that, in general, activists tend to downplay their mainstream media usage, and her explanation for why this may be seems convincing. As she (Rauch, 2007) notes:

> They professed paying little attention to mainstream media, but many of the activists in fact used more commercial news produced by large corporations than they explicitly realized or admitted. I interpret these seemingly contradictory claims as a form of symbolic resistance, whose value lies in the idea of rejecting mainstream media, as opposed to the actual practice of not using them. (p. 1007)

However, unlike in Rauch's study (2007), many of the interviewed reporters in this research were not suggesting that they rejected the mainstream media altogether, but their dismissal had to do mainly with television programmes.

A noteworthy divide emerged from the interviewees' accounts in relation to their media consumption between reporters who engaged with media a great deal and reporters who decidedly limited their media intake. Thus, some reporters described how they spent a lot of time using media, often online and from many sources, ranging from Google News to the websites of mainstream news organisations and from blogs and newsletters of civil society organisations to various alternative media. Some of these reporters called themselves "news junkies". Moreover, as their media usage was intertwined with their media producing activities, not least because their media usage could feed into the media content they produced, the reporters' relationship with media seemed to correspond with what Bruns (2005) has called "produsers" (p. 23), that is, people who, when online, are involved both in producing and using media. Although some produsers' engagement with media as a user appears to have shifted to online usage of newspapers, radio and sometimes also television, it did not usually mean that older distribution formats would be rejected altogether. Hence, produsers may well read some newspapers and magazines in print format or occasionally watch a television programme.

In contrast to produsers, a few interviewees who were themselves involved in making media reported having a rather different relationship with media, as they tended to use media very selectively and some also scarcely. An Indybay interviewee whose radio shows are posted on Indybay described her media consumption as follows (Cadman, personal communication, June 12, 2007):

> …I burned out a few years ago on a lot of stuff and so I don't consume as much news as I used to. Sometimes I don't listen to the radio or look in a newspaper all day. I don't subscribe to newspapers. I might read the headlines on occasion. I might on occasion pick up a paper and read it in a coffee shop. I don't really read papers other than the weeklies here [in Santa Cruz], because, I don't know, there's only so much one can take in… I don't watch any TV. And I don't think that I'm missing out on much. I think television is pretty much garbage. I get my information from radio and from doing radio basically.

The reasons for this approach to media usage varied from negative views on specific types of media to attempting to reduce time spent on using media, as noted by the interviewee. Choosing to reduce media intake significantly is not, however, necessary

due to media usage having become too intense[17], as implied in the above quotation. As a former VAI reporter calling his relationship with media "active nihilism", and who since the closure of VAI has been writing articles to alternative publications along with his day job (Liesaho, personal communication, January 17, 2007), explained:

> …for many years I have not had a TV nor have I subscribed to newspapers and I try not to read them. And I have chosen this because I have come to a conclusion that of course they have useful information, but in addition, I get so much other stuff that I do not really want, so I dissociate myself from them entirely, which means that I read alternative and cultural publications and seek information from here and there, but randomly.

For this interviewee, keeping up with the news flow was not important. As he argued (Liesaho, personal communication, January 17, 2007): "My life rolls on as before although I do not know everything." Despite an attempt to reject much of the media, in particular the mainstream, the interviewee, however, noted that occasionally, he read, for example, free city newspapers like *Metro* in public transport. Hence, even in this rare case, the mainstream media block-out was far from being absolute. What is intriguing in these two examples of a reporter rejecting much of the media is that it implies that there is not necessarily a positive correlation between media production and media consumption. Thus, a reporter can be involved in creating media content, but largely reject content created by others.

6.3   Skills

Researchers concerned with education, such as Kellner (2002, pp. 92-93), stress that in the era of new media, people need multiple literacies that amount to critical media literacy. To accompany reading and writing skills, critical media literacy has been seen as an ability to analyse, weigh and interpret media content (Kellner, 2002, p. 93). However, as Lewis and Jhally (1998) have argued, a text centric approach to media literacy is not sufficient on its own; it must take into account the economic and social structures within which media are embedded, that is, the political economy of media. Significantly, a further aspect of critical media literacy has been learning to express oneself in the media, and in relation to this type of self-expression, writing skills have been traditionally seen as crucial (Kellner, 2002, p. 92). It is argued that, in participatory

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[17] This account of an interviewee's media usage echoes a notion of condition known as "information overload" and the anxieties the existence of "the gap between 'what we understand' and 'what we think we should understand'" can cause (Capurro, 2005, p. 188).

cultures of "artistic expression and civic engagement", new competencies are required in addition to those such as technical, research and critical analysis skills (Jenkins et al., 2006, pp. 3-4). As Jenkins et al. (2006) argue: "Participatory culture shifts the focus of literacy from one of individual expression to community involvement. The new literacies almost all involve social skills developed through collaboration and networking" (p. 4).

When focusing on participatory journalism, the notion of skills is not a simple one. For example, it can be assumed that writing skills are important, but is it sufficient to write well, or should reporters know how to handle audio material or images, whether still or moving? What about technical skills in relation to using a computer? Do reporters need to be able to collaborate? Furthermore, what role does the participatory media organisation play in relation to skills?

In the majority of the interviews with OMNI, Indybay and VAI reporters in this research, the discussion on skills centred on analytical skills, writing skills and an ability to upload material to participatory journalism websites, and was sometimes tied to the elusive notion of quality. As one of the core group of activists who launched VAI and provided content for the website argued (Laakso, personal communication, August 24, 2006):

> In my opinion, citizen journalism should aim at the same quality as "real" journalism –except, perhaps, for objectivity. But even a subjective view must not mean pure propaganda or lies. Other than that, the skills required are the normal good writing skills, critical analytical skills and so forth. I guess that the "critical citizen journalism" part comes from having a slightly different point of view from that of the mainstream media, i.e., criticism of society, reporting on what social movements are doing, et cetera.

Less discussed in the interviewees were skills concerned with photography, audio material and video. With regards to VAI, this is hardly surprising, given that the website content was predominantly text. OMNI and Indybay reporters, on the other hand, can upload images as part of their articles and as has been noted before, also video footage and audio material can be posted on the Indybay website. Some articles on the OMNI website have links to video clips in the YouTube video-sharing service and some are available as podcasts. When OMNI employed more staff, it was sometimes one of the editors who created podcasts of articles, whereas nowadays, the reporters themselves occasionally make an article into a podcast.

Despite the differences between the content of the three cases, it would appear that on all of these three websites, although more so on VAI and OMNI than on

Indybay, text forms the core of participatory journalism and, for many of the interviewees, the purpose of other forms of expression is to complement the text. Consequently, an ability to express oneself comprehensibly in writing tends to represent a minimum requirement for being able to practise participatory journalism. However, of the three cases, Indybay, where it is possible to submit content that contains practically only still images, video or audio material, is to some extent different from the other two cases. Consequently, on the Indybay website, there is a photo reportage type of content and video footage. Based on the interviews, much of this type of content seems to be provided by reporters who are fairly skilled in their craft.

On the other hand, taking photographs and posting them online was not something in which all interviewed reporters were interested and, for a few, photography was a skill that they perceived themselves as lacking. As two of the Indybay interviewees had discovered, cooperation with another reporter can lead to enhanced reporting when the skills and preferences of the reporters are complimentary. Thus, a reporter more interested in expressing herself in writing had joined forces with another more talented in photography and videography to provide content that combined these two elements. In this case, it was possible to see the emergence of collaborative practice.

A further interesting aspect to posting visual content that was discovered from the research data is that it can offer a way of contributing when a reporter is not comfortable with expressing his or herself in writing due to inadequate writing skills. For example, someone may be struggling with writing due to a disability, such as dyslexia. Thus, a reporter may prefer posting images accompanied by virtually no text or only a headline, captions and perhaps a short summary. An opportunity to contribute visual content can, therefore, be valuable not only for reporters who have specialized in photography and video, but also for people who otherwise might feel that they are not able to become involved.

The training available for reporters who experience problems with an aspect of their reporting differs between the three platforms for participatory journalism. According to some Indybay interviewees, the collective holds workshops, for example, on photography, whereas based on the interviews, VAI did not provide training in media work. The interviews with a few VAI reporters, however, revealed that an informal arrangement of advice could emerge between people involved in a collective, in which case a more experienced reporter provided support in the form of offering advice and proofreading the articles of a reporter new to journalistic writing. Thus, collaboration could lead to the development of skills. Unlike OMN, which provides

training courses for the reporters in its own journalism school not far from Seoul in South Korea, the reporters for OMNI depend on editors for advice and for the guidance that is provided for them online by OMNI.

It is important to stress that the three participatory media organisations also approach differently the question of what to do with content that editors or, in the case of VAI, moderators, perceive to be of too poor a quality to be published on the website. Based on moderators' recollections, in the case of VAI, content deemed to be of an unacceptable quality because it was incomprehensible was either removed from the website, or was returned to the reporter with a note that it should be checked for spelling and grammar. In contrast, the editors of Indybay tend to correct poor grammar, and the blurbs in the middle column are edited versions of the originals, as discussed in the previous chapter. Editors of OMNI routinely edit articles and, as part of the process, they check the grammar. They may return an article to a reporter for rewriting. However, as was noted in the previous chapter, when an editor has more than one article on the same topic, the strategy is to reject weaker ones in favour of one that needs less work. Such decisions are entirely at the discretion of an editor, and, therefore, reporters do not have a say in them. In VAI and Indybay, decisions concerning content are discussed on a mailing list for people involved in moderating or, in the case of Indybay, editing.

6.3.1   Skills required in uploading content on the website

As all three media organisations in this study operate online, a reporter must be able to upload content to a website. Based on the interviews, for a majority of the interviewees, regardless of the website, submitting an article is a fairly straightforward process, which is made easier by not having to know a language that is used to write web pages. As an Indybay reporter noted: "You don't have to know anything about even HTML [Hyper Text Markup Language] or anything, how to format anything; it does it all themselves" (Rhodes, personal communication, November 30, 2006). An Indybay editor had observed a shift in who posted on the website (Ogren, personal communication, June 2, 2007):

> To post you don't need almost any skills, people; it used to be that we would mainly get more tech savvy people and now, for some reason, our site is mainly older people, or the people actually doing the coverage for our site tend to be sort of the demographic who used to not do that much on the Internet … people who are in their fifties or sixties even.

It appears that learning how to post content has required more effort from some reporters of the older demographic than from those who have grown up with computers at home and at school. As one Indybay reporter noted (Robertson, personal communication, December 3, 2006):

> I had to be walked through it [posting to Indybay website]. You know, it wasn't real clear to me how to do it, and I could really tell that the people who have set it up are, um, young guys who are real, you know, high tech, you know… So, I wouldn't say it's basic [the skills required in posting to the website], but um, young people, I mean, to college students, no problem. They could do it in a minute.

Moreover, for several interviewed reporters of Indybay and OMNI, posting certain types of content, such as photographs, is a more complicated process than submitting an article. As an OMNI reporter put it (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006): "The only difficulty I've found is, um, um, how to submit pictures. And, I think I will have to read the instructions several times before I'm able to successfully submit pictures."

Based on the interviews, reporters seem to employ various strategies to overcome the challenges. Some seek advice from those more proficient in using computers, be it a family member or a colleague; some learn through trial and error; and some by observing others. An Indybay reporter put forward the last two approaches (Livingston, personal communication, November 25, 2006): "How did I learn? By doing, and also by trying to pay attention to others, and how they do it, and I'm learning every day." Some reporters for Indybay also mentioned with gratitude the prompt email support provided by editors and "techies" when they have experienced problems in uploading content onto the website. It is important that a participatory media organisation is able to offer advice when necessary.

6.3.2   Language skills

A theme in relation to skills that came up in particular in interviews with Finnish reporters is that of language. The activists who launched the VAI website decided that its main language would be Finnish, although people could contribute also in Swedish, which is the second official language in Finland. Consequently, Finnish and Swedish speakers could submit content in their native language, which kept the threshold of

expressing oneself on the website lower than if it had been, for example, in English. As one VAI interviewee, a university student, explained (Vainio, personal communication, September 3, 2006):

> It certainly is much easier to write in Finnish; although in a way I feel that my English language skills are fairly strong, even then writing the final text somewhere where it is scrutinised by many, for many of whom English is their first language, then even so there is quite a barrier there.

The interviewee, when talking about a blog in which he wrote, for example, about open source software, said (Vainio, personal communication, September 3, 2006): "I write there in English, and that in itself raises the barrier to writing there often … and it tends to be left undone." As this interviewee's experience indicates, writing in a foreign language is not effortless even for someone who is university educated and used to writing in English. To stress the point about language skills further, it is worth noting that, according to the statistics, in Finland, in 2006, 82% of the Finns aged between 18 and 64 knew at least some English; however, only 20% reached the highest level of competence in English (Statistics Finland, 2006).

It seems that having the VAI website in Finnish removed one obstacle from the path of Finnish-speaking writers who wanted to contribute. On the other hand, because the website was in Finnish, articles published on other Indymedia websites that were deemed sufficiently important to be circulated also on the VAI website had to be translated into Finnish. A further consequence of the selected language was that people other than Finnish speakers were not able to understand the website content. Hence, although choosing to have the website in Finnish may have encouraged participation among Finnish speakers, it meant other collectives in the Indymedia network or any other non-Finnish speakers, for that matter, were not able to take advantage of the content on the VAI website.

The main language of content on the Indybay website is English and there is also a Spanish-language section. Hence, the website aims to be accessible not only to the English-speaking, but also to the Spanish-speaking population in the San Francisco Bay area, which is logical considering that the population speaking Spanish as their first language is sizeable in California. According to the most recent US Census from the year 2000, nearly six million of the approximately 35 million Californians aged 18 or over speak Spanish at home (US Census Bureau, 2000). The majority of the website content appears, though, to be in English. Thus, most of the Indybay website content is

comprehensible to anyone with access to the Internet and sufficient English language skills.

On the OMNI website, all articles are in English. This means that people with reasonable English language skills can read the OMNI website. However, the content, like most on the Indybay website, remains incomprehensible for the majority of the world's population. Estimates of first or second language users of English vary between eight and eighteen per cent of the world's population although this does not, of course, mean that the same proportion of Internet users are users of English (Graddol, 2006, p. 62). Having English as its language of operation is a challenge for a media organisation that aims to offer coverage from around the world. As English is not the first language for the majority of the reporters to the website, to some extent, OMNI can be considered to be successful.

The support that editors of OMNI provide to non-native English speakers appears vital in achieving and maintaining the international reporter base. The challenges of contributing for reporters when English is not their first language could not be explored in this study, as all of the interviewed USA-based OMNI reporters were native English speakers, except for one native Korean speaker living in the USA. However, as informal discussions with several non-native English speaking reporters at the Citizen Reporters' Forum in Seoul in 2007 indicated, editors' assistance whether, for example, language editing or tips on how to improve writing, is highly appreciated. Based on these discussions, it does not seem too far-fetched to argue that the contribution by editors is likely to be one of the key factors in why reporters not fluent in English choose to contribute to OMNI rather than to some other participatory website that does not offer the same type of support.

In 2007, when the organisation was already experiencing financial difficulties, the senior editor of OMNI noted that the English language editing was a valuable service for which the company could possibly begin charging non-native speakers who required it, especially given that shared copyright would allow them to republish their work in other media (Thacker, personal communication, July 3, 2007). However, despite the increased financial pressure under which OMN has since been operating, to date the international edition has not required financial input from the reporters for editing. This, perhaps, is not surprising, as paying reporters fluent in English while asking reporters requiring English language editing to pay would have put reporters on a rather unequal footing. Moreover, if at least to a certain extent, the motivation of some reporters has to do with being paid for their contribution, revising the payment policy this way could

have a negative impact on the number of OMNI's non-native English-speaking reporters.

To sum up, in addition to appropriate language skills, the basic technical skills required to be able to practise participatory journalism are an ability to create content, whether text or images, by using appropriate equipment and software and the Internet for uploading content to a website. A further important aspect in relation to skills in participatory journalism has to do with a complex set of issues regarding the journalistic practices of reporters and related journalism ethics, something about which each of the three websites has their own guidelines, as was discussed in the previous chapter. Of interest in the section following the discussion on interviewed reporters' level of skills are the principles that reporters employ and the choices they make concerning their reporting.

6.3.3   Reporters' levels of skills

It was possible to distinguish between interviewed reporters' level of skills based on their accounts of their involvement in participatory media in general and in relation to one of the three participatory media organisations in particular. As can be deduced from these descriptions, reporters' skills levels seem to depend by and large on the following factors: how motivated they are, the amount of effort reporters put into learning new skills or improving existing ones, how much and how frequently they create media content, how long they have been involved in making various types of media and whether they have had training in media making in general or in a specific type of journalism, be it writing articles, shooting videos, taking photographs or making radio programmes.

The single most important factor adding to skills would appear to be a passion for media work. As a Santa Cruz-based volunteer radio show host explaining why she has become good at making radio programmes (Cadman, personal communication, June 12, 2007) commented:

> I've never been to college. I've taken a few classes at community college but I don't have a degree. So where did I learn it [making radio programmes]? I just did it and, you know, I think that some people think that I'm talented at it. They'll make comments that I should pursue it as a career, because they think that, you know, I'm talented. And I think really what it is, is that I'm really interested in it and I'm really passionate about it, and I think when you're really interested and you're really passionate about something then you'll get good at it.

The above quotation highlights three important points in relation to skills that a number of interviewees raised. First, a passion for what one does is important. Second, learning by doing can be an effective way of achieving the required skills. A third key point that comes across is that education is not a requisite for being able to become a thriving media maker. On the other hand, for many of the interviewees in this study who either had a university degree or were working towards attaining one, their studies were likely to have provided with them certain skills, such as writing, research skills and analytical skills, that are useful in and, to some extent, transferable to media work.

Lower skills levels typically have to do with not having much time that can be devoted to journalistic activities due to other commitments in life, such as long working hours or having very little free time because of small children and not investing in improving one's skills because of a lack of interest in media work. Moreover, having a learning disability, such as dyslexia, can affect a reporter's skills level.

There were a greater number of highly skilled reporters amongst interviewed Indybay reporters than amongst interviewed VAI reporters because of the different age distribution between these two groups. Hence, as most VAI reporters were fairly young, in their twenties, at the time they were contributing, they had not had as much time to accumulate reporting experience as had the, on average, considerably older Indybay reporters, a few of whom had had decades of experience in making media. The interviewed OMNI reporters seemd fairly skilled which is likely to have to do with the selection process of what is published on the website, as a result of which the least-skilled reporters do not get their contributions published.

In the discussions with reporters concerning skills, the notion of tools was also touched upon. For most interviewees in this research, being able to shift between using or consuming media and creating their own media was not an issue of online access and tools. Although, obviously, the availability of the appropriate tools and having access to the Internet is important, as they create the basic conditions without which such engagement would not be possible, the transformative power of such tools as expressed, for example, by Gillmor (2006, p. xv)[18] does appear highly exaggerated. On the other hand, the minimal emphasis on the importance of Internet access and tools is likely to reflect where the interviewees in this study are based, that is, in some of the richest

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[18] Gillmor (2006, p. xv) has argued: "When people can express themselves, they will. When they can do so with powerful yet inexpensive tools, they take to the new-media realm quickly. When they can reach a potentially global audience, they literally can change the world."

countries in the world. The prominence given to the means of making media could thus be expected to be quite different should the interviewees be from significantly less wealthy countries. However, occasionally, the availability of tools has mattered to reporters in this study. An example of such an instance is an Indybay reporter who could not afford to buy a digital camera and was given a surplus camera by someone he met at a demonstration. In addition, a few VAI reporters recalled with gratitude how their involvement in VAI was facilitated by them being able to use the Internet in, for example, their educational institution, or in the workplace, as at the beginning of the 2000s they did not have an Internet connection at home.

6.4   Knowledge

As Dahlgren (2009, p. 109) points out, there are many aspects to knowledge and its accumulation, from having background knowledge to acquiring new information, disseminating it and discussing it with other people. This section focuses on a very specific dimension to knowledge in relation to reporters' activities, that is, their access to sources of information. The reason for this is that access to information is vital for reporters to be able to create media. On the one hand, reporters may need ways to do background research for their articles; on the other, they may need access to people and places on which they want to provide coverage. Sometimes, background knowledge can be highly valuable, as can be information gathered in the past originally for some other purpose. Different types of reporting may require different types of knowledge. For example, covering a demonstration may require access to sources, but not necessarily extensive background research, whereas in investigative reporting research can play a vital role. The discussion draws on the study of Reich (2008), who has argued that citizen reporters, as he calls reporters who are not working for the mainstream media, by and large have a far more restricted access to news sources than have their mainstream counterparts.

It appears that, for many of the interviewed reporters, the Internet provides a valuable tool, and can be used, for example, for checking that facts, such as dates and figures in an article, are correct. Moreover, reporters seem to access the Internet for both original and mediated sources of information. In the former, for example, reports and statistical data are searched for, whereas the latter typically means browsing the various media online for news. Some reporters rarely use sources other than the ones available online, which corresponds with Reich's (2008, p. 749) finding of reporters' high reliance on the Internet as a news source. As an OMNI reporter (Hahn, personal

communication, August 10, 2007) noted: "I think the majority of the time, if I need a source it will be, um, another news story or, or information on a website." The reporter (Hahn, personal communication, August 10, 2007) also mentioned how he has been approached several times by people marketing products and seeking to gain publicity for them. He (Hahn, personal communication, August 10, 2007) pointed out: "There's a lot of potential to use those people as sources, but I think maybe 99% of the time I steer clear of, you know, actually responding and writing about their website or their products, um, unless it's very interesting."

More often than not, the scenario, however, is that reporters seek to gain access to sources. For Indybay and VAI reporters, access to people whose activities they cover rarely seems to pose a challenge, because they tend to have connections with them, but gaining access to other types of sources can be far more problematic. As one Indybay reporter (Sonnenfeld, personal communication, June 12, 2007) explained:

> Volunteer journalists or Indymedia activists would be a lot more effective if we could, if sources would talk to us … I've called up specific sources trying to get quotes, specifically from the government, and they won't give them because they don't have to. We're not like, we're not the local paper, we're not a radio station, we don't have our press passes. We always get denied from events because we don't have official press passes. So, in their eyes, we're not legitimate to a certain degree. We do have an amazing amount of access to activists who won't talk with some of the corporate press and who won't talk with other people, but they will talk with us.

The interviewee highlights several aspects of being a reporter who does not work for the mainstream media, such as that legitimacy achieved in some circles is not a guarantee of recognition in others, and that not having journalist credentials, such as a press card, can make it difficult to gain access to certain types of events. On the other hand, it was pointed out by another Indybay reporter that many reporters have plenty of access to the type of events they want to cover. Another Indybay reporter suggested that gaining access had to do with confidence. As he (Wolf, personal communication, June 7, 2007) argued: "I think that has a lot more to do with confidence issues, than actually issues around being an independent journalist." A photographer who often takes pictures in demonstrations raised another point in relation to access, as he explained that although there is access to the protest itself, sometimes demonstrators do not want to be photographed, especially if they are involved in illegal action (Maiden, personal communication, December 2, 2006).

In Reich's (2008, p. 750) study, focusing on articles that draw on reporters' personal experiences was seen as a mechanism used by citizen reporters to compensate for their limited access to what he calls "senior sources". A similar finding was made in this study in relation to OMNI. One OMNI reporter thought that not having press credentials held her back from writing news articles, as opposed to articles based on her own experiences and observations. As she (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006) explained: "If I were going to interview someone in West Palm Beach, an official in West Palm Beach on the upcoming election, that person will have to take it on faith. I'd have nothing to show." Another OMNI reporter (Lyon, personal communication, November 2, 2006) believed that gaining access to powerful figures in politics as a reporter for OMNI would not be possible in the USA, because "here in this country, it [OMNI] does not have that sort of credential." It is arguable whether this perception is accurate, and whether it might still hold true, as in general, participatory journalism has become more commonplace. However, two of Reich's (2008, p. 749) findings were that citizen reporters use the types of sources that the mainstream journalists habitually access, including spokespersons and PR, far less, and mainly because they tend not to be granted access, for example, because the news organisation they represent lacks prestige.

It seems justified to argue that a participatory news organisation can play an important role in helping reporters to gain access to information and events. When one reporter wanted to provide coverage from the United Nations headquarters in New York, OMNI helped her to gain regular access. According to an assistant editor of OMNI, the organisation would also occasionally write reporters letters helping them to gain access to a press conference (George, personal communication, December 17, 2007). At the same time as OMNI bans reporters from making OMNI press cards on their own, it has granted a few trusted reporters an OMNI business card. Indybay has produced press cards for its reporters, which some of the interviewees found useful whereas others did not. Although VAI did not provide press cards, one reporter recalls how some reporters, nevertheless, went ahead and printed their own VAI press cards.

The next section discusses the choices reporters make concerning their reporting. The notion of principles that they employ is approached as follows: differentiating between news and opinion, the degree of detachment or attachment regarding what is being reported, and the use of facts and sources. These aspects of media ethics have been selected for discussion partly because they emerge from the interviews with the reporters and partly because they tend to be given attention in traditional journalism

ethics (Harcup, 2009). Thus, what underpins the discussion is some of the key principles that in journalism are collectively knows as "objective reporting", and that are expressed through "separating facts from opinion", "accuracy and realism in reporting", "minimising the influence of the writer's own attitude, opinion or involvement" and "balance and even-handedness in presenting different sides of an issue", as listed by Harcup (2009, p. 83). On the other hand, as Atton (2008b) has pointed out, what tends to be seen as being inherent in alternative media practices is the aim to challenge and to redefine many of these norms. The following discusses how reporters of Indybay, OMNI and VAI negotiate these norms in relation to their reporting.

6.5   Values: News and Opinion

There is a major difference between OMNI and the two Indymedia collectives, VAI and Indybay, as OMNI encourages its reporters to adopt a news style with a distinctive voice, whereas VAI and Indybay do not put forward any similar requirements. Rather, the assumption in the latter is that instead of a neutral, news tone, people do "engaged media stuff", as one Indybay interviewee put it (Henshaw-Plath, personal communication, June 8, 2007). Indybay, though, seeks to present the middle column in a factual news style. Statements by VAI interviewees, such as, "We tell the truth: our truth" (Kivekäs, personal communication, September 5, 2006) and, "Of course one is allowed to be more subjective, one can almost be as subjective as one wishes; that is exciting, interesting and real" (Liesaho, personal communication, January 17, 2007), reflect the website's stance in relation to objectivity and mark a significant departure from this key professional journalistic principle. McNair's (2006, p. 119) view of subjectivity as a central aspect of online amateur journalism supports this finding, as does Atton's (2008b, pp. 327-329) argument of how the practitioners of alternative journalism reject the ideal of objectivity.

Considering OMNI's approach as a media organisation to keeping news separate from opinion by labelling as "opinion" or "analysis" any content that the editors do not consider pure news, it is not surprising that OMNI reporters tend to stress that they differentiate between the news type of content and commentary. Thus, the reporters' attitude to facts and opinion corresponds with that of OMNI, and the approach OMNI employs derives from traditional journalism ethics and the notion of "separating facts from opinion, but treating opinion as relevant" (Harcup, 2009, p. 83). Reflecting on the

articles he has written to OMNI, one interviewee noted (Jacquot, personal communication, November 17, 2006):

> … it's always very difficult, um, I find, especially when it comes down to, um, if you write an opinion piece or a piece in general about world news. Sometimes it's difficult to, to really tell, you know, whether it's considered opinion or news [by an editor]. You know, I mean, I try, even in my opinion pieces, to put a lot of actual substantial information. Um, some people, you know, when you write an opinion piece, it can be very easy to descend into simply, purely your own opinion, but even when I try… when I write an opinion piece I come out with the notion that I still want to inform the viewer. I don't necessarily only just want to present my opinion.

Two important points come across here. First, the distinction between what is considered news and opinion is not clear-cut and, consequently, a reporter cannot always predict how an editor will label a submitted an article. Second, when writing an opinion piece, it can be the aim of the reporter to provide readers with information, not just an opinion.

Although content submitted by Indybay and VAI reporters is not categorised in the same way as in OMNI, it obviously does not reveal anything about an individual reporter's approach to content genres. One reporter of Indybay, who noted that his reporting style differs depending on whether he is writing a news article or an opinion piece, illustrated this point. He described his approach as follows (Rhodes, personal communication, November 30, 2006):

> …I think that anybody who reads my writing, uh, for very long will realise that I have a position. I'm not trying to be, uh, completely unbiased or non-opinionated. But I, I sort of write different kinds of articles. I'll write opinion articles and, and those are clearly and distinctly different than, uh, a news article where I'll have a balance and I'll have more voices in, you know.

The quotation highlights the flexibility that Indybay grants to reporters. Moreover, it shows that reporters can shift between balance and bias depending on the type of article. It also introduced the question of how reporters position themselves in relation to that on which they report, which was touched upon in the typology based on reporters' motivations.

6.5.1 Detachment/attachment

For the majority of Indybay and VAI reporters interviewed, it was typical to find either some level of personal involvement in what they cover, or strong sympathy for the cause of the people or affairs of the communities about whom they report. Some Indybay reporters indicated that they are accountable to those communities about which they provide coverage. Some of these "native reporters", to use Atton's (2002) terminology, were integrated into the communities and, thus, they were reporting their own activities and those of other people in the same group. VAI reporters who covered the activities of the alter-globalisation movement themselves as participants in it are an example of this. One of the interviewed Indybay reporters described as follows his position in relation to people whose lives he has followed closely to document their struggle (Ballis, personal communication, December 1, 2006):

> I view myself as an advocate… If I was objective, these people wouldn't accept me because I look different, you know. I don't look black, I don't look like a Mexican, I don't look like a farm worker; why would these people work with me? I don't look like an Indian; why would they work with me?

Thus, here, unlike in traditional journalism ethics, where, as Harcup (2009) pointed out, the reporting is not to be influenced by the writer's involvement, that involvement is seen as vital to access and advocacy, not as something that is undesirable.

In contrast, a majority of the interviewed OMNI reporters tend to detach themselves from what they are covering. If a reporter for OMNI wants to show support, it is demonstrated by what the reporter chooses to cover rather than the way in which something is reported. It is the freedom to write on themes that are perceived not to be popular in the mainstream media and having in OMNI an outlet for them that was of importance at least to some of the interviewed OMNI reporters. As one reporter argued in relation to the mainstream media about his article that was published by OMNI (Hauben, J., personal communication, November 2, 2006):

> So most journalists who, who would submit my articles would be told "That's not appropriate"… I don't think anybody else would have written about, in their mainstream paper, about the anti military movement within the US military in the, in the 1960s and 70s. That wouldn't have been acceptable within, within mainstream journalism.

The point in this claim is not whether the mainstream media would publish something like the article in question, but rather how the interviewee considered that writing for media like OMNI grants far more flexibility, and, as the reporter concluded in the following quotation, that this can lead to a positive outcome for democracy (Hauben, J., personal communication, November 2, 2006):

> I feel that the citizen journalists can speak of a broader spectrum and the mainstream journalist is confined in a more narrow spectrum and that the mainstream journalists may be very professional and very good at what they do but the, they're ground down by the process and end up really supporting the system and the, and the society's norms rather, or the norms that the society projects for itself rather than, um, opening it up so that it can grow and develop and so that more democracy can come forward.

The above shows a strong desire to see that public participation in media can help democracy to grow by 'opening it up' to multiple voices.

6.5.2 Facts

On the whole, for the interviewed OMNI reporters, getting the facts right was their priority and was one of the few key notions mentioned in discussions of the journalistic principles and ethics that they followed in their work. Thus, OMNI reporters' emphasis resonates with the traditional journalistic notion that news must be backed up with verifiable evidence (Harcup, 2009, p. 90). Some of the interviewed OMNI reporters also noted their appreciation of and gratitude to editors for fact checking. Having an editor who checks their articles was seen as a highly valuable service, because it lessens the possibility of erroneous information slipping into a published article by accident. The point is evident in how a reporter recalled the first story she had submitted to OMNI (Gibbs, personal communication, November 6, 2006): "He [an editor of OMNI] did me a very big favour, because he caught an incorrect fact".

One OMNI reporter described his approach as follows (Hauben, J., personal communication, November 2, 2006): "I think there's real importance to stay true to the facts and to the, to what you know outside of what your, what your opinion is." Another OMNI reporter noted (Lyon, personal communication, November 2, 2006): "I am terrified of getting something wrong… if I am going to use facts, they'd better be right." In these two statements, albeit both stress the importance of getting the facts right, there is a difference of approach to what is included in the facts to be presented in an article. In the first account, the interviewee argued in favour of making an effort to gather

information beyond what supports his own opinion, whereas the second account refers to how the facts the reporter uses must be correct.

One point a few Indybay interviewees raised is that it is at the discretion of a reporter which facts to use. An example of this is given by a reporter involved in a group called the Raging Grannies, regarding the activities of which she frequently provides coverage on the Indybay website. She noted (Robertson, personal communication, December 3, 2007):

> I have learnt to put spin on things. Uh, one of our grannies used to say, "Sure sounds like there were a lot of us there at that demonstration, Ruth", and I say, "Yeah, but if you read it carefully it doesn't say how many of us there were." She says, "Well, you know, only three of us managed to make it up to that Israel conflict thing", and I say, "But you noticed I didn't say how many. I didn't say, '…and three of us made it up there.'"

The reporter then went on to explain how she uses techniques similar to those that she has seen the mainstream media employ (Robertson, personal communication, December 3, 2007):

> … I've seen how the press, you know, when the press covers us they put a spin on things, they make it into a bigger story than it is or they slant it a certain way. So, um, so I have learnt to make it, um, the most attractive thing I can. Like the picture I put at the top of Indybay will get people's attention, maybe it's a bit flashy or saucy or you know, sexy even. It won't be a real ugly woman, uh with a broom cleaning up after Chaney, it will be someone who looks kind of cute, you know … and then as far as ethics go, I am careful not to lie, um, but you know, sometimes, you know, um, there is spin and there is lying. So I will spin it a certain way, that's for sure.

In this case, selecting what to post on the Indybay website seems to be based on principles that some might claim resemble those of the mainstream media. Although this is only one instance, it implies, as Atton (2008a) has suggested, that there may be links between the practices of alternative and mainstream media that have remained under-explored.

6.5.3   The use of sources

Choosing not to include different sides of the story is another way in which some of the interviewed Indybay reporters "put spin" on the content, to borrow the expression of one reporter. This position was expressed by an Indybay reporter, who noted

(Carpenter, personal communication, November 24, 2006): "I do not try to put up both sides, unless both sides are on the left, or three or four are on the left." Hence, some of the reporters, usually those advocating social or political change, focus in their reporting solely on the perspective of those whose cause they support. What is common to most of the reporters who adopt this approach to the use of the sources upon which they base their article is that they do not see why including different, and potentially contrasting sides to a story would be necessary. This stance appears to suggest a departure from the commonly held journalistic principle that providing information in an article that originates in different, contrasting sources is desirable. Deciding to use certain sources for an article and not others does not necessarily indicate that the reporters themselves are active participants in organisations or movements, the activities of which they document.

A further approach to the use of the sources is provided by a videographer, who argued that he is "editorialising through the subject", unlike someone who interviews people for an article, which, according to him, can easily lead to setting up an answer (Wolf, personal communication, June 7, 2007). The interviewee, who explained how he videos events as they unfold, but does not attempt to interview people, commented in relation to the notion of objectivity when covering demonstrations (Wolf, personal communication, June 7, 2007):

> … there is nothing more objective than capturing the event itself, and using that, obviously there's something very subjective about which parts of that event you choose to use [when editing the piece of video footage].

The interviewee argued that it is through editing that a video becomes a subjective piece of media, whereas videoing an event with a video camera in itself is to be seen as objective reporting, at least more so than writing an article based on a reporter's observations and possible interviews with people taking part in an event. Hence, what seems to be implied here is that the act of recording video footage is restricted by the preconceptions of the reporter less than is a written account of the same event; this relates to a widely contested notion that images, whether still or moving, at least to a certain extent, are inherently less susceptible to bias than is text (see, e.g., Newton, 2001; Sekula, 1982).

A labour movement media activist, who regularly posts on Indybay, explained that he aims to provide in his reporting different points of view (Zeltzer, personal communication, December 4, 2006):

You know, I like to see what the bosses or the capitalists or management has to say. Let them speak for themselves then, then people can see what, this is what they say, this is what the other, the workers say, or whatever. It makes a better story and better journalism…

Here, reporting both sides of the story relates to the notion that readers and viewers, if presented with contrasting views, can draw their own conclusions. In this sense, at least at first glance, it appears that what is described above conforms with the commonly held expectation that journalists should strive for balance by offering different and relevant sides in their reporting (Harcup, 2009, p. 83). However, it appears that the reasoning behind allowing opponents to represent themselves is not only that it makes "better journalism", as the interviewee put it, but that it is believed that the side whose views a reporter does not support is not going to be able to advance their cause. This may in part be because, not the only, but perhaps the largest audience for this type of reporting is likely to be the people who have a strong alliance with one of the two sides presented. In this case, the workers are likely to support the workers' view rather than the view of "the capitalists or management", as the interviewee refers to the opponents.

An avid advocate may quote an opponent for reasons other than wanting to offer, for the sake of principle in an article, more than one side. An example is provided by the editor of *Community Alliance*, who posts on the Indybay website, amongst other types of content, on the plight of homeless people in Fresno. In the following quotation, which merits the length it has been accorded, he discusses a response of the representative of the Fresno police department on his article on how the police were destroying homeless peoples' belongings and shelters (Rhodes, personal communication, November 30, 2006):

I wrote a story about the homeless attacks that the City was conducting and I got a call from the, uh, Public Information Officer from the Police Department complaining to me about my story. He'd obviously read it on Indymedia and was asking me why I hadn't gotten their position on things, you know. Why didn't I ask him about his opinion about what had happened? And I said, well, you know, um, I, I do, I do talk to the police. In fact, I quoted one of the police officers who'd arrived on the scene. He [the police officer] said, he said the luckiest homeless people were in Fresno. I was, like, "What?" You know he was just starting to bulldoze their shelters. And I… "What do you mean?" And he goes, "They get free maid service every two weeks; we come and clean up their entire place for them." So I quote them, you know, I quote you people. It might not be the quotes you want me to quote … but I, I quote them, you know.

Giving in an article a voice not only to the voiceless, in the above case the homeless, but also to a representative of the other side of the story, here the police, can be considered an approach to the use of sources because it is perceived to advance the cause of the former. In the above case, by quoting a police officer, the reporter wanted to give the reader an insight into the way of thinking of someone who was involved in destroying the homeless peoples' shelters. The reporter concluded the story by explaining the approach as follows (Rhodes, personal communication, November 30, 2006):

> … I do have a preference to give a voice to the voiceless and to, um, um, give a perspective that's not, um, you know that people don't get in corporate media. I mean my feeling is that people get that perspective all the time.

These two quotations speak about the matter that was discussed earlier, that is, what Atton (2008b) calls the "explicitly partisan character" (p. 329) of the alternative media. As he (Atton, 2008b) explains: "In the language of ethics, they exhibit clear biases, yet they proclaim their selectivity and their bias, and generally have little interest in 'balanced reporting'" (p. 329).

6.6   Reporters' Forms of Civic Engagement Other Than Creating Media

According to Bennett (2008, p. 14), we are seeing a shift from what he calls dutiful citizens to actualising citizens from the younger generations, whereas Dalton (2008) has argued that we are seeing an emergence of engaged citizenship (see also Mäkinen, 2006). In Bennett's model, a dutiful citizen is one to whom political participation is a citizen's obligation and is performed first and foremost via the act of voting. If dutiful citizens communicate their interests through membership of political parties and civil society organisations, for actualising citizens, voting is less important than expressing political engagement through acts of personal preference, be it involvement in friendship-based networks or loose networks of communities of interest, both of which can be sustained online (Bennett, 2008, p. 14). A dutiful citizen is the subject of an information flow that is top down, from government via the mass media to citizens (Bennett, 2008, p. 14). In contrast, an actualising citizen, critical of traditional politics and the mainstream media, favours engaging in various (social) media (Bennett, 2008, p. 14).

Voting tends to be seen not only as something that is fundamental to the functioning of democracy, but also as the minimum level of citizens' political engagement. It was, therefore, perceived to be important to discuss with the interviewed reporters whether they voted. Somewhat surprisingly, virtually all of the interviewed reporters in this study indicated that they voted; this was regardless of factors such as age, gender, political orientation and where they lived. The only exceptions to this uniformity were one OMNI reporter who, as a citizen of another country, was not entitled to vote in the USA, his country of residence; an Indybay reporter who explained she was selective in her voting and voted when she felt it could make a difference, which, according to her, meant mainly local elections; and one OMNI reporter who said he tended to vote for his wife due to the lack of, in his view, deserving candidates. Although interviewees may be doubtful about how effective voting is as a way of participating in democracy, it seemed to be perceived as something that one could do in addition to other forms of political engagement. Hence, in relation to Bennett's model, when considering the interviewed reporters in this study, the sceptical attitude to voting did not affect actual voting behaviour. The reason for this is likely to have to do with the following view, as expressed by Dalton (2008): "Many engaged citizens will still vote because of the importance of elections to the democratic process" (p. 92).

Reporters contributing to VAI indicated most often - nearly all of them - that they were members of at least one, and often more of the various civil society organisations, whereas for Indybay and OMNI reporters, based on their accounts, membership was less common. The majority of the reporters of all three cases said they did volunteer work other than their involvement in one of the organisations in this study at least occasionally. What is notable about some VAI reporters' attitudes towards membership is how the form of paying a membership fee without other involvement in an organisation was hardly seen as making a contribution; rather it tended to be perceived as the minimal level of support one can show to an organisation such as Greenpeace, Amnesty International, or Friends of the Earth, to name some of the organisations to which VAI reporters indicated they belonged. Hence, being a member was seen to materialise truly only through being active in the organisation in some other way. The multiplicity of some VAI and Indybay reporters' affiliation with various civil society organisations and the shifting between them does seem to support Bennett's notion of an actualising citizen. On the other hand, in particular some older Indybay reporters' connection to a specific movement or group, and the novel ways in which they engage with the media not least as producers of content, seems to indicate that the shift from a

dutiful citizen to an actualising/engaged citizen can be gradual and does not necessarily concern only the younger generations.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, four dimensions of Dahlgren's civic culture framework were considered: practices, including the notion of skills; identities; knowledge; and values. Therefore, there was a discussion of what kind of content reporters post on the Indybay, OMNI or VAI websites and their other journalism-related activities, what they identify both as reporters and as users of various media, what skills they need in their journalism activities, their access to sources of information required in reporting, and, finally, how reporters in this study negotiate ethical dimensions to journalism practices. The last part of the chapter brought the discussion to the notion of civic engagement by exploring whether reporters vote and volunteer.

The chapter began by providing an overview of reporters' practices, first, in relation to the participatory media organisations in this study, and second, by considering their other journalism, or related activities. Four key points were discovered based on the interviews with reporters. First, most of them create original content, be it photographs, video, radio or other audio material or text. Second, many appear to have a favourite content type. What reporters can post on the website depends on what formats the media organisation in question supports. In this respect, of the three cases, Indybay is the most accommodating. The third point is that the topics reporters cover vary greatly, and the fourth is that many of the reporters of all three websites are also involved in some other journalism or related activities, from providing content to other media to more individual means of communication or the distribution of information, such as having their own website or a blog, or circulating a newsletter. Noteworthy with relation to Indybay was that several interviewees were actively involved in other media organisations. Another interesting observation was that so many former VAI reporters have not abandoned journalistic activities, although some have shifted to blogging, which, in Finland as in much of the western world, has become a popular form of self-expression.

The reporter typology was intended to demonstrate that, although reporters' motivations vary, as do their engagement with media as users, in relation to the former, it is possible to distinguish between four reporter identities that are based on the reasons reporters are involved in producing media. The two key levels of motivation were

advocacy and personal gratification. For reporters in the former group, motivation has to do with promoting change, whereas for people in the latter group, the motivating factors relate to enjoyment of the process of making media. The difference between the sub categories of advocates, which were activists and citizens, became evident when considering their personal involvement in what they provide coverage on, and whether they tend to consider themselves revolutionaries or reformists. The difference between the sub categories of media makers, which were writers and aspiring professionals, were that, for writers, reporting is their leisure pursuit, about which they may be passionate, whereas for aspiring professionals, enhancing their skills is the main motivating factor.

Two aspects of reporters' media usage trends are significant. The first one is that, on the whole, reporters across the three cases seemed to use both alternative and mainstream media, although in the media diet of the reporters of Indybay and VAI, alternative media played a greater role. The second finding in relation to some reporters' identities as media users that was interesting was the aim to reduce media usage drastically, and the realisation that one was not "missing out on much", in the words of an Indybay reporter. In contrast, there were also reporters whose online media usage patterns appeared to correspond with Bruns' (2005) notion of "produsers". However, on the whole, reporters' media usage seemed quite varied and rarely appeared to take place solely online.

The discussion on skills in this chapter centred on the technical skills required to be able to upload content, and on language skills. It was helpful to begin with a general overview of what the notion of skills suggests in relation to participatory media more generally and in relation to the three organisations in particular, such as what training they provide and what their approach is to handling content perceived to be of poor quality. As the discussion revealed, there were differences between the organisations. For example, Indybay organises media training workshops, whereas VAI did not. On the other hand, reporters of OMNI, because of its wide geographic spread, rely on advice provided online. In relation to specific skills, it was highlighted how a lack of language skills is still a limiting factor on the Internet and how technical skills that may seem simple for some can be less so for others. The final part on skills not only analysed reporters' skills levels, but also what might affect them. The key findings were that a passion for journalism, being able to spend time on journalistic activities, and honing one's skills are more important factors in becoming 'good' than is having a formal education.

In the context of the civic cultures dimension of knowledge, there was a discussion of what sources reporters use with an emphasis on reporters' access to what Reich (2008) calls human sources. Whilst a lack of credibility due to not having journalist credentials was seen by some reporters to hinder their journalistic efforts, others highlighted that limited access to some sources in comparison to that given to journalists working for the mainstream media was not a problem for them because they had plenty of access to sources vital to that on which they were interested in providing coverage.

Values were taken in this study to refer to how reporters negotiate certain aspects of their journalistic practices; these were whether they aim to distinguish between news and opinion, how they perceive themselves in relation to what they report on, what their view is on presenting facts and, finally, what their approach is to using sources. Given the overall stance of OMNI as a news organisation, it is not surprising that, on the whole, OMNI reporters lean more towards a traditional approach in those questions having to do with media ethics than do reporters of Indybay and VAI. What is surprising, though, is how well they appear to have internalised the values held in high regard in the traditional media. For example, OMNI interviewees had a tendency to stress how important it is that facts are correct and that they do not mix their own opinions with news. For many Indybay and VAI interviewees, the approach is different. There is a tendency not to attempt to maintain a distance from the subjects of the reporting, or to attempt to present various viewpoints unless it serves the purpose of advocacy. On the other hand, there is no reason to assume that those facts that are presented in reporting would not be correct. What was interesting in relation to facts was how one Indybay reporter, drawing on the perceived practices of the mainstream media, had learnt to put spin on her reporting. To sum up, there is a noticeable difference of approach between the reporters of OMNI and those of the two Indymedia collectives.

As has been noted in other chapters, this thesis rests on the premise that engagement with participatory media is one of the fairly recent modes in some people's range of civic engagement. The last part of the chapter returned to the notion of civic engagement, and analysed whether, when considering reporters in this study, it was possible to see any indication of support for the theory of the emergence of an actualising/ engaged citizen. The evidence was to some extent mixed. On the one hand, just by being involved in participatory media as reporters, and thus engaging with media in more ways than as a dutiful citizen in Bennett's (2008) formulation, reporters

correspond to one of the characteristic of an actualising citizen. On the other hand, as the vast majority of reporters indicated they vote in elections, and as some reporters seem to be active mainly in one civic organisation, it would appear that the shift from a dutiful citizen to an actualising citizen is gradual, but unlike Bennett (2008) suggests in his model, does not concern the younger demographics only.

7 Conclusions

The aim in this thesis has been to explore the factors that enhance or impede participatory journalism practices as civic engagement embedded in a media organisation that is located in a wider socio-cultural environment. What is known as participatory media and citizen journalism, and in particular blogging and the ways in which the mainstream media attempt to engage their audiences to produce so-called user-generated content have attracted a surge of academic interest in recent years. Much of the research is either generic or focuses closely on one aspect of participatory journalism, such as the reporters' perspective (Sutton, 2006; Ugille & Raeymaeckers, 2008) and the content they produce (Papacharissi, 2007), whereas some research is event-, issue-, group-, or location-specific (Huesca, 2008; Salter, 2009; Vis, 2009) consequently, such studies are rarely comparative. Therefore, a need was identified for comparative research, transcultural in scope, which aimed to understand the phenomenon from the subjective viewpoints of the people involved in participatory media either as reporters or as facilitators of participatory journalism.

As, in part, the focus was on the conditions under which participatory journalism could be facilitated, with this respect, the importance of a media organisation that enabled communicative practices to take place became evident. It was clear from early on in the research project that despite Indybay, OMNI and VAI all being information and news websites, it was necessary to look beyond the notion of the Internet as a communicative space, if one was to begin to understand how the context within which participatory journalism practices are embedded may shape them. The main question this research project aimed to answer was derived from this observation, and therefore was: How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations?

As the question suggests, the analytic frame of civic cultures provided a means for unpacking the dimensions that were likely to shape reporters' involvement in participatory journalism. Thus, the discussion in the three empirical chapters, that is, Chapter 4 to Chapter 6, addressed all six elements of Dahlgren's (2009) most recent formulation of civic cultures, although the frame was adjusted from the original to fit a participatory journalism type of civic engagement. For example, values were taken to refer to the ethical dimensions of reporters' journalistic practices, and knowledge was explored in relation to reporters' access to information and sources. Skills, as a segment of practices, came to occupy a prominent place in the analysis. The sub research

questions were designed to allow these different but interlinked aspects of civic cultures to be addressed. Moreover, they were also intended to allow a focus on a comparative analysis between three participatory media organisations operating in different socio-cultural, and media environments. A holistic approach was adopted to participatory media combining micro (reporters) and meso (organisations) levels of analysis, although even the latter was constructed largely by drawing on the interviews with people who were involved in organisations, but also on the analysis of various documents, such as those available to reporters on the Indybay, OMNI and VAI websites.

This final chapter begins by presenting the key empirical findings in this research by focusing on each of the six dimensions of civic cultures in turn, that is, spaces; trust; practices, including skills; identities; knowledge; and values. The section that follows considers the empirical findings in relation to the key theories drawn on in this thesis starting with the discussion of civic engagement and the civic cultures analytic frame, the organisational theory of voluntary associations, alternative media and the rhizomatic model in particular, and Mouffe's (2000a) political theory of agonistic pluralism. Then, a reflexive account of the research design is provided, with qualitative interviewing as the key method employed, as well as the sample and research ethics. The final section reflects on the wider implications of the findings and discusses the reporters' perceptions of why participatory journalism is important. This concluding part of the chapter also considers avenues for further research on participatory media.

7.1 Dimensions of the Civic Cultures Framework: Key Empirical Findings

7.1.1 Spaces

In this thesis, it was decided to research two active (Indybay and OMNI) and one defunct participatory media organisation (VAI) based in the different contexts of Finland, South Korea and the USA, and representing a voluntary model (Indybay and VAI) and a commercial, but hybrid model (OMNI) for participatory media. When considering the organisational basis of Indybay and VAI in Chapter 4, it became apparent that despite seeming similarities between Indybay and VAI as part of the same network, several differences were to be found in a closer inspection of how they operate.

The main findings regarding comparisons of the organisational similarities and differences between the two voluntary associations indicate the following. First, even for voluntary associations that aim to avoid hierarchy and are anti-authoritarian, some structure is necessary for their continued existence, such as the delegation of tasks. Second, when considering the publishing process, at least some degree of moderation, perhaps also editing, is necessary if the organisation is to survive the challenges having to do with open publishing. Third, failing to negotiate conflicting interests in an organisation can lead to two opposite outcomes, either closure, as was the case with VAI, or the birth of a new organisation, as was the case with Indybay. Fourth, a voluntary association needs to have a clear vision that is acknowledged and accepted by the volunteers involved. It seems justifiable to argue that for Indybay, the split from another collective strengthened a vision of an umbrella website for a broad range of leftist communities. In VAI, the aims were too varied, but ultimately the lack of clarity was over whether VAI was a medium of the alter-globalisation movement or media activism.

The fifth point taps into what can become a great weakness for participatory media as voluntary associations. That is, an organisation must not only have an adequate number of volunteers, but also their skills need to correspond with the tasks on offer. How many volunteers is sufficient depends greatly on factors such as the range of functions an organisation maintains, how much time and effort individual volunteers are investing in the organisation and how successful an organisation is in using effectively the resources at its disposal. In relation to the first and the last point, the comparison between Indybay and VAI showed significant differences. For example, VAI, unlike Indybay, rejected the open source Indymedia software, did not provide training for reporters, nor have website editors.

When considering a problem that reportedly is typical for the alternative media, that is, difficulties in finding a sustainable funding model (Atton, 2002; Hackett & Carroll, 2006) Indybay and VAI appear to be exceptions to the rule. On the one hand, this is because of both the low entry cost and the cost of running a media operation on the Internet whilst not maintaining an office, and on the other, because both organisations took an approach where neither the people volunteering in a collective nor the reporters were paid for their contributions. To summarise, drawing on research on voluntary associations (e.g., Handy, 1985, 1988; Harris, 1998), comparing the cases of Indybay and VAI provided interesting new insights concerning what affects the sustainability of participatory media as a voluntary model.

In comparison to a voluntary model, which requires minimal monetary resources if costs are kept low, but the key weakness of which is its reliance on volunteers, the commercial hybrid model represented in this study by OMNI is more susceptible to challenges related to the financial sustainability of participatory media. In comparison with Indybay and VAI, autonomous collectives in an international network, OMNI forms part of a South Korean media company OMN and is dependent on it for staff and the monetary resources that, when the company was profitable, allowed payments to be made to reporters. What were, by western standards, modest payments before OMNI ceased the cyber cash system to cut back on expenses, and moved to having a few volunteer editors, had unexpected consequences, as discussed in Chapter 5. It was discovered that, for some reporters from poor countries, their understandable aim to earn money from OMNI would sometimes lead them to ignore OMNI's requirement of original content rather than something rehashed from other media.

OMNI would not exist without OMN, yet the international edition suffers from a lack both of autonomy and of a clear vision beyond OMN's aim to showcase the concept of OMN worldwide. However, OMNI falls short even of its showcase function, because it does not operate in the same ways as OMN: it has no staff reporters, and it cannot provide its reporters with training offline, as does OMN in its journalism school near Seoul. These differences have to do with OMNI's broad geographic reach in comparison to the Korean edition and thus point to limitations of the type of participatory media online that is international in scope. From OMNI's broad reach challenges emerge many of which have to do with operating in the English language, which is not the native language for the majority of reporters.

The key findings concerning organisational structures as a space in relation to the publishing process on the three websites are interesting, as all three media organisations portray a different level of control over what is published on the website, and how they exercise that control. Thus, the ways in which journalistic practices can be enacted on the websites of Indybay, OMNI and VAI are structurally confined. VAI represents a minimally restricted form of open publishing, OMNI a maximally controlled publishing process, and Indybay is located in between. The analysis of the three organisations strongly indicates that regardless of where the website operates, when people can post content online anonymously and without registering, the probability of spamming and flaming increases, as has been indicated in research on computer-mediated communication (Connery, 1997; Kiesler et al., 1984; Wilhelm, 1998). This, in turn, leads to a need to moderate content. Thus, at the most minimal level of control, an

organisation restricts typically post publication the content reporters can post on the website. All three participatory media organisations in this research were moderating their website, but only VAI did not extend its control mechanisms beyond that. In VAI's case, even moderating required a major effort, as the website became a space for confrontations – a development that appears to have to do, for example, with the anti-activist atmosphere in Finland.

Editing allows an organisation to exercise power over not only what type of content is published on the website, but also where and how it is presented. Thus, it is a tool that can serve different purposes, such as promoting certain content over other (Indybay and OMNI), ensuring that the facts are correct (OMNI and Indybay to a lesser extent), keeping parts of the website neutral in tone (Indybay and OMNI), aiming to make sure content meets certain quality criteria (OMNI and Indybay to a lesser extent) and controlling unwanted opinions (Indybay). The listing reveals two to an extent surprising points.

First, although of these two websites OMNI, based on what is known of it from previous research and even more so OMN, would seem to resemble the mainstream media far more than does Indybay, the evidence in this study suggests that both organisations edit the websites for many similar purposes. Second, of these two organisations, Indybay poses restrictions on whose content is welcome on the website based on reporters' political leaning. Thus, if considering the level of the freedom of speech, the hybrid, and yet commercial model of OMNI is more accommodating, but obviously only if those posting on the website accept that their views may be positioned next to those of someone who can portray a very different opinion.

As long as people adhere to the editorial policy, all three media organisations invite everyone to post on the website. However, only in Indybay and VAI are people invited also to become involved in the work of the media organisation. Thus, OMNI despite recently offering a few readers an opportunity to become volunteer editors[19] falls short of an ideal of maximal participation, if different levels of participation in Carpentier's model (2007, pp. 113-115) are considered. Moreover, requiring people who want to have their work published on the main sections of the website to register and write under their own name sets it apart from the two Indymedia collectives and suggests a different understanding of how the credibility of a website may be achieved.

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[19] Since the introduction of volunteer editors, and after the analysis phase in this study had finished, OMNI appears to no longer have any staff editors, which is likely to indicate that OMN continues to struggle financially, and/or it is no-longer prepared to invest in OMNI.

In many ways, OMNI's model of publishing, which is designed to maximise the credibility of the website, replicates the mainstream media's practices by promoting a news style, compensating reporters (until 2009) and separating facts from opinion. Moreover, despite its aim to democratise media production by inviting a plurality of voices to come forward in the media, the actual publishing process of OMNI promotes hierarchy not only between editors and reporters, but also between reporters. Evidence to support this claim is, for example, how reporters have no say in the editing process, in whom the editors promote to the featured reporters category, or in who is invited to the Citizen Reporters' Forum.

To conclude, it is helpful to return to the key research question in this study, that is: How do reporters contribute to civic cultures in different participatory media organisations? Media organisations have a potential to facilitate reporters' activities, for example, by helping them to gain access to sources and by providing training. Moreover, reporters' involvement is shaped by the values and the type of journalism organisations promote, and the ways in which they build and maintain trust between reporters and an organisation typically through the moderators/editors, as will be discussed in the next section.

The findings indicate that the emergence of participatory organisations and to an extent how they operate depends on a context. For example, of the three cases in this study, VAI was not born as part of a larger struggle to democratise the media, unlike Indybay and OMN, as in the Finnish context, the idea of media activism at the time VAI emerged was relatively new. OMN's emergence, on the other hand, cannot be understood without reference to South Korea's democratisation phase and related media reform movement. Moreover, when considering Indybay's aim to keep the website open to a broad, but nevertheless leftist range of views, not only the polarised political climate in the USA, but also the consequences of the free market of media model in the country must be taken into account.

7.1.2   Trust

The notion of trust was approached in the thesis by considering the relationship between moderators/editors and other key groups in the organisation, such as the staff and members of a collective, readers of the website and the reporters. In these relationships, moderators/editors are, by and large, the trustees. As indicated by the discussion of some of the challenges the three participatory media organisations have encountered in

relation to trust, many of them have to do with moderators/editors' relationships with reporters. Trust between these two groups is typically what Putnam (2000) calls thin trust, as they tend not to know each other well in person.

In VAI, some of the problems in maintaining trust between moderators and reporters had to with the way the organisation changed the moderating process whereby moderators came to be seen by some contributors as censors. An example of what happened in one of the regional sections of Indybay, on the other hand, demonstrates the dilemma that many Indymedia collectives have, as has been pointed out in some of the research on the network (e.g., Beckerman, 2003; Langlois, 2005). The issue is whether open publishing should equal absolute freedom of speech. What makes the editing system susceptible to criticism from people representing both ends of the opinion spectrum is that in the daily running of the website, the interpretation of the answer to this crucial question depends on the editors and their subjective interpretation of the principles posted on each Indymedia website concerning open publishing. In the case of OMNI, the key finding in relation to trust was how maintaining a relationship based on trust between editors and reporters across cultures online requires from the editors an awareness of the cultural differences. As the findings in Chapter 5 indicate, the thin trust between reporters and moderators/editors not only is of vital importance for the success of an organisation that relies on reporters posting content on the website, but also can get broken if not carefully preserved.

7.1.3 Practices

As could be expected, journalistic practices are one of the ways in which many of the reporters interviewed in this study are politically active. For example, as was discussed briefly in Chapter 6, most of them vote, and many volunteer albeit some of them infrequently. In the discussion on reporters' journalistic practices, the notion of skills was central. The key findings with regards to technical skills when posting content online were that although there appears to be a generational gap, with some guidance and most importantly a determination to learn, people overcome any problems they may have in using the Internet to post content online. The analysis of the language skills required from reporters indicated that expectations when considering the world's population that people are able to read, let alone write in English, are obviously unrealistic and do limit organisations like OMNI that aim to have a worldwide reporter base.

Language, thus, is still a dividing factor on the Internet. When a participatory media organisation chooses a language, it means that while access is opened for some, it is closed for others. This should guard us against the notion of participatory journalism online lending itself easily to a transcultural practice that is available for anyone from any part of the world with access to the Internet. Such attempts, as the case of OMNI indicates, require that appropriate support is available to those whose language skills are not sufficient for journalistic writing. The decisions made on this meso level concerning the training of reporters and what the procedure is if the posted content does not meet the quality requirements imposed by a media organisation are important as, because of them, reporters who are not confident about their skills may either be encouraged to engage with participatory media or hold back.

What specific skills are required depends also on what types of format the media organisation supports. One of the reasons Indybay has been successful is likely to be that it facilitates many types of contributions, from text to audio, photographs and video, allowing reporters to focus on those content formats where their strengths lie or to mix different formats and experiment with them should they wish to do so. One of the findings was that many reporters of Indybay, OMNI and VAI have a preferred format, and many were also involved in more than one journalism or related practice, such as having a blog or a website, publishing a newsletter and writing articles to the alternative or the mainstream media. Some reporters of Indybay would be regularly involved in another media, such as a newspaper or the radio, and would be publishing on Indybay either the same content as elsewhere or the type of content that benefits from the immediacy of online publishing. This finding, together with how Indybay reporters are often involved in various social movement activities, highlights the embeddedness of Indybay's type of participatory media in a broader, networked civil society.

What type of journalism reporters favour is related to their aims and motivations to produce content and how they position themselves in relation to the topics and events on which they provide coverage. Moreover, journalistic norms are constitutive of the reporters' practices. Thus, reporters tend to lean heavily either towards the advocacy journalism where reporters are usually at least to some extent involved in what they provide coverage on, or draw on the traditional liberal journalistic values of neutrality, objectivity and the separation of facts from opinions.

Most reporters in this study seemed to have a fairly broad media diet, though as expected, Indybay and VAI reporters more often than OMNI reporters discussed using

various alternative media. The key findings in relation to reporters' identities as media users were the strong criticism of (commercial) television that came across more than the criticism of other mainstream media. Another interesting finding was the divide between what Bruns (2005) has termed "produsers" and those whose media intake appeared rather minimal. Thus, some reporters spend a lot of time online engaging with various media both as users and producers, whilst some reporters limit their media usage because they do not see that it is a necessity to constantly engage with the news.

7.1.4 Identities

The issue of reporters' identities was approached by proposing a reporter typology, which used as a starting point the *main motivation* to post content on a website. Two main categories emerged from the analysis of interview data, namely, an "advocate" and a "media maker". It can be argued that broadly speaking, for reporters, their identity as a reporter has to do either with an aim to promote social, cultural or political change or the satisfaction expressing oneself in the media gives them on a personal level. In both groups, there were two subgroups. In the advocate group, these were labelled "activist" and "citizen" and in the media maker group, "writer" and "aspiring professional".

Unsurprisingly, activists tend to be personally involved in what they cover and their involvement is revolutionary rather than reformist, which is the aim of "citizen" reporters who also typically are more detached from what they provide coverage on. For activist reporters, journalistic activities are often one mode of civic engagement amongst many, although on the other hand, their role in a movement or a group can be that of a reporter for reasons such as that they are interested in media production, developing their skills, and ensuring that there is coverage of the group's activities available both at present and in the future. Reporters in the "citizen" category are typically motivated to provide coverage, such as investigative reporting, that is perceived to support engaged citizenship, in a similar vein to Schudson's (1999) "trustee model" (p. 120), and echo also the ideals of the public journalism movement concerning the role of journalism facilitating people's participation in the democratic processes (Haas, 2007). For reporters in the "writer" category, journalistic practices are a hobby about which reporters may feel passionate, whereas for aspiring professionals, involvement has mostly to do with learning either new skills or developing existing ones with an aim of benefiting financially from those skills in the future.

7.1.5   Knowledge

In this thesis, knowledge was taken to refer to reporters' access to the various sources of information that they need to be able to create media content. One of the findings was that reporters tend to use the Internet frequently to access both news and websites for information and for checking facts. Although for some reporters, the Internet appears to be their main source of information, as Reich (2008) has suggested in his study on citizen reporters, many seek direct access to human sources. For example, Indybay and VAI reporters often attend various events, such as demonstrations, to provide coverage that favours the view of those attending the event. Although these reporters may enjoy better access to certain sources, such as activists, than do journalists working for the mainstream media, they may have trouble accessing what Reich (2008) calls "senior sources", such as, for example, government officials. On the other hand, not all reporters found this a problem because these were not the type of sources they were seeking to use anyhow. To summarise, amongst Indybay reporters in particular, there were mixed reactions concerning whether the perceived limited access to certain types of sources was a hindrance.

The lack of journalist credentials may hold a reporter back from writing news articles. In discussions with reporters who had a press card, there were different responses concerning their usefulness. Some pointed out that they facilitate access, some said they did not need them and rarely used them, whereas one reporter felt that gaining access to sources has to do first and foremost with the confidence of the reporter. Thus, there is mixed evidence on whether the authority of a reporter is a matter of having press credentials. Interestingly, although OMNI, in the reporter's agreement, specifically forbids reporters from producing cards claiming that they are citizen reporters of OMN, on the other hand, it provides them to some of its trusted reporters. For those who want help in gaining access to sources, a participatory media organisation can play an important role in facilitating such access.

7.1.6   Values

In this thesis, the discussion on values centred on how reporters negotiate their practices in relation to some of the key ethical dimensions of journalism ethics. Thus, there was a discussion of whether reporters attempt to differentiate between news and opinion, whether they aim to remain detached from what they provide coverage on, and what

their approach is to the use of facts and sources. It was discovered that there is a correlation between OMNI's editorial policies and how OMNI reporters see ethics in relation to their practices. However, OMNI reporters appear not only to aim to respond to the expectations, but also tend not to question them. On the other hand, in opinion pieces, which OMNI keeps separate from news articles on the website, reporters can, should they wish to do so, push the boundaries of the guidelines that OMNI has for news items concerning, for example, facts and accuracy. Moreover, some OMNI reporters considered that media ethics was not a major issue, but that the freedom to get articles published on OMNI that would not be of interest to the mainstream media was a way to challenge what they perceived as the tendency of the mainstream media to support the status quo.

The way in which Indybay and VAI as media organisations position themselves in relation to traditional journalistic norms of objectivity, balanced reporting, and separating facts from opinions, which, drawing on Harcup (2009), were identified as ideals in journalism in general, differs from the position adopted by OMNI. The Indymedia collectives' stance of putting the emphasis on truth-telling and subjectivity, and rejecting objectivity, about which last point VAI was clear on its website, correspond with what tends to be seen as the characteristics of alternative media, as Atton (2008b), for example, has argued. Interestingly, though, Indybay does aim to provide a neutral tone in the articles published in the centre column. The main findings in relation to reporters' take on these alternative principles were that Indybay and VAI reporters tend to be selective in their approach to providing different viewpoints in their reporting and they may be involved on some level in what they report on, which usually means taking sides, and giving a voice to the voiceless, as it were.

7.2   Contribution of Empirical Findings to Theory

7.2.1   Civic engagement and civic cultures

It is helpful to return here to Dahlgren's notion of civic cultures as a "dynamic circuit", and thus, the idea that each of the six dimensions, that is, spaces; practices, including skills; trust; values; identities; and knowledge are interconnected (Dahlgren, 2009, p. 102). When considering participatory media, the most obvious links between the dimensions, with the focus on participatory media organsations as *spaces*, can be illustrated as follows.

Participatory media organisations as *spaces* embedded in their socio-cultural environment facilitate reporters' *practices*. Thus, organisations such as Indybay, OMNI and VAI not only provide a communicative space for reporters' practices, but the practices are also confined by the structure of organisations, their operational practices and values. Reporters, in their *practices* draw on the skills they have. As the evidence in this research indicates, many of the skills can be learnt by doing, and a passion for media work is the key factor in encouraging reporters to enhance their skills. However, participatory media organisation can play a role in helping reporters to improve their skills. Reporters' *identities* and therefore their ability to see themselves involved in journalistic activities relate to their motivations and aims, but are expressed through their *practices*. There is a connection between *identities* and participatory media organisations, as the organisations can reinforce the reporters' motivation to contribute.

Regarding the reporters' engagement with participatory media, it was argued that an important role is played by *trust*, in particular trust between reporters and editors/moderators. As was noted earlier, the ethical dimensions to reporters' journalistic practices as *values* appear to be linked firmly to those of the participatory media organisations. Thus, Indybay and VAI reporters are more likely to practise advocacy journalism, whereas OMNI reporters are drawn to traditional journalistic values. This relationship, of course, works two ways, as reporters choose to contribute to a certain type of organisation because they perceive it to represent the kind of values with which they feel comfortable. *Knowledge*, which in this research was taken to mean reporters' access to and use of sources that they need in their reporting, again, can be facilitated by media organisations and is likely to affect people's motivation, thus implying that there is a link here to the *spaces* and the *identities* dimensions. In summary: Participatory media organisations as *spaces* are related to the other five dimensions in the civic cultures framework.

Based on this research, one suggestion and some criticisms emerge regarding the civic cultures analytic frame. In relation to how the circuit could be improved, skills would work better either as a separate dimension or possibly coupled with knowledge. In the current formulation, it is embedded somewhat uncomfortably in the practices dimension. Thus, whilst skills are clearly closely associated with practices, as explained above, it would work better as a dimension if the two were treated separately. It must be acknowledged, though, that skills may not have as much bearing in many other, different types of civic engagement as it has in relation to participatory journalism. This brings the discussion to two deficiencies in the civic cultures frame, which are, to what

extent it can facilitate exploring all different types of civic engagement as surely not all of them can be expected to consist of the exact same dimensions, and not all dimensions can be expected to fit neatly with how they have been defined by Dahlgren (2009). For example, in this study, the liberty was taken to "interpret" the dimensions and to adjust the circuit accordingly. The following is a minor point, but it may also be that a circuit is not the most appropriate way of describing the relationships between dimensions. That is because it can be that not all dimensions are connected to one another, or at least the link may not always be obvious.

Although Dahlgren (2009) implies that sometimes a dimension may increase in importance, on the whole, the circuit appears to assume an equal weight for all dimensions. This is a point put forward also by Couldry (2006b, pp. 325-326) in his critique of Dahlgren's civic cultures framework. The findings in this research indicate quite clearly that some dimensions are likely to bear more weight than others – for example, in this study, the dimension of spaces, which is why media organisations required a significant amount of attention. In some other type of civic engagement, the emphasis may of course shift to another dimension or perhaps to a set of dimensions.

7.2.2   Voluntary associations

The entire voluntary sector, as researchers such as Harris (1998) and Smith (2000) have argued, should not be treated as homogeneous - it was a tendency in much of the early research to attempt to present the findings on large voluntary organisations as though they were universally applicable. However, since research on the voluntary sector has become more refined, some of it focusing on small voluntary associations, it has become helpful in framing research by highlighting the issues that tend to be symptomatic for each specific type of voluntary organisation. Thus, as Rochester (1999) has suggested, within the field of voluntary associations, different types of models can be found.

The organisational model of Indybay and VAI corresponds with that of the member/activist model (Rochester, 1999, pp. 15-16). The findings concerning VAI and Indybay, in particular in relation to the organisational challenges, contribute to the research on this subtype of voluntary associations. Because the study provides a comparative analysis of the two participatory media organisations that are both part of the same international network and that were launched the same year, but in different countries, it is hoped that the findings indicating that these two organisations were

drawn in very different directions will highlight the need for empirically grounded research that tests some of the assumptions concerning voluntary associations. Moreover, the hope was to demonstrate that the broader environment within which organisations are embedded must be taken into account, as it brings to the analysis another level, deepens it, and ultimately enhances our understanding of the possible differences deriving from the context.

An interesting observation is that regardless of the field in which voluntary associations operate, the range of problems they encounter appear noticeably similar, and so the prior research helps in identifying where to look, as it were. Thus, for example, many of the challenges facing voluntary organisations reported in Harris' (1998) study on religious congregations, such as difficulties in agreeing on the long-term goals of an association, resonate with the findings in this study in relation to VAI. Yet, what solutions the organisations seek to overcome challenges, and the direction they take is where they differ. Moreover, as the case of OMNI indicates, even previously hybrid models of commercial participatory media can convert closer to the voluntary association model, where functions, most notably producing content and editing, are sustained by unpaid volunteers.

7.2.3   Alternative media and the rhizomatic model

The burgeoning alternative media scholarship has addressed several aspects of these media, from their ability to facilitate individual empowerment, their radical political aims and the organisational limitations typically having to do with difficulties in finding a sustainable funding model to their embeddedness in civil society and the ways they challenge mainstream media. However, as Atton (2008a) has argued, the ethical dimensions of the production of alternative media have been practically ignored. He has (2008b) also called for research on alternative media that moves away from their celebration as being independent from the constraints of mainstream media to exploring the connections between the two. After making similar observations, it seemed that, in particular, research focusing on the micro level without ignoring the meso level was scarce with regards to ethics and connections of various participatory media with mainstream media and the market.

The key finding was that there is a notable variation between different types of participatory media organisations. For example, the organisations portray diverse stances in relation to values in reporting, most notably those values concerned with

objective reporting, such as keeping facts separate from opinion and presenting different viewpoints in reporting (Harcup, 2009, p. 83). Moreover, organisations that otherwise differ in their values may in some practices in relation to the publishing process draw in a similar way on the practices employed by traditional mainstream media.

The findings indicate that as convenient as it may be to employ the umbrella terms of participatory media, or even alternative media when participation in that type of media is discussed, nuances disappear when grouping all different types of participatory media together. As a result, generalisations concerning participatory media are being made that may not capture the intricacies of the reality. Therefore, despite the critiques concerning case studies in relation to the generalisability of the findings, an argument put forward here is that research on many types of participatory media, preferably comparable, is valuable. For example, in this research, by not limiting the analysis to the two Indymedia collectives Indybay and VAI, but adding to the selection of cases OMNI, which is a hybrid model, the analytic conclusions were enhanced through another level of comparisons.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, the rhizomatic model of media, as formulated originally by Carpentier et al. (2003) and discussed also by Bailey et al. (2008), was employed in the analysis of the organisations. When using abstract models in empirical research, it is valuable to test their applicability in real life settings. In this thesis, the rhizomatic model of media (Carpentier et al., 2003) was found on the whole more accommodating than theories of alternative media. It allows the exploration of characteristics current in hybrid models of participatory media such as in this study, OMNI, and accounts for the risks to which these types of media are susceptible. It must be noted though that not only OMNI, but also Indybay conforms to some of the characteristics of a rhizome, as it connects a broad range of activists and leftist organisations. One of benefits of the rhizomatic model is that it allows addressing the varying degrees of embeddedness of different participatory media in the civil society, but also the connections they have to market and/or state.

The findings in this research indicate that the risks the model puts forward in relation to commercialisation are indeed accurately identified, but only when they are examined in relation to a media organisation can we see exactly how they develop and why. Thus, OMNI, in relation to the findings in this thesis, portrays many of the characteristics of the rhizomatic media, for example, because it does not exist outside the market, although this is where the risks that are involved for such media can be seen, in OMNI's case due to the lack of independence from the company that ultimately

seems to be subjected to the logic of media as a business. In relation to rhizomatic connections between people and organisations, OMNI portrays more the potential than the actual emergence of rhizomatic media.

7.2.4 Agonistic pluralism

Mouffe's (1996, 2000a, 2000b, 2005a, 2005b) political theory of agonistic pluralism argues against the Habermasian ideal of rational political consensus and advances instead a radical pluralist democracy where competing and conflicting views and power struggles are not eliminated or denied, but occur between adversaries. Agonistic pluralism was employed in the thesis to assess whether an agonistic online space is a possibility, and if so, under what conditions. Following on from Couldry's (2006a, p. 65) and my own observation of how Mouffe has very little to say in her theory about the emergence of agonistic spaces or the conditions under which they may or may not be sustained, the case of VAI in particular offered an opportunity to "test" her theory, as it were.

Rather than investigating Mouffe's (Carpentier & Cammaerts, 2006) conception of the failure of online spaces to bring together differing voices, because people have a tendency to seek spaces where their views are reinforced, in this thesis, the focus in relation to VAI was on the opposite scenario, where people who disagreed with each other's opinions took the opportunity to engage in debates in an open publishing platform. Thus, in Chapter 5, there was a discussion of VAI, which provided a compelling case as a minimally controlled and unedited participatory media for evaluating the possibilities and constraints and, ultimately, the viability of an agonistic online space by taking into account the context of Finland.

On the other hand, it seems justified to argue that in contrast with VAI, Indybay, by restricting who can publish on the website based on political stance of reporters, prevents it from developing into an agonistic space. This is not to say that pluralism does not emerge in Indybay, but that pluralism is restricted to consist of leftist voices, as disruptive right-wing voices are excluded. As OMNI does not limit who can post and what political views reporters represent, it portrays more potential to an emergence of an agonistic online space, but this potential may be limited by its broad geographic reach and thus fragmentation of the readership.

Arresting as Mouffe's theory of agonistic pluralism is, in the light of the evidence provided by the case study of VAI, caution is warranted concerning the viability of an

agonistic space in practice. This is not to suggest that such spaces are not possible per se, or that the theory could be refuted, but rather that for such an ideal to move from an abstract level to a more concrete level, research is required so that there can be an understanding of those factors that affect the viability of agonistic spaces, whether online or not. This thesis hopes to have contributed, albeit in a modest way, by beginning to identify some of those factors, such as how the ways in which reporters' and users engage with the website is shaped by broader cultural factors. Thus, based on the findings concerning VAI, it seems justified to argue that it is vital that the research takes into account the context in which spaces aiming to be agonistic function.

7.3   Reflections on the Research Design, Method, Sample, and Ethics

The epistemological starting point for the research design was broadly speaking interpretivist. Thus, participatory media and journalism was explored by analysing the views of people who are involved in them either as reporters or facilitators of participatory media. Although these three organisations all facilitate opportunities for people to publish media content on their websites, the cases were selected because they would allow comparisons to be made on several levels. Therefore, with Indybay and VAI, comparisons could be made between two participatory media organisations forming part of the same network, both of which, as voluntary associations, had adopted the same organisational model, but with different outcomes, as Indybay, unlike VAI, is still active. OMNI, on the other hand, provided an opportunity to compare participatory media as part of a larger media company to a voluntary model. A further aspect of comparing the cases was brought about by the fact that these participatory media organisations operate in different socio-cultural locations. It was unexpected how important understanding the emergence of OMN in the context of South Korea and the ways in which the Korean edition functions became for the analysis of OMNI.

Because of the focus on people's points of view, it was appropriate to conduct a qualitative enquiry and to select as the main method semi-structured face-to-face interviews with research participants followed by questions sent by email and supplemented with secondary data, such as articles concerning OMN and OMNI in the media, observations made at the OMNI Citizen Reporters' Forum in 2007, and posts on Indymedia mailing lists. Giving such a strong prominence to interviews required a small leap of faith for two reasons. First, there was a risk of not being able to collect a sufficient amount of interview data that was appropriate for answering the research

questions. Second, basing most of the empirical analysis on data derived from one method and engaging only in data triangulation, thus investigating participatory journalism in different places and from a number of perspectives, was also potentially problematic, as engaging in various types of triangulation has become not only an accepted, but it seems, an expected practice in social research. However, as the interview method was deemed best for this investigation, and more than one type of triangulation was considered not to be a necessity, the second concern was removed. Nonetheless, the other reason for apprehension remained.

Whether people would be willing to talk with me, and whether I would be able to scratch below the surface in discussions, were the two major questions from the outset. The first one was based on my understanding of the security culture of social movements, as was discussed in Chapter 4, and on my perception that as a relatively new phenomenon, reporters engaged in participatory media may receive so many requests from researchers that I might have trouble convincing them to take part in my research. In relation to VAI, it was seen as a strong possibility that people who had been active in the collective might not have been prepared to discuss the closing down of VAI, the reasons that led to it, and their role in the collective.

Although securing interviews was by no means effortless, it did not turn out to be impossible. Moreover, the vast majority of interviewees were generous with their time and willing to share their thoughts. One of the challenges with interviews as a method that tends to be noted in methodology textbooks is that interviewees may withdraw information. In the case of VAI, it was observed that not all interviewees discussed all aspects of the closure; for example, some did not mention the conflict in the collective. It therefore became vital to be constantly on the lookout for confirmatory or contradictory evidence and to seek corroborating findings, when possible from sources other than interviews alone.

There were a few practical challenges that derived from a decision to conduct interviews. Finding a microphone-digital recorder combination that would work in various environments some of which, such as cafes in metropolises like New York, were noisy - these were the types of settings where most of the interviews were carried out - posed a challenge. As a result, the sound quality in one of the interviews is poor and in several others adequate. In one interview, the recorder suffered a technical malfunction and, as a result, the recording was lost. Fortunately, the interviewee had recorded the interview – the only occurrence of this - on a laptop and it was possible to obtain a digital copy from him.

7.3.1   The sample

As was discussed in Chapter 3, the sampling technique in this study, as in qualitative research in general, is based on a purposeful rather than on a random sample. More specifically, the aim was to achieve a sample where there was variation between interviewees based on a number of characteristics of their involvement in participatory journalism either as reporters or facilitators of participatory media. It is practically impossible to know to what extent the sample on the whole represents the population, as delineating the latter is not possible. In particular, in relation to the reporters, the population is hard to pin down because it can be (rapidly) evolving, which is also the point that Couldry (2010, p. 140) has made in relation to his research on bloggers.

When considering people active in the collectives and even more so the staff of OMNI, the notion of a population is not quite so obsolete, and in that respect, my selection of interviewees perhaps is a reasonable representation of the population. However, again, it is not possible to know this with any great certainty. For example, in the case of VAI, the collective had long been disbanded and the attempts to find out who had been involved at least at some stage could be based only on the memory of people who had been identified as having been active in the collective and on information concerning VAI that had been found online.

On the whole, in this research, accomplishing a representative sample was not a priority, unlike achieving a sufficient amount of empirical data consisting of the views of a fairly broad range of people discussing their experiences of journalistic practices, participatory media organisations and such media more generally. This aim, in my view, was achieved. Whether, in part, employing snowball sampling resulted in the best possible combination in the range of interviewees is another matter, as it may be that interviewees suggested people with whom they had something in common. On the other hand, in the case of OMNI, very few of the interviewed reporters were selected through snowball sampling. With Indybay and VAI, a concerted effort was made not to rely solely on interviewees' suggestions for other people to contact, but also to identify potential interviewees via the Indybay and VAI websites.

7.3.2   Research ethics

As the research project involved interviewees from different countries, my aim was to be sensitive to the differences in their cultures, and to treat the participants with equal

respect. Moreover, I acknowledge that my inside perspective on Finnish culture, unlike that on the USA, let alone on South Korea, may have affected both my practices when conducting the fieldwork and my analysis of the data. I took the necessary steps to ensure that the interviewees received an accurate description of the research project, such as its aims, the research design and how the accumulated interview data were going to be used. To an extent, the aims and the research design evolved and become more focused during the research process, and so for that reason, there are likely to be discrepancies between the final approach and how the research was discussed when the interviews were conducted. I was open about my role as a researcher when I recruited interviewees, but it is difficult to assess the impact my role as someone approaching the topic from an "outsider's" perspective, as it were, had on the interviewees' way of describing their activities. Nor is it clear to me whether I was less susceptible to losing the analytic distance than are researchers who have personal experience or are involved in what they study.

7.4 Discussion and Suggestions for Further Research

This final section offers a discussion of the processes of production of participatory media with reference to the wider implications of the findings, and puts forward suggestions for further research on participatory media. Moreover, touched upon here is an immense question, which the thesis has not attempted to address because it is beyond the scope of this research, the aim of which was to explore participatory journalism and the factors that enhance or impede reporters' practices. The question is, what may be achieved by the reporters' media practices beyond self-empowerment? The question is important not least because "Sceptics rightly ask whether, in the grand scheme of things, it really threatens established institutions that people can form their own online health support groups or citizen journalists make their own news?" as Livingstone (2008, p. ix) notes. Later in this section the interviews with reporters are drawn on to highlight why, in their views, participatory journalism matters.

Dahlgren (2009) provides a useful projection of current trends and questions in journalism in relation to information flows in online environments. He (Dahlgren, 2009) argues:

> Who is and who is not a journalist in this context becomes increasingly fuzzy as a variety of information functions arise to sort, sift, and funnel data electronically in differing organisational and societal contexts. The

boundaries between journalism and nonjournalism in cyberspace are become even more blurry than in the mass media. (p. 173)

Findings in this study indicate that although the change in journalism may seem rapid and some journalistic practices are labelled as "new", at least the type of participatory media studied in this research is part of the historical trajectory in journalism, and participatory media draw on the old ways of producing journalism rather than creating practices previously unheard of. Thus, Indymedia links with the long history of alternative media, and of the three cases, OMNI in particular falls back on traditional journalistic ethics and practices originating in the liberal theory. This is not to detract value from the way in which all three cases undeniably have made media production more inclusive by offering people opportunities to become involved, yet it is important to note that, beyond that point, not only do differences emerge regarding how democratic the rest of the production process is, but also regarding to what extent it is experimental.

Based on the empirical evidence concerning Indybay and OMNI, one could argue that the production processes of participatory media are less distinct from those of mainstream media than may have been assumed, on the one hand, by those coming from the alternative media research tradition celebrating the production of participatory media as inherently different from the mainstream, and on the other, by those coming from the liberal tradition worrying that participatory media are not conforming to the norms of mainstream media. Thus, for the latter group the observation may signify good news, whereas for the former perhaps less so.

What difference do participatory media practices make? was the question raised earlier. One of the frequently emerging arguments proposed by reporters was that participatory media brings forward a multiplicity of new voices. As an OMNI reporter (Hahn, personal communication, August 10, 2007) put it:

> I think one big advantage is that you will get unique perspectives. I think maybe perspectives that wouldn't be so easy to convey or put out on mainstream sources that have to be a little bit more, I guess, safe and middle of the road. So, I think you'll get articles where writers will convey their perspective without, um, yeah, without fear, I guess, or without, um, without too much restraint, in a good way. Um, and I think, you know, there are advantages that you'll get not only unique perspectives, but you'll get a lot of them.

Another way of proclaiming the benefits of participatory media was put forward by a reporter for the Indybay website who contrasted what she called volunteer journalism with the work of journalists who have a paid job. As she argued (Cadman, personal communication, June 12, 2007):

> I think volunteer journalism is really important because not everyone is going to get paid to do it. Not everyone wants to get paid to do it … I think volunteer journalism is really important because when people aren't caught up in caring about their paycheck or about the threat that their paycheck might be taken away … they have more freedom to speak up.

Another Indybay reporter noted that with participatory journalism it is possible to try to influence people's opinions. He then presented a powerful vision of what is at stake (Livingston, personal communication, November 25, 2006):

> If we work hard enough, and if we create a critical mass of ideas, where people realise that certain value, values are inalienable, such as the freedom of information, the freedom to know, the freedom to lay evidence. If we can create those values, and they're strong enough, there would be such repugnance against any power to take those away, that maybe we can stop it. And then, hopefully, you, you want to create a better world. That's the whole goal. And it's just as possible as creating a worse world, I believe.

Thus, participatory journalism here is seen to play a vital role in the building of a fairer democratic society. This perception appears to resonate with a more modest aim that various forms of participatory media have a potential to "deepen civic culture", as Dahlgren (2009, p. 177) has argued. Consequently, again the old question as to how exactly and to what extent do participatory media make a difference emerges.

More research is required that carefully and systematically considers what evidence there is to support the view that people's participation in media production has made a difference and under what conditions such efforts may succeed or fail. Research of this kind should help us to move beyond celebrating democratised media production (Gillmor, 2006) and preaching about an erosion of the media culture (Keen, 2007). Although this research has not looked into the impact of participatory media, the aim has been, however, to begin to address some of the assumptions concerning participatory media, such as those of the ethical dimensions to their production, and what similarities and differences emerge in relation to two types of participatory media organisations.

A suggestion for further research on participatory journalism based on the findings in this study is that the ethical dimensions of the work of reporters of participatory media require more attention. Moreover, in this respect, there is the potential for comparative studies both between different types of participatory media organisations and, perhaps even more urgently, between them and the mainstream media organisations. An important avenue for further research, prompted by the notion that many VAI interviewees in this study had continued being involved in journalistic activities in some way, whereas, for example, research on blogging suggests that dropping out is common, are longitudinal studies that would trace how reporters' practices evolve and whether their ethical standards change over time and how reporters' skills develop over extended periods of involvement. Furthermore, this type of research ought to explore also why the possible changes come about, for example, whether they are linked to a specific media organisation or levels of engagement and, for example, are signals of a broader cultural shift. Moreover, drawing on the findings in this study, in particular concerning Indybay, and thus how older generations take part in participatory culture through media production, further research is required to understand better the ways in which generations that do not represent the much-researched so-called "digital natives" (Palfrey & Gasser, 2008) are involved.

On a final note, although participatory journalism online is part of the emerging wider picture of the changing media landscape, which Gillmor (2009) has called the new media "ecology", it is hardly to blame for why traditional journalism is in turmoil and why mainstream media, in particular in print, are struggling to maintain their profit margins, and to fulfil their democratic role. Yet, the development of various participatory media has caused uneasiness not least in journalistic circles, and the concerns raised have centred on the questions of legitimacy and credibility in journalism and what journalism is, as outlined by Dahlgren (2009; see also Gillmor, 2009). If the restlessness is anything to go by, it may be that we are closer now than before to a moment when journalism is judged by its merits, and a journalist is a person who practises journalism. For the benefit of many of the reporters in this study, whose work has "nothing to do with the common notion of the amateur as the ignorant, self-deceived dabbler", as Atton (2007, p. 75) has argued in defence of amateur journalists in alternative media, I hope that to be the case.

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Appendix A: VAI Website

Retrieved from http://www.vaikuttava.net

VAIKUTTAVA TIETOTOIMISTO
A member of the global Indymedia network
• Etusivu • Uutiset • Kuvat • Esittely • Julkaise •

Haku
[Etsi]

Päävalikko

Uutiset
viimeisimmät uutiset
lyhennyksineen

Julkaise
lähetä uutisesi suoraan
selaimeltasi Vaikuttavaan
tietotoimistoon

Esittely
vaikuttavan tietotoimiston
toiminta-ajatus

Osallistu
tule mukaan Vaikuttavan
tietotoimiston toimintaan

Käyttäjät
kirjoittaudu sisään tai
rekisteröidy käyttäjäksi

Arkisto
artikkeleita järjestettynä
aihekokonaisuuksiin

Toimintakalenteri
tulevat tapahtumat,
mielenosoitukset ja kokoukset

Katalyytti
vaikuttava videojulkaisu

Sivarien kertausharjoitukset Jyväskylässä

23.07. 13:31 AKL-JKL

Aseistakieltäytyjäliiton Jyväskylän paikallisosasto kutsuu kaikki sivarit, totaalit ja muut antimilitaristit kertaamaan aseistakieltäytymisen aakkosia Kuohun harjoitusleirille 15.-17.8. Tervetuloa!

Lue lisää|36 kommenttia|Tulostusversio|Lähetä teksti

Mitä USA:n hallitus ei haluaisi sinun näkevän: kuvia Irakin sodasta

23.07. 13:27 JT

Aitoa verta, aitoa tuskaa, aidot ihmiset. Irakin sota on näyttänyt aikaisempien ihmiskunnan sotien tavoin merkkejä äärimmäisistä raakuuksista, vastuuttomuuksista(siviiliuhrit), ja ahneuksista(yhdysvaltalaisten/irakilaisten tekemät ryöstelyt, sota öljyn vuoksi).

Lue lisää|18 kommenttia|Tulostusversio|Lähetä teksti

Reclaim The Streets // JKL

23.07. 11:33 RTS-JKL

Jyväskylän kadunvaltausbileet tulevat.

Lue lisää|10 kommenttia|Tulostusversio|Lähetä teksti

Oikeuskansleri hyväksyi perusoikeusloukkauksen?

22.07. 20:57

Kansalaisten tulisi olla yhdenvertaisessa asemassa asuinpaikasta riippumatta viimesijaisen toimeentulon turvan suhteen. Aina näin ei kuitenkaa apulaisoikeuskanslerin mielestä tarvitse olla - missä menevät perusoikeuksien toteutumisen rajat?

Main navigation: Home - News - Gallery - About - Submit
Left hand side navigation:
    News: latest news with summaries
    Submit: send your news items to VAI directly from your browser
    About: VAI statement of purpose
    Participate: join VAI activities
    Users: login or register
    Archive: articles sorted by topic
    Calendar: coming events, demonstrations and meetings
    Catalyst/Katalyytti: active video publication

Appendix B: Indybay Website

Retrieved from http://www.indybay.org

Indybay

Topics
animal lib
anti-war
arts + action
drug war
education
en español
environment
global justice
government
health/housing
immigrant
media
labor
lgbti / queer
police state
racial justice
womyn

More
make media
get involved
calendar
gallery
archives
chat
links

Search

Donate
Help support grassroots independent media.

Donate

$55.00 donated in past month

IMC Network

Regional Pages
North Coast
Central Valley
North Bay
East Bay
South Bay
SF • Peninsula
Santa Cruz IMC
California • US
International:
AMERICAS • HAITI
IRAQ • PALESTINE
AFGHANISTAN

Calendar Events

Thursday Feb 25
4PM International Day of Action for Shuhada Street...
7PM Radical Women: Black History Month Celebration
7PM Black History Month Open Mic (Poetry) Night
8PM Support the Anarchist Prisoners and Mexican...

Friday Feb 26
8AM Stop All MUNI Cutbacks and Fare Hikes! Come Speak...

More Events...

5PM Lower Ocean Block Party/bbq/music
7PM Forum/Foro: Defend Public Education! /¡Defiende...
7PM Beneath the Snow: Anarchists Reportback on "No...
7:30PM Joint Benefit For Free Community Health Program &...

Saturday Feb 27
5PM Celebrate African American History with Dinner &...

Indymedia.org | Indymedia.us · West Coast IMCs: Seattle, Portland, Rogue, Santa Cruz, L.A., and San Diego

Action Against Big Banks' Abusive Treatment of Customers

Animal Teeth Swallow Up Bank Cards at Bank of America and Wells Fargo   Tue Feb 23 2010 (Updated 02/24/10)

Four of the nation's biggest banks — Bank of America, Citibank, Chase and Wells Fargo — are ruining the American economy, say activists who are taking to the streets this month to urge bank customers to "break up that affair with your big bank." In the San Francisco Bay Area members of the Raging Grannies launched a culture jamming action at banks in three cities to give the message some "real teeth".

Read more on Indybay's Global Justice and Anti-Capitalism or Arts + Action pages

As Afghan War Continues, S.F. Vigil Marks 1000 U.S. Deaths

Vigil in San Francisco Marks the 1000th US Death in Afghanistan   Tue Feb 23 2010 (Updated 02/24/10)

The day after the 1000th US soldier was killed in Afghanistan a vigil was held in front of the War Memorial in San Francisco to draw attention to the growing loss of life for the US war drive. All 1000 names were read as well as a representative of the unknown number of Afghanis who have been killed during the occupation of their country. The event was organized by the American Friends Service Committee and Veterans for Peace.

Read more on Indybay's Anti-War page

DREAM Week of Action Kicks Off

DREAM Act: A Pathway to Legalization for Undocumented Students   Mon Feb 22 2010

A National DREAM Week of Action kicked off on February 22nd and will last until Friday, February 26th. Students across California and 16 other states are organizing in support of the DREAM Act, a piece of federal legislation that would provide a pathway to legalization for undocumented students educated in the U.S. Every year, 65,000 undocumented students graduate from U.S. high schools, but these students face serious barriers to higher education.

Read more on Indybay's Immigrant Rights or Santa Cruz Indymedia pages

Open Shuhada Street Global Day of Action February 25, 2010

International Day of Action for Shuhada Street, al Khaleel/Hebron   Sun Feb 21 2010 (Updated 02/22/10)

On February 25th, 2010, activists and organizations from around the world will join together in solidarity with the Palestinian residents of Hebron/al Khaleel, through local protests that demand the opening of Shuhada Street to Palestinians and an end to the Israeli occupation. In San Francisco, a participatory, theatrical nonviolent demonstration will be held at Union Square from 4-6 pm.

Read more on Indybay's International or Palestine pages

Last Two of the Oakland 100 Headed to Trial

JR Valrey and Holly Works Face Years of Jail Time Over Oscar Grant Rebellions   Wed Feb 17 2010 (Updated 02/24/10)

UPDATE 2/22: Case Dismissed Against JR Valrey; Holly Still Facing Trial March 1st

JR Valrey and Holly Works, the last two of the Oakland 100 — those arrested during the rebellions that followed the police murder of Oscar Grant last year — must raise legal defense funds for their imminent trials. JR's trial starts Monday, February 22nd, and Holly's starts the following Monday, March 1st. Supporters are calling out to all who are able to attend the trials.

Publish your news
Add an event
article photo
video audio

Local News
Global | Breaking

Noon Rally Today at Oakland City Hall Against Racist, Classist Parking Enforcement Rise Up Oakland! (2 comments)
Thursday Feb 25th 11:05 AM

3/1 Press Conference/Rally "Criminal Cover-Up By US Department Of Labor?" Committee To Clean Up Corruption At DOL
Thursday Feb 25th 10:51 AM

UCSC Humanities 2 Banner Drop uc student
Thursday Feb 25th 10:35 AM

KPFA Show Host Combats Censorship By Oakland City Attorney John Russo & KPFA Louis Medina repost
Thursday Feb 25th 8:56 AM

UAW holds nationalist rally at NUMMI plant in California repost
Thursday Feb 25th 7:41 AM

Holly Court Support schedule change O 100
Wednesday Feb 24th 10:48 PM

California Marijuana Ballot Signature Update! East Coast Keeping Eyes On California! Cris Ericson
Wednesday Feb 24th 8:14 PM

Humboldt County Fishing Interests Critical of Wave Power Project Christina Aanestad
Wednesday Feb 24th 5:22 PM

Feinstein Shuts Out Delta Communities From Water Export Talks Dan Bacher
Wednesday Feb 24th

Appendix C: OMNI Website

Retrieved from http://english.ohmynews.com

Appendix D: Emailed Questions

Quality and skills in citizen journalism (Indybay/VAI/OMNI interviewees)

- Based on my research, it appears that one of the challenges of citizen journalism is quality and another one is the skills that are required from a citizen reporter. What does quality as regards citizen journalism mean to you? In your opinion, what kinds of skills are needed in citizen journalism?

Citizen journalism terminology (Indybay/OMNI interviewees)

- Based on my research so far, many of my interviewees do not like to call themselves "citizen reporters" nor do they see themselves doing "citizen journalism". Why do you think this is? If you reject these terms, what in your opinion would be more appropriate terms for "citizen reporter" and "citizen journalism" and why?

Current journalistic activities and Internet history (Indybay/VAI/OMNI reporters)

- Do you do currently work either as a citizen reporter or as a professional journalist? If you do, when did you begin to contribute, what do you contribute and to what publications and how often?
- How much time on average do you spend weekly on each of your journalistic activities?
- If you have a blog, when did you set it up, what type of topics do you write about and how often do you update it?
- When considering, for example, your current profession or hobbies, has it been useful for you to be involved in Indybay/OMNI, and if so, how?
- It is possible to trace, for example, what people have written on the Internet. Have you experienced any advantage or disadvantage from having an Internet history? Could you tell me about your experiences?

Questions about Indybay/VAI (interviewees involved in the Indybay/VAI collective)

- What kind of mailing lists has Indybay/VAI?
- Who decides who can join the mailing lists?
- Can the articles that have been removed from the Indybay/VAI website be viewed online? How about comments?

Questions about Indybay (all Indybay interviewees)

- Indybay reporters do not need to register. Can you tell me what advantages and disadvantages there are to this both from your point of view as an Indybay reporter and a reader of the website?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way in which the Indybay website is edited?
- Based on my research so far, it appears that the majority of Indybay contributors are over 30 years of age and many are over 50. Based on your experiences of Indybay, would you agree, if not why not? If you agree, why do you think that is?

Questions about VAI (all VAI interviewees)

- When considering the number of articles posted on the VAI website and in particular the amount of discussions following the articles, it seems that VAI was popular. In your opinion, of what is this an indication?
- In many of the interviews, it has been noted that a lot of provocative content was posted on the VAI website. Why do you think this is?
- People could use pseudonyms when they were posting on the VAI website. What advantages and disadvantages were there in this when considering both people who posted on the website and its readers?
- The VAI website seems to have had a lot of content in relation the events abroad such as the War in Iraq, the Israel/Palestine conflict, and demonstrations in Gothenburg and Genoa. Why do you think this might be?

General questions about OMNI (to those OMNI reporters regarding whom these questions were not covered properly in the interview)

- OMNI contributors need to register. Can you tell me what advantages and disadvantages there are to this both from your point of view as an OMNI contributor and as a reader of the website?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of the way in which the OMNI website is edited?

The following questions are about the usability of the Indybay/OMNI website features for citizen reporters (all Indybay and OMNI interviewees)

- How easy or difficult is it for you to use the system for submitting content to Indybay/OMNI?
- Was it easy to learn to use the system?
- How efficient is the system to use?
- Has the system evolved over time?
- How satisfied you are with the system currently?
- What problems are there, if any?
- How could the system be improved?

Appendix E: Interviewees
(* indicates original interview followed up by email interview)

Indybay (N=17)

Ballis, G.* Interview with the author, Fresno, USA, 1 December 2006. Mr Ballis is a reporter on the Indybay website. He has documented via photos various social justice and civil rights movements in the USA, mainly in California, for many decades.

Borgström, D. * Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 15 June 2007. Mr Borgström is a reporter for the Indybay website.

Cadman, G. Interview with the author, Santa Cruz, USA, 12 June 2007. Ms Cadman is a radio show host at Free Radio Santa Cruz. Many of her radio programmes are posted on the Indybay website.

Carpenter, B.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 24 November 2006. Mr Carpenter is a reporter on the Indybay website.

Henshaw-Plath, E. Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 8 June 2007. Mr Henshaw-Plath is a reporter on the Indybay website and active in the Indybay collective as a programmer, though both only infrequently. He has been involved in Indymedia collectives in many parts of world including Europe and South America.

Johnson, B.* Interview with the author, Santa Cruz, USA, 11 June 2007. Ms Johnson is a reporter of the Santa Cruz section of Indybay website.

Livingston, R. B.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 25 November 2006. Mr Livingston is a reporter on the Indybay website.

Maiden, P.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 2 December 2006. Mr Maiden is active in the Indybay collective as an editor, a reporter and a photo coordinator for the Indybay website.

Ogren, Z. Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 2 June 2007. Mr Ogren is active in the Indybay collective as a programmer and an editor for the Indybay website. He also occasionally posts content, mainly photographs, on the website.

Rhodes, M.* Interview with the author, Fresno, USA, 30 November 2006. Mr Rhodes is a reporter on the Indybay website and the editor of *Community Alliance*, a progressive newspaper in Fresno, California.

Robertson, R.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 3 December 2006. Ms Robertson is a reporter on the Indybay website. She is actively involved in the San Francisco Bay Raging Grannies.

Sakharov, R.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 29 November 2006. Mr Sakharov was involved in the editorial collective of the newsmagazine of Indybay called *Fault Lines*, when it published, and he is a reporter on the Indybay website.

Scott, B. Interview with the author, Santa Cruz, USA, 13 June 2007. Mr Scott is active in the Indybay collective of Santa Cruz as an editor and a reporter for the Indybay website.

Sonnenfeld, J. Interview with the author, Santa Cruz, USA, 12 June 2007. Mr Sonnenfeld is active in the Indybay collective of Santa Cruz as an editor and a reporter for the Indybay website.

Sousa, L.* Interview with the author, Chicago, USA, 6 August 2007. Ms Sousa is one of the activists who launched the Indybay website, and she was also active in the collective as a reporter before moving from California.

Wolf, J. Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 7 June 2007. Mr Wolf is a reporter on the Indybay website.

Zeltzer, S. Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 4 December 2006. Mr Zeltzer is a reporter on the Indybay website, a long-time labour activist and the founder of *Labor Video Project*, a labour video and communications organisation.

OMNI (N=12)

Andriotis, T. Interview with the author, New York, USA, 9 August 2007. Mr. Andriotis is a former a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

George, C. Interview with the author, London, United Kingdom, 17 December 2007. Ms George was Assistant Editor of OhmyNews International until summer 2007.

Gibbs, D.* Interview with the author, New York, USA, 6 November 2006. Ms Gibbs is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

Hahn, J.* Interview with the author, New Jersey, USA, 10 August 2007. Mr Hahn is a reporter of OhmyNews International.

Hauben, J.* Interview with the author, New York, USA, 2 November 2006. Mr Hauben is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

Hauben R. Interview with the author, New York, USA, 3 November 2006. Ms Hauben is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

Jacquot, J.* Interview with the author, San Francisco, USA, 17 November 2006. Mr Jacquot is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

Kang, I.* Interview with the author, Seoul, South Korea, 4 July 2007. Mr Kang is a reporter on both the South Korean OhmyNews and OhmyNews International websites.

Lyon, C.* Interview with the author, New York, USA, 2 November 2006. Mr Lyon is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

McCann, S.* Interview with the author, Chicago, USA, 6 August 2007. Mr McCann is a reporter on the OhmyNews International website.

Min, J. K. Interview with the author, Seoul, South Korea, 1 July 2007. Mr Min works in international business relations and corporate communications for OhmyNews International.

Thacker, T.* Interview with the author, Seoul, South Korea, 3 July 2007. Mr Thacker is Senior Editor of OhmyNews International until summer 2009.

VAI (N=15)

Aho, V.* Interview with the author, Tampere, Finland, 31 August 2006. Mr Aho programmed VAI's application.

Huhta, J.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 29 January 2007. Mr Huhta was both a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Kivekäs, O. Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 5 September 2006. Mr Kivekäs was a member of the core group of activists in the VAI collective.

Kojo, L. Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 15 January 2007. Mr Kojo was active in the VAI collective as a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Laakso, T.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 24 August 2006. Mr Laakso was a member of the core group of activists who launched the VAI website. He was active in the VAI collective as a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Liesaho, J.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 17 January 2007. Mr Liesaho was both a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Lähde, V.* Interview with the author, Tampere, Finland, 30 August 2006. Mr Lähde was a user of the VAI website. In his capacity as its editor-in-chief, he also published stories taken from the VAI website in *Muutoksen Kevät*, a print publication of the environmental movement and animal rights activists in Finland.

Nikkanen, H.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 1 September 2006. Ms Nikkanen is one of the core group of activists who launched the VAI website. She was active in the VAI collective as a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Rainesto, H.* Interview with the author, Turku, Finland, 10 January 2007. Mr Rainesto was a user of the VAI website.

Sardar, A. Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 30 January 2007. Mr Sardar was a reporter on the VAI website.

Stranius, L.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 29 August 2006. Mr Stranius was a reporter on the VAI website.

Tuominen, J. Interview with the author, Jyväskylä, Finland, 4 September 2006. Mr Tuominen was a reporter on the VAI website.

Vainio, N.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 3 September 2006. Mr Vainio was a reporter on the VAI website. In his capacity as one of the editors of *Muutoksen Kevät* after Mr Lähde, he also published in it stories taken from the VAI website.

Weckström, E.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 31 January 2007. Ms Weckström was a reporter on the VAI website.

Öberg, J.* Interview with the author, Helsinki, Finland, 30 January 2007. Mr Öberg was a moderator and a reporter on the VAI website.

Appendix F: Interview Schedule; Question Sets A-D

<u>Question set A</u> for OMNI reporters and Indybay and VAI reporters who are not active in the collective

Opening questions in relation to Indybay/VAI/OMNI

- Can you tell me about your citizen journalism activities in general and about your involvement with Indybay/VAI/OMNI as a reporter?
- What are your reasons for posting on the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website?
- Do you create content on other websites/other media or do you have a blog?
- How does the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website work?

Producing content on the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website

- Can you describe the process of creating media content?
- What kind of content do you produce (types/formats/topics)?
- Can you give examples of what you have posted on the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website?

Skills and tools

- What kind of software and devices do you use to create media?
- What kind of skills do you need to be able to create media?
- Where have you learnt these skills?
- Is the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website user-friendly? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- Is there support available, and if there is, what kind of support?
- How could the Indybay/OMNI/VAI website be improved?

Interviewees' role as a reporter

- How do you see your role as a reporter?
- What does it mean to you to create content for the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website?
- What do you want to achieve by creating content for the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website?
- Do you have principles or ethics that you follow as a reporter? If you do
- How would you describe them?
- Do you think they differ from those of professional journalists, and if so, how?

Aims and audiences

- Do you create media content with a certain type of audience in mind, and if you do, how do you picture your audience?
- Is it important to you that people see or read what you have posted?

Interactions with other reporters/readers

- Do you get feedback on your media content? If you do:
- What feedback have you had and how often?
- How do you feel about getting feedback and has it been useful?
- Do you respond to feedback?
- Do you comment on other people's articles?
- Have you kept in touch with people who you have met via Indybay/VAI/OMNI such as people who have given you feedback?

General questions about Indybay/VAI/OMNI

- What are the editorial guidelines of Indybay/VAI/OMNI?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Indybay/VAI/OMNI from your point of view as a reporter (and possibly a user of the website)? What are your views on anonymity and registering?
- If you are familiar with other participatory media websites, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Indybay/VAI/OMNI compared to them?
- Does Indybay/VAI/OMNI (in your opinion) offer information that is:
- Not available in other media? If so, what type of information?
- Accurate?
- Up-to-date?
- Is Indybay/VAI/OMNI open to anyone (for example, regardless of social, cultural or political background, age or gender)?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of reporters getting paid (OMNI)/not getting paid (Indybay/VAI) for their contributions?

Indybay and OMNI interviewees
- How do you see the future of Indybay/OMNI?

VAI interviewees
- Can you tell about the closure of the VAI website?

Views on citizen journalism

- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of citizen journalism?
- Does citizen journalism differ from professional journalism and if so, how?
- There has arguably been an increase in citizen journalism online in recent years: why do you think that is?
- Do you think it is possible to influence, for example, political decision-making or policy-making with citizen journalism? If you do, can you give examples?
- How do you see the future of citizen journalism?

The role of media

- How do you see the role of media in society?
- How do you see the role of alternative media in Finland/the USA?
- What does the objectivity of media mean to you?
- How do you evaluate the objectivity of media?

Interviewees' media usage

- How do you use or consume media?
- What media, mainstream or alternative, do you use?
- How much do you use media on average either daily or weekly?

Background questions

- Age
- Occupation
- Education
- Do you do voluntary work? If you do, can you tell me about it?
- Are you a member of
- charities?
- voluntary organisations?
- a trade union?
- How would you describe your political orientation?
- Do you vote?
- Are you involved in party politics? If so, how?

Future plans concerning journalism

- In terms of journalism or related activities, what are your plans for the future?

Closing the interview

Question set B for Indybay and VAI interviewees who are active in the collective

Interviewee's role in the collective

- Can you tell me about your role in the collective?
- If you have an activist background, can you tell me about that?
- When did you become active in the collective?
- What motivates you to do work in the collective?
- Do you post content on the Indybay/VAI website?

Indybay/VAI collective

- Can you tell me about the collective and how it works?
- How many people are involved in the collective and what are their roles?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to Indybay/VAI of being a volunteer participatory media organisation?
- How do you see the role of the collective in relation to activism in the Bay Area/Finland in general and media activism in particular?
- Is the collective in your view open to anyone (for example, regardless of social, cultural or political background, age or gender)?

The Indybay/VAI website

- When was the website launched?
- How does open publishing work?
- How is the website edited?
- Is there support available for reporters? If there is, what kind of support?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Indybay/VAI reporters not getting paid?
- What are the aims of the website?
- Are there challenges in running the website, and if there are, what are they?
- If you are familiar with other participatory websites, what are the advantages and disadvantages of Indybay/VAI compared to them?
- What types of content are posted on the website?
- What is the editorial policy of the website?
- Who contributes to the website?
- Is the website user friendly?
- Has the website evolved over time? If it has, how?
- How active is the website in terms of users and people posting to it?
- In your opinion, is the website open to anyone (for example, regardless of social, cultural or political background, age or gender)?
- In your opinion, does the website have an impact on political decision-making or policy-making, for example? If it does, can you give examples?
- Does Indybay/VAI (in your opinion) offer information that is:
- Not available in other media? If so, what type of information?
- Accurate?
- Up-to-date?

Indybay interviewees only: The division of the Indymedia website into two separate websites.

- Can you tell me about the Indybay collective splitting into two separate collectives (e.g., how, when and why did it happen, who made the decision)?
- What has been the reaction of reporters to the situation?
- How does having two Indymedia websites in the Bay Area work?
- Why do you think Indymedia seems to thrive, for example, in many parts of the USA, whereas in Finland it closed down after three years of existence?

VAI interviewees only: The closure of VAI website

- Can you tell about the closure of the VAI website? For example:
- What led to the closure?
- Is there something that, in your opinion, could have been done differently?
- Was the decision to close the website unanimous and who made it?
- Would there, in your opinion, be a need for a similar website to VAI in Finland? If yes, why? If not, why not?
- Why do you think Indymedia in Finland closed down, whereas it seems to thrive, for example, in many parts of the USA?

If the interviewee is also as reporter, continue the interview with Question set C. If the interviewee is not a reporter, move on to following questions.

Interviewees' media usage

- How do you use or consume media?
- What media, mainstream or alternative, do you use?
- How much do you use media on average either daily or weekly?

Background questions

- Age
- Occupation
- Education
- Do you do voluntary work? If you do, can you tell me about it?
- Are you a member of
- charities?
- voluntary organisations?
- a trade union?
- How would you describe your political orientation?
- Do you vote?
- Are you involved in party politics? If so, how?

Future plans concerning work in the collective

- In terms of your work with the collective, what are your plans for the future?

Closing the interview

Question set C for Indybay and VAI interviewees who are both reporters and active in the collective (to be asked in addition to question set B)

Opening questions in relation to Indybay/VAI

- Can you tell me about your citizen journalism activities in general and about your involvement with Indybay/VAI as a reporter?
- What reasons have you for posting on the Indybay/VAI/OMNI website?
- Do you create content on other websites/other media or do you have a blog?

Producing content on the Indybay/VAI website

- Can you describe the process of creating media content?
- What kind of content do you produce (types/formats/topics)?
- Can you give examples of what you have posted on the Indybay/VAI website?

Skills and tools

- What kind of software and devices do you use to create media?
- What kind of skills do you need to be able to create media?
- Where did you learn these skills?

Interviewees' role as a reporter

- How do you see your role as a reporter?
- What does it mean to you to create content for Indybay/VAI website?
- What do you want to achieve by creating content for Indybay/VAI website?
- Do you have principles or ethics that you follow as a reporter? If you do
- How would you describe them?
- Do you think they differ from those of professional journalists, and if so, how?

Aims and audiences

- Do you create media content with a certain type of audience in mind, and if you do, how do you picture your audience?
- Is it important to you that people see or read what you have posted?

Interactions with other reporters/readers

- Do you get feedback on your media content? If you do:
- What feedback have you had and how often?
- How do you feel about getting feedback and has it been useful?
- Do you respond to feedback?
- Do you comment on other people's articles?
- Have you kept in touch with people whom you have met via Indybay/VAI/OMNI, such as people who have given you feedback?

General question about Indybay/VAI/OMNI

- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Indybay/VAI from your point of view as a reporter? Views on anonymity and registering?

Views on citizen journalism

- What do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of citizen journalism?
- Does citizen journalism differ from professional journalism and if so, how?
- There has arguably been an increase in citizen journalism online in recent years: why do you think that is?
- Do you think it is possible to influence, for example, political decision-making or policy-making with citizen journalism? If you do, can you give examples?
- How do you see the future of citizen journalism?

The role of media

- How do you see the role of media in society?
- How do you see the role of alternative media in Finland/the USA?
- What does the objectivity of media mean to you?
- How do you evaluate the objectivity of media?

Interviewees' media usage

- How do you use or consume media?
- What media, mainstream or alternative do you use?
- How much do you use media on average either daily or weekly?

Background questions

- Age
- Occupation
- Education
- Do you do voluntary work? If you do, can you tell me about it?
- Are you a member of
- charities?
- voluntary organisations?
- a trade union?
- How would you describe your political orientation?
- Do you vote?
- Are you involved in party politics? If so, how?

Future plans concerning journalism

- In terms of journalism or related activities, what are your plans for the future?

Closing the interview

Question set D, an example of questions to OMNI staff

General questions

- What does your work involve?
- How did you come to work for OMNI and what is your background in terms of journalism?
- Can you tell me about the launching of the OMNI website?
- How does OMNI work?
- What are the aims of OMNI?
- Can you describe OMNI's organisational structure and its relationship to OhmyNews?
- How is OMNI funded?
- How many page views has OMNI per day?
- Can you tell me about the Citizen Reporters' Forum?
- Can you tell me about the OhmyNews Citizen Journalism School?
- What were the reasons that led OMNI to downsize its workforce and what are the consequences of having fewer people?
- OMNI has had links to news on *International Herald Tribune* and *Associated Press* websites. Can you tell more about this?
- What kind of agreement has OMNI had with these organisations?
- What were the benefits to OMNI and to the other news organisations?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of OMNI?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of OMNI when compared to other participatory journalism websites?

Editing

- How does the editorial process work in OMNI?
- What kind of editorial policy or principles does OMNI follow and why?
- How many reporters has OMNI and in how many countries?
- How many stories do OMNI's citizen reporters submit each day on average?
- How many OMNI reporters are male/female?
- What proportion of registered reporters are active?
- How often does a reporter submit stories on average?
- Do reporters drop out and if they do, how often does that happen and why?
- What proportion of the stories that are offered to OMNI are rejected (according to an LA Times article about 30% of South Korean OhmyNews submissions are rejected)?
- Is there support available for reporters? If there is, what kind of support?
- How and by whom are the decisions made regarding what can and cannot be published?
- Why does OMNI no longer list featured writers on the front page?
- Does OMNI issue press cards to its citizen reporters?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages in the way in which OMNI is edited?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of citizen journalists getting paid for their contributions?
- How do you see the future of OMNI?

Appendix G: Introducing and Closing the Interviews

Introduction

This interview forms part of my doctoral research on citizen journalism at the London School of Economics and Political Science in the UK.

I am interested in how and why people get involved in creating content online. My study seeks to identify and analyse the factors that enhance or impede participation in citizen journalism websites as a form of civic engagement in Finland and in the USA.

These websites are OhmyNews International, which is an English language edition of South Korean OhmyNews. The other two are part of the international Indymedia network, and are called Indybay and Vaikuttava Tietotoimisto. The latter was active in Finland from 2000 to 2003, and the former operates in the San Francisco Bay Area.

My primary method is interviewing a total of 39 to 45 people who are involved with either OhmyNews International or the two Indymedia websites.

I am seeking to interview a range of people from seasoned citizen journalists to those who have only just begun to create their own media. I am conducting interviews also with OMNI staff and people who are active in the two Indymedia collectives.

I plan to send a set of further questions to most of the interviewees by email during the year after the initial interviews.

You can withdraw from the research at any time.

May I have your permission to record this interview? The recording will be transcribed.

Can I refer to you by name in my thesis and in other possible written outcomes of my research, such as journal articles? You can remain anonymous should you wish to do so.

Closing

- Is there anything you would like to add?
- Is there something you would like to ask me?
- I may want to send you further questions by email sometime later. Would that be okay?

Thanking interviewee for her/his time and contribution.

Appendix H: The Mission Statement of VAI

Retrieved from http://www.vaikuttava.net/sections.php?op=viewarticle&artid=14
Translation of the original website.
[The text is out of date. New policies are under construction]

Media and the Illusion of Objectivity

Mainstream media aims at creating an image of an objective means of communication. Most media organizations call themselves "independent" or "non-aligned". This may be true in respect of political party lines, but each news desk has their own "line", values and interests. They may not be written on paper, but they exist.

Often this "line" means pursuit of profit and thus supporting the relating power structures. The continuous concentration of media to only a few corporations has further boosted this development. Helsingin Sanomat and TV news play an essential role in shaping peoples' world views in Finland. It would be naïve to assume the information they provide is entirely objective.

Media concentration is a problem because it creates a considerable risk of biased editorial content. For example, commercial interests can affect news content. It is not far fetched to imagine that a major advertiser is not criticized over their environmental impact, but instead praised for good financial results.

A major problem exists in Finland in that people generally follow only the largest media which all share a rather uniform world view. This is an ongoing problem even though there is more information available than ever before. People have become passive media consumers.

Traditionally media has been seen as actors independent of politics and society. We want to question this predominant conception. Media are some of the most important active participants in politics. The image of media being objective is an illusion.

Independent Media Center

Independent Media Center (IMC) was established in November 1999 for the purpose of providing grassroots coverage of the World Trade Organization (WTO) protests in Seattle. IMC succeeded in its mission and the world got to know more of the protests than just the broken windows the mainstream media mainly focused on.

Independent Media Center has grown into an international network, which consist of around 40 web sites all around the world. New sites join the network constantly.

IMC is not just a news web site, but a network of media activists. Administration and content provision are important especially in the beginning. Later on the existing network makes it easier to launch new projects. For example media activist training can be an essential activity.

Openness and inclusion are central concepts of IMC activity. People are encouraged to actively produce media instead of just passively consuming it. Everyone has the opportunity to publish their own news material without preventive censorship. The international IMC network can offer technology and world wide contacts. The network

does not, however, observe strict rules or policies. Instead, every center can develop its own methods. Pluralism is an asset.

VAI

We aim to create a new medium in Finland; one that is an active participant in the creation a new better society. We want to offer a new perspective alongside the world view of the mainstream media. We want to democratize the political power of the news media. We acknowledge our subjectivity but aim for pluralism and accurate news coverage. As an alternative to the mainstream media "objectivity" we offer openness and collaboration. VAI is a politically active but completely non-commercial medium.

Our target group consists primarily of the people who may not be active in social activities, but are interested in such issues. We offer news and articles that can't be found from daily newspapers. We also write for reporters of other media, because we can show "the other side" of issues.

Our purpose is to create an efficient and functional news network through collaboration. True freedom of speech is the right to be heard, not so much the right to say something. Through cooperation it is possible to create a medium that reaches not just fellow activists but others too.

Join us in media revolution!

VAI editorial policy

Join our mailing list

Appendix I: The Editorial Policy of VAI

The Editorial Policy of VAI

[The text is out of date. New policies are under construction]

The following text defines the editorial policy observed by VAI. Please follow these guidelines when submitting your articles.

Overview
* VAI is an independent news service which covers social issues from a non-mainstream point of view.

* Other issues reported should have some social aspect. An image of an Indian Elephant does not belong to VAI, but an article on IMF policy affecting the Indian Elephant does. This guideline is not absolute, interesting articles are always welcome.
* Interesting quality news are highlighted at the front page. The best are picked by the content provision team.

* VAI tries to keep white noise as low as possible to maintain the news value of the service. See moderation.

* Clear misinformation or material that slanders individuals or groups is not accepted. If you want to claim that someone is an asshole, refrain from using the word "asshole" and state your reasons.

* Commercial advertising is forbidden.

* As a political statement we do not accept material that is racist, homophobic, sexist or otherwise offensive to others' human rights (list not exhaustive). Using the freedom of speech for violating universal human rights is never accepted. Proprietary rights or freedom of trade are not considered universal rights.

* Copyrighted material can not be submitted without explicit permission of the rights owner.

* Material must meet certain quality standards. For example texts with numerous typos, curse words or nonsense are removed.

* The content should be structured to minimize white noise and to ease decision making. For example a headline page can include a summary of recommended related material. Browsing old articles should be easy. Interlinking articles is recommended when possible. (It is profitable to try to interlink articles.

* Authors are responsible for their material and content thereof. Articles do not represent the opinion of VAI.

Posting Comments
It is possible to post comments to all published news articles. The comments are published immediately. This system allows better quality control than moderation. The

ability to comment is a major difference from mainstream media. VAI is an interactive media which offers a possibility for dialogue over every article.

* Comments relating to a specific article should be posted to the article itself, not submitted as a separate news item.

* When considering removing an article from the service it should always be assessed if replying to the article would be more beneficial. If the view of the original article is that of the mainstream media, a reply will usually be more efficient than deletion of the article. In some cases even inappropriate messages can prompt quality discussion.

Moderation Policy

* The purpose of moderation is maintaining high quality standards. Moderation controls the compliance with the editorial policy.

* The moderation guidelines must be public. The reasons for all decisions must be given if requested.

* Material considered inappropriate for the service is removed afterwards. Articles are removed according to these guidelines.

* Articles are removed by hiding. Hidden articles are still accessible through the article administration system. This method makes the system transparent.

* The moderator team consists of a few people with enough time and the authorization from others. The team can not read all material all the time so it is possible to request for removal of material.

* It is considered better for a low quality article to remain in the service than for a high standard article to be removed.

* Discussion over controversial moderation decisions must be public. Personal antipathy towards a person/group/ideology must not be a basis for moderation if the article is suitable by other means.

* Spamming the page is handled by all means necessary. As a last resort, a police report will be filed for interference of telecommunications.

Decision Making

* Decisions are made by active participants of the project.

* Unnecessary bureaucracy must be avoided.

* Decisions are made by consensus as long as this doesn't lead to inefficiency or minority terror. Voting is used as a last option.

* VAI aims to decentralize activities. Establishing independent content provision teams is encouraged. This takes excessive focus off of Helsinki area.

* Meetings are held when absolutely necessary. Communication and cooperation between people are always more effective in real life than online. Thus media activists should hold off-the-record meetings somewhat regularly.

* IRC-meetings are one possibility. This offers an easy access from everywhere to participate.

* All official meetings are recorded, so that absentees can stay up to date.

Copyright
* Authors own copyright to all of their own material.

* All material on the web site can be used for non-commercial purposes.

* Posting third party copyrighted material is not allowed.

* A fee is charged for all commercial use of any material.

Funding
* Paid advertising is not accepted.

* Funding can be gathered through selling self-produced videos, CD:s, magazines, other publications or fan merchandise (T-shirts, pins etc.).

* Contributions can be collected any time any where.

* Published material may be sold to be republished in commercial media.

Content Provision Team
* Content provision team consists of active members of the community. The team ensures regular content provision. This is important especially in the beginning, before the service gains an established status.

* There can be several content provision teams in different parts of the country.

* Media criticism and activism related news coverage should be central in content provision.

* One important function of VAI is to follow other news centers and link and translate the best articles. This should be reciprocal.

Technical Team
* HELP IS NEEDED URGENTLY!

* Collaboration with international network is important for the exchange of ideas, information and code.

Contact vaikuttava@kulma.net if you want to participate!

Appendix J: SF Bay Area Indymedia Principles of Unity

Retrieved from http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2003/12/08/16643971.php

Media Activism

About | Contact | Subscribe | Calendar | Publish | Print | Donate

Regions
north coast
central valley
north bay
east bay
south bay
san francisco
peninsula
santa cruz
california
us
international

Topics
animal lib
anti-war
arts + action
drug war
education
en español
environment
global justice
government
health/housing
immigrant
media
labor
lgbti / queer
police state
racial justice
womyn

International
americas
haiti
iraq
palestine
afghanistan

More
make media
get involved
calendar
gallery
archives
chat
links

[Search]

Donate
Help support
grassroots
independent

printable version - fluid-width version

Indymedia

About Us
by sfbay volunteers (sfbay [at] lists.indymedia.org)
Monday Dec 8th, 2003 7:34 PM

The San Francisco Bay Area Independent Media Center is a non-commercial, democratic collective of bay area independent media makers and media outlets, and serves as the local organizing unit of the global Indymedia network.

Web hosting provided by ~~Transbay.net~~ ~~Communitycolo.net~~ Cernio Technology Cooperative.

Principles of Unity: San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia

1. We strive to provide an information infrastructure for people and opinions who do not have access to the airwaves, tools and resources of corporate media. This includes audio, video, photography, internet distribution and any other communication medium.
2. We support local, regional and global struggles against exploitation and oppression.
3. We function as a non-commercial, non-corporate, anti-capitalist collective.

San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia involves volunteer participants and allied collectives organized along anti-authoritarian principles of open and transparent decision-making processes, including open public meetings; a form of modified consensus; and the elimination of hierarchies.

San Francisco Bay Area Indymedia participants shall not act in a manner that endangers, intimidates, or physically harms any member of the group, including by sexual harassment or acts of violence. Indymedia members shall strive to act in a respectful manner to other members of the collective as well as the public.

Mission Statement

- To encourage a world where globalization is not about homogeneity and exploitation, but rather, about diversity and cooperation.
- To cover local events that are ignored or poorly covered by corporate media.
- To provide edited audio, video, and print stories of the above on the internet for independent media outlets and the general public.
- To facilitate the networking and coordination for the coverage of local events as well as gather information about events to cover.
- To provide links to alternative media, activist, and research groups.
- To seek out and provide coverage underscoring the global nature of people's struggles for social, economic, and environmental justice directly from their perspective.
- To offer community classes for training in internet and media skills.
- To encourage, facilitate, and support the creation of independent news gathering and organizations.

See also the Indybay.org Editorial Policy

Indybay's processes and policies for maintaining the open-publishing site.

Get Involved

This is *your* independent media center. As an all-volunteer organization, we need **you** to get involved! Check our get involved page for info on meetings and e-mail lists.

Indybay Overview Video

Appendix K: SF Bay Area Indymedia Editorial Policy

Retrieved from http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2002/08/04/1395001.php

Media Activism

About | Contact | Subscribe | Calendar | Publish | Print | Donate

Regions
north coast
central valley
north bay
east bay
south bay
san francisco
peninsula
santa cruz
california
us
international

Topics
animal lib
anti-war
arts + action
drug war
education
en español
environment
global justice
government
health/housing
immigrant
media
labor
lgbti / queer
police state
racial justice
womyn

International
americas
haiti
iraq
palestine
afghanistan

More
make media
get involved
calendar
gallery
archives
chat
links

Search

printable version - fluid-width version

Indymedia

SF Bay Area Indymedia Editorial Policy
by SF Bay Area IMC Web Collective (sfbay-web [at] lists.indymedia.org)
Sunday Aug 4th, 2002 2:22 AM

After months of discussion and debate, the SF Bay Area Indymedia Web Collective has consented upon the following editorial policy. Your thoughts, comments and suggestions are as always welcome. Updated: January 2004.

Fundamentals

The SF Bay Area IMC newswire operates on the principle of Open Publishing, an element essential to the global IMC network. Simply put, Open Publishing is to news and information what open source code is to software. In practice, the Open Publishing newswire allows anyone to instantaneously self-publish their work on http://bayarea.indymedia.org, a web site accessible from around the world.

People are encouraged to "become the media," to use their own skills and abilities of observation, writing, and creativity in posting text, analysis, videos, audio clips, photos and artwork directly to the website. The post is then viewable at the top of the Breaking newswire, and will move down the list as more people post news.

The use of, and belief in, Open Publishing rests on several central assumptions:

- People who post to the newswire will present their information in a thorough, honest, and accurate manner.
- Readers are intelligent and aware, skeptical and inquisitive of the posts they read and videos they watch, and are able to distinguish for themselves what is content of value and what is not.
- The means to an end is as important as the end itself.

Our Philosophy and Your Responsibility

We hide and classify in a way that we think helps promote the usefulness of the site. If you have any suggestions on how we could make the site more useful (e.g. by hiding more or less things) we are open to hear your suggestions.

Please be civil in your posts; if an editor sees a flamewar starting that seems to be overly personal or to just contain insults, the comments may be hidden. We want to keep this site a friendly place for people to post news and discuss issues and our goal is to facilitate that. Feel free to email us any suggestions. This site is here to serve your needs and we would love to hear from you.

Administration Overview

The editorial collective is reponsible for updating and maintaining the various "center-column" feature pages and the "right-column" newswires. While the center columns are compiled and edited by the editorial collective, the right-hand, open-publishing newswire is designated as an open space for publication of news, media, and commentary by SF Bay Area IMC reporters, participants, and readers.

Classifying

The newswire is divided into three separate sections:

SF Bay Area Indymedia Editorial Policy (continued)

- Local News: This section contains posts that are substantially local in nature, and that the editorial collective reasonably believes to be accurate and newsworthy stories fitted for syndication.
- Global News: This section contains posts that are not locally focused, and that the editorial collective reasonably believes to be accurate and newsworthy stories fitted for syndication.
- Other/Breaking News (Open Publishing Newswire): This section is where a post will appear immediately after being published. Items that remain in this category will have been deemed unworthy of promotion to any of the above wires. Items targeted to remain here include, but are not limited to, articles which are not news stories, likely or factually inaccurate stories, unverified stories, postings of very poor writing quality, repostings of corporate media articles, and bulletin board type posts.

The process for the classification of a posting is quite simple: Any participant in the editorial collective may do so based upon her/his understanding of the SF Bay Area IMC Principles of Unity, this policy, and her/his personal judgement. Editors will not promote (syndicate) articles which could undermine the newswire service, e.g., articles containing (not reporting) hate speech, etc. A classification of a post is contestable and subject to review by members of the editorial collective. Challenges must be based on our Principles of Unity.

Linking and Editing

Editors may link related posts together in order to occupy less space on the newswire. Editors may also make typographical, spelling or grammar corrections and formatting improvements and may remove extraneous, false, illegal (threatening, libelous, etc.), or abusive (pornographic, etc.) material and hate speech, and particularly with regards to syndicated articles, are encouraged to do so. As appropriate, explanation of any modification may be inserted.

At any time another Editorial Collective member may dispute the editing of a post or comment, based on our Principles of Unity or this policy.

Hiding

SF Bay Area IMC is founded on the principle of open publishing. Reality dictates that the editorial collective will at times decide to hide posts and comments. This is not a decision that is taken lightly, however, and the editorial collective does its best refrain from hiding. Our vision for the function of the newswire, and the general framework in which all decisions to hide will be made, are as follows:

- The newswire is intended to be a community media resource, a space free from spam and abuse in general; and
- That space will not contribute to the oppression of traditionally oppressed and marginalized groups.

Members of the Editorial Collective are permitted to hide posts or comments as long as that person's decision is based on at least one of the following three points:

- The post or comment constitutes abuse of the newswire (see note below);
- The post or comment undermines the Principles of Unity of the SF Bay Area IMC; e.g., right-wing propaganda or hate speech; or
- The post or comment constitutes a spam attack (see below) on the newswire.

The editorial collective may remove copyrighted material on request of the copyright owner. At any time another Editorial Collective member may dispute the hiding of a post or comment, based on our Principles of Unity or this policy.

Comments, questions, and feedback regarding this policy are highly encouraged. Please write us at sfbay-web@lists.indymedia.org.

Comments

Commenting on posts is an essential feature to the democratic nature of Indymedia. It allows points to be refuted, ideas to be expounded upon, arguments to be had, and discussions to be hashed out. If you disagree with the content of a particular post that someone has posted or can provide further relevant information, you can say so by commenting via the "add your own comments" link at the bottom of each post.

(continued)

The process for hiding and editing comments will be the same as that for posts. Special care will be taken to not stifle rational debate and dialogue. To be clear, flame wars are not generally considered debate and/or dialogue, while cogent arguments and analyses are.

Spam Attacks

A spam attack is defined as a pattern of abuse of the newswire by a particular poster or posters. If the editorial collective reaches consensus (at a meeting or on the mailing list) that an individual is launching a spam attack on the SF Bay Area IMC newswire, the spammer's posts and/or comments may be hidden from the newswire by a member of the editorial collective. Alternately, the posts may be linked together so as to occupy only one spot on the newswire.

Each instance of recognized spam will be considered individually. In cases of recognized spam, editorial collective members are empowered to immediately hide the post or comment.

Contact

Contact the SF Bay Area IMC editorial collective if you have any questions or comments: sfbay-web@lists.indymedia.org.

Notes

As of the latest update of this document, the current Principles of Unity can be found here: http://bayarea.indymedia.org/news/2003/12/1664397.php

The phrase "abuse of the newswire" is necessarily vague. Editorial collective participants each have different conceptions of what this means, so each proposal to hide/edit posts or comments will be taken on a case-by-case basis.

The term "post" refers to anything that is self-published by a reader/participant and which appears on the newswire in the right hand column of the front page and feature pages.

This document, as are all SF Bay Area IMC policies, is constantly up for review and debate. The editorial collective invites suggestions, comments, criticisms and ideas to improve this editorial policy.

Add Your Comments

Appendix L: OMNI Membership Registration

Retrived from http://english.ohmynews.com/member/member_step1.asp

Membership Registration Agreement

Article 1: General Rules

Section 1: Purpose

1. The purpose of this agreement is to define all issues relating to the conditions and procedures of use of all Services ("services" defined as all contents including news

articles, pictures, images, illustrations, music files, video files, and other formats and diverse services) between the customer (herein referred to as "Member") and OhmyNews, and to define all other necessary particulars.

Section 2: Effectuation and Amendments

1. Services are provided on condition that the Member accepts this Agreement without changes. Clicking "Agree" means the Member accepts this Agreement.

2. This Agreement takes effect when it is published online. OhmyNews may make amendments at its discretion as circumstances necessitate, and any such changes take effect by being posted on the service page or upon notification to the Member through other means.

3. The Member may choose to stop using Services and withdraw Membership if he does not agree to amendments to this Agreement. The Member is assumed to have agreed to changes if he continues to use Services after amendments have been made to this Agreement.

Section 3: Rules Not Included in This Agreement

1. Issues not defined in this Agreement are defined by the related laws of the Republic of Korea where applicable.

2. Services not defined by this agreement will require Member acceptance to (a) separate agreement(s).

Article 2: Membership Registration and Use of Services

Section 1: The Establishment of a Use Contract

1. A Use Contract is established upon OhmyNews' acceptance of the user's application for use and the user's acceptance of the Agreement.

2. A person desiring to register as a Member and use Services must provide a pre-determined amount of personal information. The personal information provided by the user is thoroughly protected in accordance with the Republic of Korea's Personal Information Protection Policy.

3. Member information provided by the Member at registration is considered genuine. Members who do not provide genuine information may not receive legal protection.

4. Persons under the age of 14 may become Members with the approval of a legal guardian, in accordance with the related laws.

1) Should a person under the age of 14 desire to accept the Agreement, his legal guardian must provide his legal name, Resident Registration Number, and contact information to be approved by OhmyNews, having overseen the process of Membership application by the person under the age of 14.

2) OhmyNews reserves the right to require additional confirmation of the legal guardian's consent by telephone, facsimile, postal mail, email, or other means, and in some cases may seek other reasonable methods of confirmation that the legal guardian has truly consented.

3) OhmyNews approves applications for Membership by persons under the age of 14 after confirmation of the consent of the person's legal guardian.

4) The legal guardian must be careful not to allow a situation where the person under 14 learns of the legal guardian's Resident Registration Number and might manipulate use of the Resident Registration Number, as such information is an important means of confirmation of the legal guardian's consent.

5) The legal guardian may retract consent at any time, but does not gain exemption from responsibility for the Member's use of Services during the period during which the legal guardian provided consent.

5. Persons residing overseas and non-Korean citizens residing in Korea and who therefore lack a Resident Registration Number must provide documented proof of identity via facsimile or file attachment in order to complete the Membership application process. Such applicants must provide that documentation within one month of applying in order to be recognized as a Member.

Section 2: Approval of Application

1. OhmyNews approves applications for use of services when the Member has stated all information accurately. OhmyNews does not approve applications in circumstances falling under "Reasons for Rejecting Application for Membership."

2. Reasons for Rejecting Application for Membership

1) The use of a name that is not the legal name of the applicant.

2) The use of a Resident Registration Number that is not that of the applicant.

3) The submission of false information at time of application.

4) Application with intent to harm good morals and manners or social peace and order.

5) Failure to meet other conditions for application as defined by OhmyNews.

Section 3: Limits to Use of Services

1. In principle Services may be used 24 hours a day every day of the year, without regard to legal holidays but with exception to special instances where OhmyNews operational or technical circumstances incur momentary suspension of Services.

2. Some Services provided by OhmyNews require Member registration and use with a username and password.

Section 4: Benefits of Membership

1. Membership is free of charge.

2. The Member is automatically invited to participate in various events and programs organized for Members by OhmyNews. OhmyNews assumes the Member agrees to abide by all rights and duties relating to participation in such events and programs at the time of Membership application.

Article 3: Termination of Contract and Restrictions on Use of Services

Section 1: Termination of Contract and Prohibitions on Use of Services

1. The Member may discuss complaints about the handling of Member information on bulletin boards such as the open bulletin board for each Service.

2. A Member seeking to terminate the Service contract must do so himself by applying for termination on the personal information management page.

3. A Member who has terminated Membership may re-register for Membership within 3 months under the same username, as the Member's username will be preserved for that period. After three months the Member must re-register under a different username.

4. OhmyNews may terminate a Member's contract or suspend use of Services for a set period without prior notification in any of the following instances.

1) Behavior that is contrary to public order or good morals and manners.

2) Criminal behavior.

3) Planning or acting on plans to use Services with the goal of harming the national or public interest.

4) Use of someone else's username and password.

5) Defamation of character or behavior injurious to another individual.

6) Registering as a Member twice under different usernames.

7) Actions hampering the positive use of Services, such as deliberate harm to Services.

8) Behavior that violates the pertaining laws or conditions of use as defined by OhmyNews.

Section 2: Procedures in Prohibiting Use

1. When OhmyNews seeks to restrict use by a Member the Member or his representative will be informed via email or telephone of the reason, when the time restriction is to begin and period of restriction of use. In urgent cases OhmyNews may suspend membership without notification.

Article 4: Responsibility

Section 1: OhmyNews' Obligations

1. OhmyNews will make Services available to Members, barring special circumstances.

2. OhmyNews is obligated to provide Services in a continuous and stable manner in accordance with this Agreement, and to restore Services when they are discontinued for unavoidable reasons without delay. However, in cases of natural calamity, states of emergency, and other unforeseen events OhmyNews may temporarily suspend Services.

3. OhmyNews will deal immediately with views and complaints presented by the Member when determined to be legitimate.

4. OhmyNews will not leak or distribute the Member's personal information as learned from the Membership registration process to third parties without the Member's consent. Exceptions include when a state agency demands such information in accordance with the Republic of Korea's "Basic Law on Electronic Communication," when such information is demanded as part of a criminal investigation or by the Republic of Korea's "Information and Communication Ethics Committee," OhmyNews will disclose the Member's personal information when the request is consistent with the procedures required by the pertinent laws.

5. OhmyNews may share Member information with sites with which OhmyNews has signed cooperative agreements in order to further the ease of use of the OhmyNews site and OhmyNews may transmit a cookie to the Member's computer for that purpose.

6. OhmyNews may use all or part of the Member's information for statistical purposes relating to business operations, within the limits outlined in "5" above.

Section 2: Obligations of the Member

1. All responsibility regarding the Member's username and password lies with the Member.

2. The Member may not transfer or give his username to another individual.

3. The Member must inform OhmyNews by email or other method of any wrongful use of his username.

4. The Member must abide by this Agreement and the related laws of the Republic of Korea as they apply.

Article 5: Posted Material

Section 1: The Member's Posted Material

1. OhmyNews may delete material posted by the Member without prior notification in the following instances.

1) If the Member's material damages, abuses, appropriates, threatens, or is harassment of another individual's privacy, rights to announce pertinent information, or other legal rights.

2) If the Member's material prints, mails, posts, distributes, or disseminates titles, names, material, or data that is illegal, inappropriate, profane, libelous, infringing, pornographic, or vulgar.

3) If the Member uploads files that are software of other material protected by the Republic of Korea's "Intellectual Ownership Law." Exceptions are when the Member maintains ownership or managerial rights over the material or has obtained consent regarding its use.

4) If the Member uploads files that contain viruses or are otherwise contaminated and as such can harm computers, or uploads similarly harmful software or programs.

5) If the Member advertises or sells products or services with commercial intent.

6) If the Member engages in data collection, contests, pyramid sales activities, or sends "letters of luck" (designed to be sent to large numbers of people that encourage further circulation).

7) If the Member downloads material he knows or reasonably can be believed to have known was posted by another site user and as such cannot be lawfully circulated.

8) If the Member removes material that consists of software or other material that has the author's name, legal or other appropriate information, trademark, source, or other descriptions and markings falsified or removed.

9) If the Member limits or prohibits another Member from using or enjoying Services.

10) If the Member posts material that includes pornographic content harmful to public order or good morals and manners, content that either promotes or attacks a specific religion, or other improper material such as content that incites regional sentiments.

Section 2: Copyright

The rights and responsibilities regarding general posted material lies with the Member who posts the material.

Section 3: OhmyNews' Responsibility for Posted Material

1. OhmyNews is not obligated to inspect all posted material. However, OhmyNews reserves the right to disclose information pertaining to the material in order to satisfy legal or regulatory requirements or legal government requests, and to refuse to edit or post material or information either partially or entirely, completely at the discretion of OhmyNews.

2. All Services regarding posted material is public communication and not private, and the Member recognizes that material he posts may be read by other individuals without his knowledge. The Member must be careful about information through which readers might be able to identify individuals or their children.

3. OhmyNews reserves the right to end the Member's access to all or part of bulletin boards for any reason and without notification.

4. OhmyNews clearly denies all forms of responsibility for posted material and responsibility incurred by the Member's use of OhmyNews bulletin board Services.

Article 6: The Provision of Information and Advertisements

1. The Member's personal information will be thoroughly protected, and it may be shared in accordance with Article 4, Section 1, Item 5.

2. OhmyNews may transmit needed information to the Member via electronic or postal mail. The Member may refuse to receive information by choosing that option in the course of Membership registration or by making changes in his Membership information.

3. OhmyNews may provide Members with commercial advertisements via email at the request of advertisers and based on the judgment of OhmyNews.

Article 7: General Matters

1. This Agreement is governed by the applicable laws of the Republic of Korea. The Member agrees that any dispute arising from use of Services or any other related dispute falls entirely under the jurisdiction of the court with jurisdiction over OhmyNews. The use of the OhmyNews site is not permitted in areas that do not recognize the legal validity of this Agreement. Furthermore, the Member agrees that the Korean language original of this Agreement takes legal precedence over the English language version in any and all legal disputes.

2. The Member agrees that no joint venture, partnership, employment, or representation exists between the Member and OhmyNews as a result of the use of the OhmyNews site. OhmyNews is governed by existing laws and legal procedures in the course of implementing this Agreement. No part of this Agreement harms OhmyNews' right to abide by government, judicial, or law enforcement authority request or demand in relation to information gathered or provided by OhmyNews in the course of providing or the use of Services.

3. When the applicable laws render invalid or inexecutable any provision or provisions of this Agreement, including the aforementioned denial of responsibility the provision or provisions so legally rendered invalid or inexecutable will be replaced by (a) valid and executable provision or provision(s) that are as consistent as possible with the original intent of the provision or provisions determined, in any way, to be legally invalid or inexecutable.

(Additional Clauses)
The original Korean language version of this Agreement took effect on September 1, 2003 and replaced the previous Agreement. Persons who registered as Members prior to the effectuation of this Agreement are nevertheless governed by this Agreement.

Appendix M: The Code of Ethics of OMNI

Retrieved from http://english.ohmynews.com/reporter_room/qa_board/
qaboard_list.asp?page=1&board=freeboard

Q2.When writing for OhmyNews, what principles should we keep in mind?

Since the very start of OhmyNews back in February 2000, all citizen reporters have been required to abide by a strict Code of Ethics. They are as follows:

OhmyNews Reporter's Code of Ethics

1. The citizen reporter must work in the spirit that "all citizens are reporters," and plainly identify himself as a citizen reporter while covering stories.

2. The citizen reporter does not spread false information. He does not write articles based on groundless assumptions or predictions.

3. The citizen reporter does not use abusive, vulgar, or otherwise offensive language constituting a personal attack.

4. The citizen reporter does not damage the reputation of others by composing articles that infringe on personal privacy.

5. The citizen reporter uses legitimate methods to gather information, and clearly informs his sources of the intention to cover a story.

6. The citizen reporter does not use his position for unjust gain, or otherwise seek personal profit.

7. The citizen reporter does not exaggerate or distort facts on behalf of himself or any organization to which he belongs.

8. The citizen reporter apologizes fully and promptly for coverage that is wrong or otherwise inappropriate.

OhmyNews Citizen Reporter's Agreement

1. I recognize the editorial authority of OhmyNews' in-house editing staff.

2. I will share all information about each of my articles with the OhmyNews editing staff.

3. I will not produce name cards stating that I am a citizen reporter of OhmyNews.

4. When an article I submit has or will be simultaneously submitted in another medium, I will clearly state this fact to the editorial staff.

5. I will accurately reveal the sources of all quotations of text.

6. Citizen reporters who work in the field of public relations or marketing will disclose this fact to their readers.

7. Legal responsibility for acts of plagiarism or unauthorized use of material lies entirely with the citizen reporter.

8. Legal responsibility for defamation in articles lie entirely with the citizen reporter.