Electric media in rural development: Individual freedoms to choose versus politics of power and control.

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2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Yet paternalism and condescension toward villagers was the project's greatest liability. (...) It was assumed that villagers themselves had nothing to contribute to the battle against poverty and could only be rescued by the teachings of a team endowed by the university with the latest Western expertise. Ana summed up the project's mission: 'to change the backward habits that keep them underdeveloped' (Starn, 1999: 197/198, bolds added)

2.1 DEFINING SOCIAL CHANGE

I am aware that this quote, from Orin Starn's book Nightwatch, defines development in a grotesquely condescending way. However, early development discourse is replete with more politically correct wordings of the same opinion. In his book on development discourse over the years, Arturo Escobar quotes from a 1950s UN document on development, which states that 'rapid economic progress is impossible without painful adjustments' and to that purpose 'ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate, bonds of cast, creed and race have to burst; and large numbers of persons who cannot keep up with progress have to have their expectations of a comfortable life frustrated' (UN, Department of Social and Economic Affairs, quoted in: Escobar, 1995: 4). More recent development discourse no longer contains such harsh statements, but the form and content of development are still mostly discussed from the perspectives of outsiders. Escobar refers to the French philosopher Michel Foucault when he points out that approaches to development are typically not based on the perceptions of people in developing countries, but predominantly on representations by Western, and Western educated, professionals and researchers of (development) realities in developing countries. According to Escobar, those representations are subsequently used to define development paradigms and policies, which do not include involvement by people in rural areas in decision-making processes. He also questions the essence of what development has become to mean: Western style economic and technological progress (Escobar, 1995: 5 – 20). Although, in my opinion, Escobar takes his point to the extreme, I agree with him that the form, content and nature of development should be determined by its ultimate beneficiaries. The term development implicates a process of change, but which processes and what type of change?

I conceive of development as defined by the broad concept of social change, which can refer to either structural changes in society at large, or changes in the lives of individual people. Kerkvliet and Porter define social change in rural areas as rural transformation. They refer to Barrington Moore, who explains transformations of rural societies in terms of three social coordination mechanisms: resource distribution, production modes and decision-making processes (Kerkvliet and Porter, 1995: 1/2). Moore addresses a shift in answers to questions on what modes of production and distribution prevail and who decides on the selection of the modes. In my opinion, his approach is slightly reminiscent of structural approaches, which were based on economic perspectives, and Moore partially neglects the perspective of individual people in rural areas. However, with his analytical concept, he addresses social change in society at large in a useful way for this dissertation and I use his concept in the case studies of chapters eight, nine and ten to analyze rural society and development. Nevertheless, I am mostly interested in social change at the level of individual people, as opposed to structural social change at societal level. I do not intend to ignore structural social change, but I conceive of such change as being the context of social change at individual levels. I also acknowledge the interdependency between structural change in society and social change at individual levels.

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1 Escobar claims that Foucault’s ‘work on the dynamics of discourse and power in the representation of social reality, in particular, has been instrumental in unveiling the mechanisms by which a certain order of discourse produces permissible modes of being and thinking while disqualifying and even making others impossible’ (Escobar, 1995: 5).

2 In line with the current theoretical position in sociology, I do not conceive of social change as unambiguously positive. Therefore, I also do not necessarily conceive of development as political, social or economic progress with positive connotations. The changes in the lives of individual people, to which I refer in this dissertation, concern increases in their individual political, social and economic freedoms, which I anticipate to increase their capability to choose alternative lifestyles. Together with Amartya Sen, I conceive of an increased individual freedom to choose as a positive social change in the lives of individual people.
levels, but, in my opinion, the general conduciveness of a society to increase individual freedoms is more relevant to rural development. In the case study countries, increased individual freedoms implicitly require structural social change, but my perspective is that of the individual. Therefore, I have used Amartya Sen's work on development as the main inspirational source of my theoretical argumentation.

Sen is a prolific writer on many subjects, but I am interested in his capability concept, as well as in his conception of development as freedom. Sen addresses development from the perspective of individual people by stressing the influence of physical and mental characteristics of individuals on their freedom to choose different lifestyles. He defines lifestyles as bundles of functionings, claims that functionings are 'constitutive of a person's being' and defines capabilities as the freedoms to choose or achieve alternative lifestyles. According to Sen, relevant functionings are 'being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity', but also 'being happy, having self-respect, taking part in community life, and so on' (Sen, 1992: 39). He does not ignore the relation between individuals and their peers, nor with society at large, but states that under similar external conditions the internal characteristics of a person influence her actual freedom to choose. Sen conceives of development as freedom and identifies five instrumental freedoms: political freedom, social opportunities, economic facilities, transparency guarantees and protective security (Sen, 1999: 38 - 40). In his opinion, the role of the State in development must be to guarantee and safeguard every individual's real and equal opportunities to enjoy those freedoms. He emphasizes a need for democracy to realize development as freedom, but states that democracy is more than a presence of formal democratic institutions. In his opinion, it is important that institutions function in a way which supports an increased freedom to choose. Sen interprets democracy as a democratic setting. In my opinion, a democratic setting contains both formal democratic institutions and democratic practices. I agree on the need for a well-functioning democracy through democratic institutions, but also stress the need to deepen and widen democratic practices. In his book on the political left in Chile and Peru, Kenneth Roberts discusses the depth and scope of democratic practices, which refer to the degree of popular participation and the domains in society to which democratic practices are applied (Roberts, 1998: 25 - 41).

In my argumentation, I will conceive of development as social change from the perspective of individuals, whereby I conceive of social change as:

*a positive change in individual freedoms to choose different lifestyles in a context of

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3 The concept of freedom has many interpretations, but in this dissertation I will restrict myself to the two interpretations Friedrich Hayek loosely defines in his book *The Road to Serfdom*. According to Hayek, the liberal tradition of the nineteenth century defined freedom as 'freedom from coercion, freedom from the arbitrary power of other men, release from the ties which left the individual no choice but obedience'. Hayek contrasts that liberal interpretation with his perception of socialism's freedom as the 'freedom from necessity, release from the compulsion of the circumstances which inevitably limit the range of choice of all of us, although for some very much more than for others' (Hayek, 1994: 29/30). In Hayek's opinion, the latter interpretation of freedom is 'of course, merely another name for power or wealth' (Hayek, 1994: 30). At present, Hayek's interpretation of socialism does no longer exist in its purest form, but countries like Cuba, North-Korea and Vietnam are close approximates. However, Hayek's argumentation in favor of liberalism's freedom and against freedom in the socialist version, remains relevant because of its fundamental priority for individual freedom over State interference. In anticipition of the theoretical argumentation in chapter three, I will interpret individual freedom for now as a combination of *freedom from coercion or interference by the State and freedom to act and choose as an independent individual*, whereby the latter refers to Sen's interpretation of freedom and both apply to the political, social and economic domains of society. In chapter three, some theoretical aspects of the concepts of freedom, liberty, and equality have been elaborated for the purpose of my conception of development, as well as the means and ends of freedom in Sen's development as freedom.

4 A *state* can be referred to as 'a great many persons generally occupying a given territory, among whom the will of the majority or of an ascertainable class of persons prevails against anyone who opposes that will' (Garner, 1998: 487). However, in this dissertation I will use this general definition to refer to a nation-state. In a legal context under international law a state is defined as 'an entity that has a defined territory and a permanent population, under the control of its own government, and that engages in, or has the capacity to engage in, formal relations with other such entities' (Hemkin, Pugh, Schachter and Smit, 1993: 242). This definition states that (representative) government is a part of the (nation-)state, albeit the controlling part. In the text of this dissertation I will capitalize *state* when I refer to (representative) government, government institutions, government affiliated and related agencies as one political and administrative entity, otherwise I will use lower case, or nation-state. I will use government when I refer to the administrative and policy-making units, which are (in)directly accountable to an electorate. In case I refer to a single element of the State, or when it is relevant in the context to make a distinction between the different elements that make up a State, I will use the terms government, government related and government affiliated.
In my perception, structural social change by and large coincides with Roberts’ conception of deepened and widened democratic practices, which create a democratic setting conducive to social change.

2.2 RESEARCH PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY
Chapter one has provided the justification of the research subject, the role of electronic media in rural development in developing countries. In section 2.1, I have outlined my conception of social change and in this section I elaborate on the research design by addressing the following issues:

- research questions and research unit;
- basic assumptions;
- qualitative research; and
- data sources and interview formats.

To some extent, the following paragraphs elaborate on the research justification of chapter one.

Main research question, secondary research questions and research unit
Combining the justification of chapter one and the conception of social change of section 2.1 leads to the following version of the main research question which the PhD research intends to address:

**Can electronic media facilitate social change in rural areas in developing countries?**

In chapter one, two types of contributions by electronic media to rural development have been identified, namely: a social actor role and electronically mediated information dissemination. The conception of social change of section 2.1 implicates that the research focuses on contributions by electronic media which lead to increased individual political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities. As a result, the main research question, in full, is defined as follows:

**Can electronic media, by electronically mediating information and through fulfilling a social actor role, facilitate increases in individual political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities of people in rural areas of developing countries, enabling those people to increase their capabilities to choose different lifestyles?**

The introduction addresses an interdependency between individuals and society and my conception of social change acknowledges that dependency by stressing the influence of socio-political and economic contexts on the extent to which electronic media can facilitate rural development. Based on that understanding, and the formulation of the main research questions, I have defined the following secondary research questions:

- which elements of socio-political and economic contexts of nation-states appear to be immediately relevant to the role of electronic media in rural development;
- to what degree do elements of socio-political and economic contexts define specific roles for electronic media in rural development and do they stimulate or discourage such roles for electronic media;
- which electronic media currently contribute to information dissemination in rural areas and which conditions facilitate, enhance or hamper that contribution;
- which electronic media currently contribute to rural development in a social actor role and which conditions facilitate, enhance or hamper that contribution;
- which information traffic patterns can be identified in the process of information dissemination in rural development and do they indicate a specific orientation towards rural development;
- does the intrinsic level of interactivity of an electronic medium influence its contribution to information dissemination in rural areas or its role in rural development; and
- does the socio-political and economic context of the nation-state influence whether electronic media can play a social actor role?

The research questions geographically define the research unit as rural areas in developing countries.

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5 In the remainder of the dissertation I will refer to this conception of structural and individual social change with the general term *social change*, without repeatedly elaborating on the details of the conceptions.
The relevant research objects are people and organizations, electronic media and other stakeholders in rural development, in particular those stakeholders relevant for information dissemination processes. The socio-political and economic context of a nation-state provides the context for the research unit.

**Basic assumptions**

In order to keep my research up-to-date with recent developments, I decided against organizing my research along the lines of a clearly phased, chronological structure with well-defined objectives for each phase, and each step within a phase. Instead, I have used a set of four basic assumptions as a guiding principle determining the form, content and nature of the research activities in the different stages and defining the structure of the dissertation. The following four basic assumptions are based on the main and secondary research questions of the previous paragraph:

- in order to have the poorest people, i.e., the people living in remote rural areas of developing countries, benefit from development efforts, development processes and their organizational structures have to be decentralized, participatory and predominantly bottom-up in orientation;
- the political and administrative system of a nation-state, its general and rural development policy and orientation, as well as the structure of its economy, define the form and content of autonomous spheres for development processes, and particularly the role of electronic media in those processes;
- electronic media with a relatively low degree of interactivity can at best play a supportive role in development processes through information provision, but are more likely to enforce existing centralized information and communication (I&C) power structures; and
- electronic media with a relatively high degree of interactivity are best suited to facilitate and enhance information dissemination (one- and two-way information flows) bypassing existing information and communication (I&C) power structures and supporting decentralized, participatory development as social change, or freedom of choice.

The first two assumptions address the socio-political and economic context of rural areas in developing countries. The nation-state does not only provide the context for development in rural regions, but those regions are themselves part of that context since they represent one or more levels of the administrative structure of the nation-state. To a large extent, the national context determines what role electronic media can play in rural development. I focus on social change as an increase in individual freedoms and, therefore, I conceive of structural social change as providing the political, social and economic conditions for such social change. In my opinion, structural social change is the indirect consequence of allowing people to develop themselves in autonomous development spheres of self-empowerment. This interpretation of the first two basic assumptions is at heart of the first part, chapters three and four, of the theoretical argumentation.

The second set of two assumptions relates to the first set in the sense that I conceive of the role of electronic media in rural development from the perspective of individual people. In my opinion, the key characteristic of electronic media is interactivity and that concept hinges on the issue of control, or power, over the form, content and nature of information flows and over storage of information as data. Low levels of interactivity point at information provision, or one-way information flows, from places of plenty to places of scarcity. I interpret such information flows as top-down information provision with little or no participation by the receivers. On the other hand, I identify high levels of interactivity with information exchange, or two-way flows of information between those who require information and those who are willing to provide that information. Characteristic of information exchanges is that its senders and receivers can change roles. In that sense, the possibility for two-way information flows can support a social actor role of electronic media by creating public opinion forums and by mobilizing people. Information exchange processes are driven by real demand for, rather than by the mere availability of, information. Another link with the first two basic assumptions is that free information exchanges require a conducive socio-political and economic context. I have used this interpretation of the second set of basic assumptions as the basis for the second part of my theoretical argumentation, chapters five and six.
Qualitative research

Based on the assumption that socio-political and economic contexts of nation-states are important factors in how and under what conditions electronic media can successfully be applied to facilitate rural development and which combinations of electronic media are most suited to facilitate information dissemination within my conception of development, I decided to compare three case study countries. I opted for case material from three different developing countries to illustrate my assumption. The three countries were selected on the basis of their different democratic deficits (section 1.2). Although the democratic deficit refers to more than formal democratic institutions, for my initial selection I only used the presence of formal democratic institutions as a selection criterion. Initially, Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru could be placed on a continuum with largely similar democratic deficit intervals between Vietnam and Indonesia and between Indonesia and Peru. However, during the research, the interval between Peru and Indonesia decreased and the one between Indonesia and Vietnam increased. Nevertheless, differences between the countries still exist and the objective of the selection was to achieve a level of diversity in socio-political and economic contexts, rather than selecting countries representative of larger groups of countries with similar democratic deficits.

In my opinion, the broad approach of the research, the number of case study countries and the available time for field research in each of the three case countries (two months) made only a qualitative approach feasible. Furthermore, I use my case study material to illustrate and redefine my assumptions, rather than to validate or reject them. My main research objective is to suggest a correlation between the conduciveness of a nation-state to rural development as social change, the degree of interactivity of electronic media and the ways in which electronic media are used. In that sense, the relevance of the research is more theoretical than practical, although I expect the outcome of the research to provide input to practical discussions as well. Finally, in my opinion, the dynamics of the research subject matter necessitated an iterative process, which disqualified the use of a quantitative approach. Due to limited field research time, a quantitative research would have increased the risk of using inaccurate data. Characteristics of a qualitative research process include its cyclical and iterative nature, which Baarda, De Goede and Teunissen interpret as a continuous (iterative) return to earlier sequences of stages (cyclical) (Baarda, De Goede and Teunissen, 1995).

Data sources and interview formats

Using the classification of Baarda, De Goede and Teunissen, I decided on the data sources to use for my field research. These three authors distinguish between (i) participatory observation, (ii) interviews (open and topic oriented) and (iii) collecting relevant documents (Baarda, De Goede and Teunissen, 1995). My selection of Vietnam and Indonesia as case study countries made the use of participatory observation impossible because of the language barrier. That same language barrier restricted the people available for interview selection in all countries to those able to communicate in English, Spanish, French (Vietnam) or Dutch (Indonesia). Similar restrictions applied to documents, but with the help of translators and interpreters access was obtained to documents in native tongues and to native speakers as well. However, the thus acquired field data had to be treated cautiously, since the reliability of the translation could not be assessed. Although I ruled out participatory observation, I did observe the case study countries through extensive travelling during the field research. In Indonesia, I limited my travels to Java, but in Vietnam and Peru I traveled throughout the country. Nevertheless, my main field data sources were interviews (open and topic-oriented)\(^6\), official documents, mass media and recent literature on all three countries. This method of data-collection has been labeled methodical data-triangulation, which refers to using multiple types of data sources and information and tends to increase the validity of the perception of the research subject and units (ibid, 1995).

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\(^6\) During the field research periods, I used two types of open, topic-oriented interviews: partially structured interviews and expert-interviews. The choice depended on the level of anticipated relevant expertise of the respondent. A partially structured interview is restricted to a range of topics, which has been defined before the interview, whereas an expert-interview is a more interactive exchange of information on relevant fields of expertise or knowledge of the respondent (Baarda, De Goede and Teunissen, 1995).
2.3 THEORETICAL ARGUMENTATION

Chapters three through six contain my theoretical argumentation, which addresses two central concepts and consists of four main topics, each discussed in one of the chapters. In order to provide a context for reading and interpreting the theoretical argumentation, I will elaborate my theoretical positions on the four topics in the individual chapters. The central concepts of conduciveness to social change and interactivity are discussed in chapters five and six, respectively. Apart from the two central concepts the following topics are discussed in chapters three to six:

- a conception of development;
- a referential policy framework;
- democratic institutions and practices and Sen’s political, social and economic freedoms; and
- the impact of the I&C power structure on information provision and exchange through electronic media in rural development.

The issues are interrelated aspects of the research subject and are expected to provide an analytical insight into the general conditions, obstacles and opportunities for the use of electronic media in rural areas. Unfortunately, in development discourse the concept of development itself is ambiguous and interpreted in different ways. Thus, the objective of the first part of my theoretical argumentation, chapter three, is to define my personal conception of development. Another characteristic feature of development discourse is the academic discussion on an interpretation of the concept of development, which tends to evolve into a development paradigm, or a set of development theories. However, in my opinion, the nature of my conception of development is incompatible with the existing paradigms. For that reason, chapter four discusses outlines of a referential policy framework based on my conception of development.

A conception of development

Chapter three provides my opinion on development from the perspective of the anticipated beneficiaries. My theoretical position is that rationales, means and objectives of development should be determined by people in rural areas. My position is slightly libertarian, since, in principle, I conceive of development as an autonomous, people-initiated and -sustained process, without interference from the State, donors or other non-local institutions and organizations. However, I do not support the laissez-faire economic perspectives, which are often associated with libertarian, and utilitarian, political philosophies. Instead, I conceive of the role of the State and development organizations as creating necessary political, social and economic conditions for autonomous development spheres and self-empowerment of people in all domains of their lives. Therefore, I emphasize the importance of a just nature of basic arrangements in society as a whole and of deepened and widened democratic practices in the socio-political domain. In my opinion, only the people in rural areas can decide whether they want development, when they want development and how that development should subsequently unfold. Therefore, development activities by outsiders should be directed at creating conditions for people in rural areas to freely make their own decisions and aimed at effectively providing them with political, social and economic opportunities to achieve the objectives of their decisions. An important implication of this theoretical position is that I envisage a shift in sovereignty and autonomy over people from the State to the people. I conceive of a declining importance of sovereignty of the State over its citizens as an important condition for rural development.

A referential policy framework

Development discourse addresses conversions from theories to policy frameworks with paradigms. In my opinion, however, paradigms mainly serve the purpose of theoretical constructions around which an academic discourse on a specific subject evolves, in this case development. I conceive of paradigms as separate discourses from policy formulation and not as linked theoretical foundations, or starting points for policies. However, paradigms could provide useful insights for policy formulation. In my opinion, policies would have to facilitate organic processes, rather than to provide prescriptive
guidelines.

In an essay on alternative development, Nederveen Pieterse claims that policy frameworks are more relevant than paradigms and he defines paradigms as explanatory frameworks of development. He also claims that the use of paradigms in social science is in itself questionable, which may well render a discussion on the need for a development paradigm futile (Nederveen Pieterse, 1998). I tend to agree with this point of view, but before I elaborate on my theoretical position on paradigms I will examine definitions of paradigms. The Oxford Companion to the English Language (1992) asserts that, in general, a paradigm is ‘a model or stereotype, as in the phrase a paradigm case, a typical specimen of something’ and in ‘social science, a paradigm is an overriding viewpoint that shapes ideas and actions within a particular field or group’. The former highlights the prescriptive nature of paradigms, but an emphasis on models is present in both descriptions. In a study on the significance of paradigms for physical scientists, Kuhn provides a more elaborate statement on paradigms is, by stating that it is:

> that constellation of values, beliefs and perceptions of empirical reality, which, together with a body of theory based upon the foregoing, is used by a group of scientists, and by applying a distinctive methodology, to interpret the nature of some aspect of the universe we inhabit.


Based on the importance he attaches to an ‘empirical reality’, Kuhn claims that paradigms are irrelevant to social science, because, in his opinion, a scholarly consensus, as in physical science, does not exist. Kuhn’s definition, like the Oxford Dictionary’s, stresses the positivist nature of paradigms, which would render the concept largely useless for my approach. However, within social science Kuhn’s point of view is not undisputed and Hunt argues that ‘[paradigms] have also, in one form or another, been applied to practical activity, for example, to policy formation’ (Hunt, 1989: 3). I agree that paradigms can indeed support policy formation, but they are not instruments of policy formation. In my opinion, paradigms can only provide theoretical and analytical insights for a policy framework. Therefore, instead of a paradigm, I prefer a referential policy framework based on a broad conception of development, the same as, or similar to, my conception of development of chapter three.

**Central concepts of theoretical argumentation**

An objective of the second part of the theoretical argumentation is to suggest a relation between the conduciveness of the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state to social change and the level of interactivity of the electronically mediated information flows. The conduciveness to social change and the level of interactivity of electronic media are the two central concepts which have determined the content and nature of the data collection during the three field research periods in Indonesia, Vietnam and Peru, respectively. Chapter five provides a theoretical discussion on the different aspects of the socio-political and economic contexts, which determine the conduciveness to social change, or development as freedom of choice, and I distinguish three relative levels of conduciveness. The case material describes the socio-political and economic contexts of the case study countries in chapters eight, nine and ten. Chapter six addresses the concept of interactivity, suggests three relative levels of interactivity and relates the conduciveness to social change to the level of interactivity of electronic media. Subsequently, the relation between the three relative levels of the central concepts leads to nine ideal-types of electronically mediated information flows. My theoretical position is (i) that the level of conduciveness to social change determines which electronically mediated information flows are initiated by the different electronic media and (ii) that the prevailing electronically mediated information flows (actual and formally preferred) are indicators of the level of conduciveness to social change of a nation-state. Chapter eleven use the case material to illustrate the existence of the relation between the two central concepts.

**Democratic practices and a conduciveness to social change.**

The third issue concerns the democratic deficit of a nation-state, which is one of the indicators of the level of conduciveness to social change. My theoretical position is that a well-functioning democracy cannot solely be defined by formal democratic institutions, but will also have to be judged on the basis of the depth and scope of its democratic practices. Vietnam’s political system does not allow for
multiple political parties and does not contain all the formal elements of what is known as a liberal democracy. On the other hand, in Indonesia and Peru all formal democratic institutions are present. However, neither Indonesia nor Peru are considered established democracies7. Sen also stresses that a presence of formal democratic institutions in itself is insufficient. Attention should be paid to the extent to which formal democratic institutions guarantee and safeguard individual freedoms. In my opinion, democratic deficits of nation-states are partly determined by restrictions on individual political, social and economic freedoms. According to Sen, imperfect functioning of formal democratic institutions can be perceived as ‘attempts to dissociate the running of governments from the process of democratic scrutiny and rejection (and the participatory exercise of political and civil rights)’ (Sen, 1999: 19). In my opinion, this refers to restrictions which violate basic human rights of an individual and limit her autonomy, her opportunities for self-empowerment or her freedom to choose different lifestyles. An in-depth assessment of this aspect of the democratic deficit of a nation-state, however, requires extensive quantitative data and I will limit myself to a qualitative evaluation for the three case study countries. I conceive of democratic practices, and their respective depth (degrees of participation) and scope (domains of society), as more important than formal democratic institutions. In chapter five, I argue that without sufficient depth and scope of democratic practices in a nation-state, the implementation of concepts such as autonomy and self-empowerment is not feasible. On the other hand, I acknowledge that implementation of individual autonomy and empowerment will have to take place in a democratic setting in order to prevent a state of anarchy. In short, I argue that increased individual freedoms (political, social and economic) require a conducive socio-political and economic context and, in my opinion, the level of conduciveness to social change of a nation-state’s socio-political and economic context is inversely proportional to the absolute value of its democratic deficit.

**Power, information, communication and interactivity**

My theoretical position is that power, which I interpret as control over information flows and storage, is the single most important aspect of information provision and exchange. I argue that the nature of information flows related to rural development issues is largely determined by existing I&C power structures, which, in my opinion, favor a continuation of the status quo of rural underdevelopment versus urban development. This preference leads to an emphasis on top-down information provision and partial restrictions on the political, social and economic freedoms to freely exchange information or independently provide information. I will argue that electronic media can only facilitate rural development if the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state guarantees and safeguards the political and social freedoms of freedom of speech, as well as the economic freedom of independent electronic media ownership. I will claim that networked electronic media both support and require autonomous development spheres of self-empowerment in order to contribute to information dissemination in rural areas. In short, my argumentation is that for electronic media and electronically mediated information flows to contribute to rural development, the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state will have to be conducive to independent rural electronic networks, as well as to a social actor role by electronic media in general.

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7 Liberal democracy, like democracy, is an ambiguous concept, but in this dissertation I refer to an interpretation provided by Roberts, who defines liberal democracy as ‘the Western model of liberal capitalism combined with representative democratic institutions’ (Roberts, 1998: 30). Roberts’ definition is similar to Held’s interpretation (Held, 1996: 70 - 120), which states that a liberal democracy emphasizes individual freedom in all domains of society, a representative democracy, but with limitations on State power by a priority for individual liberty over coercive State power or interference. A more popular definition of liberal democracy is provided by Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1992: 43), but I explain in chapter five that his perception of a democracy in general, and a liberal democracy in particular, is limited.

8 Sen conceives of individual agency as the role of ‘the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political action’ (Sen, 1999: 19). He argues along the same lines as Roberts, who stresses the need for deepening and widening democratic practices in support of development.

9 I conceive of human rights as the generic category of individual rights, of which individual political and civil rights are a subset.