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

van Koert, R.

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5 DEMOCRACY, FREEDOMS AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

In order to keep a [development] model consistent in the long term a strong State is required. However, it is has to be pointed out that a strong State does not mean an interventionist State. A State has to be strong in the sense that it has the capacity to defend itself against pressures from society in a way that it can continue to go forward with consistent policy behavior. Therefore also a minimal, non-interventionist State needs the strength to maintain that policy. (Hunt, 1995, In: Kisic, 1999: 110)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In his essay Privatizations, investments and sustainability of the Peruvian economy on the nature and role of the State in relation to development, Drago Kisic points out that Hunt conceives of only three alternatives, an autonomous State with authoritarian tendencies, a State supported by a dominant faction of society and a State founded on a dominant coalition of groups in society (Kisic, 1999, In: Crabtree and Thomas (eds.): 75 – 113). In my opinion, the critical point Hunt makes is that a strong State can pursue development policies without being interventionist. A strong State does not have to be authoritarian, but can be based on a shared interest in general development by different groups in society, even if those groups may have conflicting interests concerning development objectives and policies. In my opinion, a strong State requires a solid democratic foundation and an effective democratic setting. The UNDP, in its recent report on poverty, also points at the importance of 'a strategic alliance between the State and civil society for poverty reduction' (UNDP, 2000). According to the UNDP, good governance, devolution of central authority and resources, pro-poor local governance and self-organization of the poor are crucial elements to poverty reduction. However, a continued need for strong democratic central government to monitor devolution and to safeguard electoral and other democratic processes and practices is stressed. There appears to be a widespread agreement on the positive effects of democracy on human poverty reduction, but the conception of democracy is often narrowed down to formal institutions. The formal democratic institutions do not necessarily threaten the status quo of vested interests. Governments usually acquiesce to international pressure and establish the formal elements of democracy. However, in section 5.3, I argue that an effective multi-party system, which would entail a devolution of political and decision-making power to political parties representing interests of groups in society, also is a significant formal democratic institution. Real popular democracy, however, means more than having multi-party elections, it also means an opportunity for significant social and political change.

The famous Brazilian advocate of 'conscientizagao', Paulo Freire, attributes preferences for a status quo in society to a fear of freedom. In his opinion, people are worried by the uncertainty created by freedom. As a result, they also fear social change, which is a possible result of increased freedom. However, fear of social change is not new in society, nor is the connection between that fear and an antipathy to popular democracy an anomaly in academic or public discourse. In the western world's cradle of democracy, the ancient Greek societies, philosophers have often argued against democracy.

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1 Original text: 'para tener un modelo consistente de largo plazo, se necesita un Estado fuerte. Pero es necesario resaltar que un estado fuerte no significa un Estado intervencionista. Un Estado debe ser fuerte en el sentido que tiene la capacidad de defenderse en contra de las presiones de la sociedad, de manera que pueda seguir adelante con una línea consistente de comportamiento. Así también un Estado mínimo, no intervencionista, tiene que tener la fuerza para mantener esa línea.'

2 The Spanish title is Privatizaciones, inversiones y sostenibilidad de la economia peruana.

3 Conscientizagao is Portuguese for becoming conscious, or awakening, and is used by Freire to refer to learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality. Freire's model has been criticized for being condescending in the sense that it denies villagers a critical consciousness, but his approach has nevertheless played a significant role in the various social struggles in Latin-America.
and in favor of arrested development, or maintenance of a status quo. Plato’s Theory of Forms or Ideas can be perceived as a sociological attempt at revealing pre-determined patterns, or structural flows of events, underlying changes in society. Plato uses this theory to reconstruct the perfect or ideal State from, in his opinion, the degenerated state of democracy. His Laws provides a detailed prescription of how to organize a State in order to avoid opportunities for social change. In my opinion, it is not far-fetched to consider Plato a supporter of autocratic leadership. His argumentation in support of authoritarian States, which combines a fear of social change with an antipathy against democracy, with the latter bringing about undesirable change, arguably makes a case for democracy. A reversal of Plato’s argumentation would be a rejection of authoritarian States in favor of social change through democracy. Democratic practices, like popular political participation, could lead to the outcomes Plato feared, social changes towards a more egalitarian society. In this context, the highly revered Plato is, therefore, not a useful source to define democracy. Another Athenian, however, may be a better advocate for the cause of democracy. Pericles, in his famous funeral oration, calls for an administration of the many instead of the few, equal justice for all and freedom for the individual to choose the life he wants to live. He claims that discussion necessarily precedes wise decision-making. These elements are all important in democracy and some are similar to components of development as freedom of choice.

Sen emphasizes actually enjoyed freedoms, or equality in capabilities to exercise freedoms, and considers ‘the following instrumental freedoms: (i) political freedoms, (ii) economic facilities, (iii) social opportunities, (iv) transparency guarantees and (v) protective security’ (Sen, 1999: 38 - 40). I would like to use the more abstract notion freedom from want, the third of Roosevelt’s four essential human freedoms, instead of protective security. I consider Sen’s safety net interpretation of protective security too interventionist at the level of nation-states and too dependent on a positive notion of liberty for the State. Freedom from want, however, is compatible with the negative notion of liberty of my conception of development. Furthermore, I conceive of freedom from want as a result from enjoying Sen’s first three instrumental freedoms. However, the main issue is that I expect increased individual freedoms to lead to autonomous development spheres of self-empowerment. My preference for establishing autonomous spheres to empower people in rural areas does not mean that I favor such spheres as a development end. Instead I perceive autonomous spheres as theoretical abstracts referring to private spheres of political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities for individual people. Therefore, I suggest policies directed at increasing individual political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities. In my opinion, such policies will effectively lead to autonomous spheres, which will in turn increase the capabilities of people in rural areas to choose alternative lifestyles. People in rural areas should actively be at the center of development efforts and not just passive recipients of aid.

In my opinion, devolution of authority, power and resources to increase autonomy of people in rural areas in developing countries is not likely to take place in authoritarian, centralized nation-states. Whether chances are better in democratic countries remains to be seen and will largely depend on the character or basic qualities of a democracy. Therefore, conceptions of democracy, as well as notions of

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4 In line with interpretations of contemporary and earlier scholars, Popper attributes the theory to Plato (Popper, 1966a: 210n).

5 In The Republic Plato describes how the ideal or perfect State was replaced by the only slightly less ideal timocracy, the rule of ambitious noblemen. Ambition and the timocrats’ use of money, instead of virtue, to distinguish themselves from their peers eventually led to the establishment of an oligarchy. According to Plato, an oligarchy has as an intrinsic contradiction in the division between wealthy oligarchs and poor lower classes, which bears the seeds of a civil war of classes. Civil war eventually makes an oligarchy degenerate into democracy, and excessive freedoms in democratic societies inexorably make such a society degenerate further into a tyranny (Plato, The Republic, Books VII - IX) (Popper, 1966a: 40 - 44). It is interesting to note that Plato, as Marx did after him, uses the analytical concept of an intrinsic contradiction to discuss the impact of differences in wealth in the oligarchic system. Similar to Plato, Marx expects a violent struggle to result from the contradiction. However, Plato foresees a development from oligarchy to democracy as the result of the struggle, whereas to Marx democratic government is just ‘a dictatorship of the ruling class over the ruled’ and merely a transition phase towards a classless society where the State has no function (ibid, 1966b: 111 - 120). Plato even sees a further degeneration towards tyranny, but neither appears to perceive democracy as a positive concept.

6 In the remainder of the dissertation I will often simply refer to autonomous spheres instead of autonomous development spheres of self-empowerment.
democratic institutions, practices and processes will be assessed on their conduciveness to social, political and economic change as embodied in a transition to increased local autonomy. Since I have interpreted autonomy as increased political, social and economic freedoms, both the constitutive and instrumental roles of Sen’s freedoms in development will also briefly be explored. For now I assume that democracy, as opposed to any type of authoritarian State or autocratic leadership, is the more conducive political context for autonomous rural development, but I also argue that much depends on the characteristics of popular political participation and the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state.

5.2 DEMOCRACY, OR ..... ?

The word ‘democracy’ is derived from the Greek demokratia and is composed of the roots demos, which means people, and kratos, which means rule or power. Democracy could therefore be translated as ‘rule/power by the people’. However, in his book The Open Society and its Enemies—Plato, the historian Karl Popper rejects ‘as irrelevant any attempts to discover what democracy, really or essentially means, e.g., by translating the term into rule by the people’ (Popper, 1966a: 124–125, italics added). He bases his rejection on the fact that, although people in democracies have some influence on decisions and actions of rulers, they never actually rule themselves, making the entire discussion futile. Another approach to define democracy is to dissect ‘rule by the people’ into the three components rule, rule by and the people. This immediately exposes the ambiguity of the idea of democracy, since all elements have multiple interpretations, i.e. different definitions of the people, rule, or rule by, depending on the perspective of the interpreter (Held, 1996: 1 - 10). Although attempts to define the original meaning of democracy may not produce a definition useful in assessing the democratic condition of political systems, adhering to rule of the people as the ideal objective of democracy may very well expose the democratic deficit of any implemented political system. Applying a rule of the people objective also allows for a communitarian interpretation of people’s sovereignty to be included and, in my perception, is likely to expose the significant democratic deficits of authoritarian regimes. The extent of a democratic deficit is relevant, since I assume it to be inversely proportional to the degree of conduciveness to social change of a society. However, that leaves open the discussion whether democracy should be about sovereignty of the people, or about practices and social institutions protecting people from tyranny in the sense of absolute State-sovereignty. The concept of rule by the people has been described in a popular way by Fukuyama, using the following definitions for a democratic conception and nation-state:

Democracy, on the other hand, is the right held universally by all citizens to have a share of political power, that is, the right of all citizens to vote and participate in politics. (...) A country is democratic if it grants its people the right to choose their own government through periodic, secret-ballot, multi-party elections, on the basis of universal and equal adult suffrage (Fukuyama, 1992: 43).

Fukuyama’s definition of democracy hinges on the meaning of ‘political power’ and ‘politics’, as well as people’s participation in politics. He narrowly defines a democratic nation-state by its formal institutions of elected government, general adult suffrage and certain conditions of the election process. The issues of democracy and of majority rule are not addressed. Furthermore, he does not make explicit references to any basic democratic principles. Fukuyama acknowledges the narrowness of the definition, but claims that with wider definitions proper assessments of nation-states cannot be conducted. For an initial, superficial assessment, or a survey of a large group of countries, Fukuyama’s definition may indeed be useful, but his definition does not suffice for in-depth evaluations of

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Held points out that the people is difficult to define. Does it mean all citizens of a nation-state, only those politically active or perhaps those citizens in decision-making positions in government? A narrower definition would limit the people to elected representatives with their own interests in power. The term rule is still more ambiguous, since it may cover just political issues, but could also include social and economic affairs, and the issue of depth of the rule further complicates matters. Finally, Held mentions that rule by could entail an obligation to obey, but what will be the room for dissent and is coercion of people by the people allowed and under what circumstances?
democratic settings.

Assuming a democratic principle exists and that such a democratic principle is about safeguarding society from tyranny, then, in line with that principle, democracy will also have to protect people from a tyranny of the majority. A democratic principle like that, which is not based on any kind of sovereignty of the people, implies that "the result of a democratic vote [is not] an authoritative expression of what is right" (Popper, 1966a: 125). The need for protection from rulers is largely based on the assumption of a conflict of interest between ruler and ruled. However, the key issue is which and whose interests are to be served in what way through the use of political power. According to Mill, an antagonistic perspective on the relation between ruler and ruled has led to political liberties and rights for people, but he claims that "there [is also a need for] protection against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling" (Mill, 1858, In: Collini, 1989: 8). In general, the line between public and private space is unclear, which led Mill to define "one very simple principle, as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control" (Mill, 1858, In: ibid, 1989: 13)\(^8\):

That [very simple principle] is, that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others (Mill, 1858, In: ibid, 1989: 13).

This principle can be interpreted as a libertarian statement in favor of a minimal State, but I would rather interpret Mill's principle as being supportive of autonomy and against State-led interventionism, which is very much in line with Rawls argument in favor of a law of peoples and not of nation-states\(^9\).

Rawls' theory of justice does not provide a definition of democracy, but he assumes that society is arranged as a pluralist constitutional democracy. In Rawls' opinion, the democratic aspect of such a society is that its basic arrangements satisfy a principle of participation, which he defines as a 'equal liberty, when applied to the political procedure defined by the constitution' (Rawls, 1971: 221). Rawls conceives of society as a deliberative democracy, in which people 'deliberate, [citizens] exchange views and debate their supporting reasons concerning public political questions' (ibid, 1999: 138). As a guiding principle in such a society, Rawls defines public reason as 'reasonable pluralism' applied to 'all political discussions of fundamental questions (...) in a public political forum' (ibid, 1999: 133)\(^11\). In his discussion of his Idea of Public Reason, Rawls addresses the political legitimacy of a government. In his opinion, political legitimacy of a government is based on his criterion of reciprocity, which holds that 'our exercise of political power is proper only when we sincerely believe that the reasons we would offer for our political actions, if we were to state them as government officials, are sufficient, and we

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8. According to Popper, "the principle of a democratic policy [is] the proposal to create, develop, and protect, political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny" (Popper, 1966a: 125). He continues by stating that "implied in the adoption of the democratic principle is the conviction that the acceptance of even a bad policy in a democracy (as long as we can work for a peaceful change) is preferable to the submission to a tyranny, however wise or benevolent" (ibid, 1966a: 125).

9. In his essay Two Concepts of Liberty (1958), Berlin also points out that drawing a line between spheres of private life and public authority is arbitrary and subject to continuous philosophical and political debate. In his opinion, that discussion turns around the conceptions of autonomy and heteronomy. Berlin argues that the starting point of the debate should be maximum autonomy and empowerment for individual people in a democratic setting. A reduction of autonomy and empowerment in favor of heteronomy and dis-empowerment could then be based, for example, on creating increased equality.

10. A radical libertarian, like Murray Rothbard, would not recognize Mill as sharing his version of libertarianism, since Rothbard not only denies a State any legitimacy for coercion, but also conceives of any State as "the supreme, the eternal, the best organized aggressor against the persons and property of the mass of the public" (Rothbard, In: Baez, 1997: 3637). Mill's position is more benevolent toward a State, to which he mainly denies a right to interfere on the basis of its supposed lack of efficiency and effectiveness in conducting an individual's business and unnecessary increases of State-power. Mill also acknowledges that there may be a need for some State-interference to arrive at a less in-egalitarian society.

11. Rawls distinguishes between the idea of public reason, which "belongs to a conception of a well-ordered constitutional democratic society", and the form and content of public reason, which is "the way [public reason] is understood by citizens and how it interprets their political relationship" (Rawls, 1999: 131 - 148).
also reasonably think that other citizens might also reasonably accept those reasons' (Rawls, 1999: 137). The relevance of Rawls’ theoretical construction to a discussion on democracy is that a properly functioning democratic government would be expected to act in accordance with public reason and, therefore, would have to be aware of the nature, content and form of that public reason through interaction with citizens in a deliberative democracy.

In comparison to Mill, Rawls limits deliberation, or public discussion, to political issues, thus limiting the depth and scope of his concept of democracy to the political domain. In Rawls’ perception, the ‘constitution is the foundation of the social [and economic] structure, the highest-order system of rules that regulates and controls other institutions’ (Rawls, 1971: 227). Furthermore, Rawls states that ‘the democratic political process is at best regulated rivalry’ and ‘inequities in the social and economic system may soon undermine whatever political equality might have existed under fortunate historical conditions’ (Rawls, 1971: 226). However, he argues that those issues are part of political sociology and of a larger discussion of the political system. Rawls is concerned with his theory of justice as fairness as applied to a principle of equal participation in the political domain12. Therefore, he conceives of social and economic liberties, freedoms and rights as being part of the basic structure of society, hence not of a constitution. Finally, Sen sees democracy as ‘creating a set of [social] opportunities’, but focuses on actual democratic practices, ‘the range and reach of the democratic process’. He is interested in ‘ways and means of making [democracy] function well, to realize its potentials’. He also makes a distinction between (i) the intrinsic importance, (ii) the instrumental contributions, and (iii) the constructive role of democracy in the creation of values and norms (Sen, 1999: 147 - 159)13.

This discussion illustrates that democracy is a concept open to many interpretations and, therefore, too ambiguous to be used to assess a society on its conduciveness to social change. Interpretations of democracy are typically concerned with practices, processes and institutions. However, apart from these democratic aspects, a democracy can be defined by the liberties it safeguards. Therefore, narrowing the idea of democracy down to what is known as liberal democracy has to be avoided, since democratic institutions, practices and processes, as well as liberties, are often also part of other social and political arrangements and not patented by any democracy. The important aspect of socio-political and economic contexts for development is the extent to which society allows for autonomous spheres for individuals and communities, so they can decide over their own lives.

5.3 DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS, PRACTICES AND PROCESSES

The holistic conception of democracy also lends itself easily to an expansion of the public domain. Indeed, it makes the democratic norms of equality and popular sovereignty potentially applicable to virtually any social unit that contains a system of power relations and has a significant impact on its constituents’ lives, whether it be a political regime, a business enterprise, a civic organization, or a neighborhood community (Roberts, 1998: 29).

Since Pericles’ days, his pure concept of democracy has evolved into a narrower interpretation consisting of formal democratic systems and institutions, like representative government, constitutional law and other more static elements, but also a more inclusive one14. The narrowing has been caused by

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12 Rawls emphasizes the importance of a constitution for political rights and, therewith, excludes social and economic rights from being a subject of the constitution. However, that does not mean that social and economic rights, in my opinion, cannot or should not be part of a constitution. The constitutions of the case study countries (Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru) all, albeit to differing degrees, include individual social and economic rights. Peru’s constitution even makes an explicit distinction between political, social and economic rights. Therefore, Rawls’ argumentation has to be seen in the purely political perspective of his theory of justice as fairness.

13 Hereafter I will use the terms liberties, freedoms and rights as if they mean the same, i.e. a combination of the following two interpretations: (i) the right or power to do as one chooses, and (ii) a right or privilege granted by authority [to an individual or a community] (Oxford American Dictionary, 1980). The same dictionary describes ‘freedom’ as ‘the condition of being free, independence’, and ‘right’ as ‘what is just, a fair claim or treatment, something one is entitled to’, but the interpretation of liberty is closest to the use I make of the conception.

14 The Athenian democracy of Pericles’ days was only a liberal democracy for an elitist minority of the population of the city-state of Athens and more like an autocratic democracy or even an authoritarian State for the rest of the population.
larger sizes of nation-states and increased population numbers, which led to formalizing and proceduralizing previously more organic processes. However, for my conception of democracy, I consider such formal elements as less important than dynamic democratic practices and processes. These practices could in principle also exist in nation-states not commonly seen as democracies, such as communitarian regimes.

Defining social and political arrangements of a society by the presence of democratic institutions and practices implies that the democratic deficit of a nation-state is determined by the extent to which these democratic elements are present. The degree of presence can be defined by the depth and scope of practices and institutions, but which of these elements define the democratic value of the socio-political and economic context of a given society, with value being the opposite of deficit? At least two types of democratic practices and institutions can be identified, those which (i) protect people from tyranny and (ii) increase depth and scope of popular involvement and participation in democratic institutions and practices. The former refers to democratic spheres, created by formal democratic institutions, and political checks and balances of power. The latter points at people’s actual freedoms in the democratic spheres of nation-states through democratic practices. Acknowledged democratic institutions are (i) fair and secret ballot elections, (ii) representative government, in the sense of ‘a representative body selected for limited terms by and ultimately accountable to the electorate’ (Rawls, 1971: 222), (iii) an effective and truly representative multi-party system, and (iv) a constitution, considered to be ‘the highest-order system of social rules for making rules’ (ibid, 1971: 221/222). Representative bodies are considered to hold effective legislative power and to be true discussion forums, not just rubber stamp parliaments. Elections for representative bodies at various levels of the administrative structure should take place under a condition of universal adult suffrage. According to Rawls, protection for ‘certain liberties, particularly freedom of speech and assembly, and liberty to form political associations’ (ibid, 1971: 222/223) have to be provided by a constitution, and constitutional mechanisms are expected to set limits to majority rule.

Democratic practices can refer to various people-centered, or people-oriented, practices, which take place in nation-states. The practices operate in socio-political contexts created by the four above mentioned institutions, a fair electoral system, a representative government, a multi-party system and a constitution and by Rawls’ principle of participation. A democratic sphere of people’s involvement is further defined, as well as safeguarded, by individual freedoms. A democratic practice related to institutions of representative government and a constitution is the removal of a government without bloodshed, i.e. through elections, and in accordance with the will of the people. In other words, ‘the social institutions provide means by which rulers may be dismissed by the ruled, and the social traditions ensure that these institutions will not be easily destroyed by those who are in power’ (Popper, 1966a: 124). Another example of a democratic practice is the acknowledgement of, and respect for, different opinions in debate, which implies that ‘the clash of political beliefs, and of the interests and attitudes that are likely to influence them, are accepted as a normal condition of human life’ (Rawls, 1971: 223). In that sense, public debate with the inclusion of voices of opposition is part of the foundation of Rawls’ deliberative democracy. However, Rawls’ view on participation is limited to political processes and related positions of public office and he typically associates social opportunities with opportunities for people to enter positions of public office.

A wider scope of popular participation is supported by Kenneth Roberts in his book Deepening Democracy? (1998) and by Sen. The latter, however, focuses mainly on participation in, and functioning of, existing formal institutions of a democracy by stating that ‘achievements of democracy

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15 The more general term process can be interpreted as (i) ‘a series of actions or operations used in making or manufacturing or achieving something’ and (ii) ‘a course of events or time’, whereas practice can be defined as ‘action as opposed to theory’ (Oxford American Dictionary, 1980). Since I use processes and processes here as opposed to formal institutions and partly as what actually takes place in reality, I will hereafter refer to practice to mean both practice and process.

16 I will use Rawls’ interpretation of a public political forum, which consists of (i) the discourse of the judiciary, (ii) the discourse of government officials (including legislators) and (iii) the discourse of candidates for public office. Rawls’ idea of public reason applies to all three elements of the forum, of which parliament belongs to the second category (Rawls, 1999: 133/134).
depend not only on the rules and procedures that are adopted and safeguarded, but also on the way the opportunities are used by the citizens' (Sen, 1999: 155). Roberts, on the other hand, stresses that the ideal of democracy is sovereignty of the people and prefers direct popular participation over represented, or indirect, participation in democratic practices. Participation is arguably one of the most essentially democratic practices, with differing depth and scope of participation and, amongst others, the following types of participation can be distinguished:

- participation in needs/problems identifying discussions/debates;
- participation in policy discussions/debates;
- participation in policy-making processes;
- participation in political, social and economic discussion/debates; and
- participation in political, social and economic decision-making processes.

The depth of participation can vary from Rawls' narrow perception that 'without a public informed about pressing problems, crucial political and social decisions simply cannot be made' (Rawls, 1999: 139) to Roberts' 'maximization of popular control by expanding opportunities for direct citizen input, oversight, and participation in the policy-making process and by enhancing the accountability of elected representatives to their constituents' (Roberts, 1998: 25/26). Regarding the scope of participation, Rawls stresses the exchange of ideas and opinions on political issues only, but Roberts claims that democratic practices as an expression of 'equality and popular sovereignty [are] potentially applicable to virtually any social unit that contains a system of power relations and has a significant impact on its constituents' lives' (ibid, 1998: 29).

Irrespective of whether or not the democratic ideal should be interpreted as sovereignty of the people, depth and scope are important in assessing democratic deficits. Held claims that 'democratic ideas and practices can in the long run be protected only if their hold on our political, social and economic life is extended and deepened' (Held, 1996: 4). The depth of democratic practices refers to forms of democracy, direct or indirect methods of governance, and the scope of democratic practices refers to the question of whether or not to include social and economic elements of society in the domain of democratic practices. This approach is meant to take democracy beyond a narrow perception as 'a set of political institutions and procedures, usually reduced to the procedural minimum required to ensure association rights, universal adult suffrage, and open competition for electoral office' (Roberts, 1998: 26, italics added). Depth and scope are considered to have continuity, which means democratic practices can be deepened and extended on a continuum.

![Table 5.1 Ideal-types of democracies](image)

Table 5.1 Ideal-types of democracies (adapted from: Roberts, 1998: 31)

Roberts uses depth and scope to distinguish between four ideal-types of democracies: (i) liberal democracy, (ii) social democracy, (iii) radical democracy and (iv) democratic socialism, as well as to indicate the form and extent of 'sovereignty of the people' in a democracy (ibid, 1998: 25 - 33).

A democratic socio-political and economic context of society can be seen as a protection from tyranny instead of a rule by the people. Shallow depths and narrow scopes of democratic practices point at a centralized political arena, political power in the hands of a few and with only minimal formal political institutions of democracy in place. From Popper's perspective, such a democracy would offer
limited protection to the people from their political leaders, hence my preference for increased depth and scope. In rural areas a case can be made for involvement with, and participation in, democratic practices, in particular given my conception of development. Such increased involvement and participation would require increased depth and scope of democratic practices. In any case, depth and scope appear to be possible indicators of the democratic deficit of the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state and, as a result, of the conduciveness to social change. The more the democratic practices have depth and scope, the smaller the democratic deficit is and the more likely a society is to be conducive to social change. It is important to note once more that democratic practices and institutions can also be present in nation-states not always considered democracies. Essential to a democratic society is the implementation of democratic practices and institutions, i.e. their depth and scope. In my opinion, increased depth and scope of democratic practices characterize socio-political and economic contexts of nation-states, which are more conducive to social change and facilitating a social actor role of electronic media in those processes of social change.

5.4 A POLITICAL FREEDOM: FREE SPEECH

Men rarely admit their fear of freedom openly, however, tending rather to camouflage it by presenting themselves as defenders of freedom. They give their doubts and misgivings an air of profound sobriety, as befitting custodians of freedom. But they confuse freedom with the maintenance of the status quo; so that if conscientização threatens to place the status quo in question, it thereby seems to constitute a threat to freedom itself (Freire, 1970: 21)

Although, in my opinion, political freedom is defined by a number of rights, such as the right to equality before the law, the right to freedom of speech, the right to assemble and the right to associate, amongst others, I will limit this discussion to free speech. I consider the individual political right to free speech to be of primary relevance with respect to electronic media in rural development, with the other political rights being of secondary importance. Before discussing the right to freedom of speech, two opposite understandings of rights have to be mentioned. The first, liberalism, conceives of rights as the condition of community in that they make a community function in a just way. Therefore, rights are part of the community’s foundation. From this perspective individual rights are given a negative notion and have priority over community rights or interests. The second perspective, communitarianism, considers the community to be the foundation for rights, meaning that individual rights are derived from being part of a community and in the first place serve the interests of that community. The liberal perspective has Dworkin, Nozick and Rawls as its representatives (Beardsworth, 1996: 46 - 51). Having already used theories by Rawls, Nozick and Dworkin, as well as Berlin’s negative notion of freedom, in my argumentation, their perception of rights as the condition of community will form the basis of this section on political freedoms. However, using the liberal conception of rights does not imply an exclusion of communitarian regimes from the general discussion on freedoms, since a different foundation for freedoms does not necessarily imply an absence of freedoms.

In his defense of socio-political arrangements which go beyond merely protecting individuals from those in power, Mill advocates a negative notion of individual liberty, a private ‘sphere of action; [which comprehends] all that portion of a person’s life and conduct which affects only himself, or if it also affects others, only with their free, voluntary and undeceived consent and participation’ (Mill, 1858, In. Collini, 1985: 15). In this autonomous private sphere, Mill claims that each individual is entitled to three basic (individual) liberties:

- the liberty of thought and feeling, the freedom of opinion and sentiment and the liberty of expressing and publishing opinions;
- the liberty of choosing the plan of one’s life to suit one’s own character; and
- the liberty to associate freely with other individuals.

However, Mill does not appear to include a positive notion of individual liberty into his defense of liberty. His conception of liberty is in fact aimed at a reduction of State-interference in favor of an extension of the private sphere, in other words, autonomy without empowerment. Since my conception of development conceives of autonomy in combination with empowerment, Mill’s argumentation in
defense of free speech covers only part of that freedom with respect to a contribution by electronic media to my conception of development.

However, in his essay on the freedom of opinion17, Mill stresses the importance of information exchange, or public discussion, in the search for the truth. Freedom of opinion is converted by Mill into the extent to which dissenting opinions can be, and actually are, discussed in the public domain, where no opinion can claim the status of absolute truth in any place, or at any point in time. In that sense, Mill actually defines freedom of speech as the basis for a free marketplace of ideas and seems to conceive of exchanging different opinions as leading to a more informed audience. Mill perceives freedom of speech as a right of the audience to be informed. This perception includes the right of individuals to inform18. He expresses his opinion by stating that ‘if all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind. (....) All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility’ (Mill, 1858, In: ibid, 1985: 20/21). Thus, a positive notion of liberty can be discerned, since Mill argues that the absence of State-interference in public discussion also serves as ‘a mode of strengthening [the citizen’s] active faculties, exercising their judgement, and giving them a familiar knowledge of the subjects with which [citizens in a private sphere] are left to deal’. In Mill’s perception, ‘free and popular local and municipal institutions serve this purpose’ (Mill, 1858, In: ibid, 1985: 109). However, he conceives of these institutions as a means for an individual to mature and to function better in her autonomous private sphere.

Two approaches to interpreting freedom have to be distinguished here. The first is in line with Mill and derives the right to freedom of opinion from the benefits such a right will bring to society at large, a more informed society. Dworkin labels this interpretation the policy approach, meaning that it justifies free speech as a matter of policy. However, in his opinion, this approach runs into the difficulty that ‘competing dimensions of the public’s interest must be balanced against its interest in information’ (Dworkin, 1985: 387). If society consists of dominant power structures connected to various, possibly opposite, vested interests, the problems Dworkin refers to are easy to understand. Mass media filters, as identified by Herman and Chomsky and described in chapter six, and their effect on information provision, make Dworkin’s point even clearer. He does not reject Mill’s approach to freedom of opinion, but Mill’s optimism with respect to shared interests between those who rule and those who are ruled is put in a 21st century perspective. Mill would probably have agreed with Dworkin, since Dworkin’s competing and conflicting interests also stress the danger of a moralizing majority or public opinion, which defines the specific public interests of society.

The second approach interprets free speech as a purely individual right, which is inalienable to every citizen and unwaivable by that citizen herself19. Dworkin labels this interpretation the principle approach, freedom of speech as a matter of principle. From that perspective, the right to free speech cannot be derived from the interests of the community, since individual rights are the foundation of community and not the other way around20. Dworkin shares this conception of the basic position of individual rights with Rawls. However, Dworkin stresses the need for some constitutional guarantee, or protected structure of institutions of public information, if a nation-state is to favor democratic practices, by stating that ‘there is no democracy among slaves who could seize power if they only knew how’ (Dworkin, 1985: 391).

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17 The title of Mill’s chapter on freedom of opinion in On Liberty is Of the liberty of thought and discussion.

18 At present, the more common interpretation is that freedom of speech refers to the speaker, implying that a violation of her individual right to free speech causes her to suffer from injustice. In that perspective, the rejection of censorship has to be based on a comparison of the harm done by uncensored speech of an individual with the harm done to others in case of no censorship. In the context of information exchange and provision in rural areas, free dissemination of ideas and information is primarily intended for the benefit of an audience. Therefore, at least initially, Mill’s interpretation will be used.

19 Although freedom of opinion is discussed from an individual’s perspective, I consider this perspective also relevant for the situation of electronic media as organizational entities, which are made up of individuals. I presume that the rights of individuals transcend to organizational entities, which as a result will have at least the same level of rights as individuals.

20 Following a similar liberal line of argumentation, censorship of speech also cannot be based on the interests of a community.
The policy and the principle approaches both have their merits. Mill’s conception of public discussion is a strong, albeit abstractly defensive, argument for free speech. Therefore, I use the principle approach to substantiate my preference for establishing and safeguarding informed public discussions as supported by a policy approach and as defended by Mill. In that way, the use of the freedom of expression is used for the general purpose of information dissemination and participation in information exchanges, the importance of which Sen also stresses, as well as for a social actor role of electronic media.

The discussion of free speech by Mill and Dworkin takes place at an abstract, philosophical level, and, therefore, requires a conversion to the level of formal legislation and democratic practices in order to make the conception of freedom of opinion applicable to the specific case of rural development. I assume that liberties of opinion and speech, enshrined in constitutions and related formal legal documents, do not automatically establish and safeguard the actual freedom of individuals. One reason is that formal guarantees and safeguards, to varying extents, also have some token value to keep up the appearance of a democratic nation-state. This aspect will be more elaborately addressed in the case studies in chapter eight through ten. Another reason is that no legal text can possibly cover the multitude of events possible in a society. As a result, any legal text concerning freedom of opinion requires interpretations to address the specifics of individual cases. Some exceptions to freedom of speech, which have emerged over the years, are those expressions of free speech, or provisions of information, that defame and endanger people. Others are related to matters of national security, or refer to standards of decency. However, usually the reason for exceptions to freedom of speech is not aimed at restricting free speech, but at creating opportunities to hold people responsible for the consequences of the way they exercised their right to free speech.

For the case studies, this brief discussion means that the presence of formal rights to free speech is not considered sufficient, but that also the democratic sphere to exercise those rights is important. This means that I consider political freedoms to exchange information, and the extent to which exchanges through electronic media are officially supported and actually take place, as important indicators of the actual democratic sphere to exercise political rights. In my opinion, the extent to which electronic media are allowed to offer individual people access to public discussion and to play a social actor role, as well as the presence of political and democratic practices are appropriate indicators of the effective political freedom of speech.

5.5 SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC FREEDOMS

Political rights are typically guaranteed in a constitution, which is not always the case with social and economic rights. However, whether or not social and economic freedoms should be guaranteed in a constitution is part of a political philosophical discussion which is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In my opinion, these freedoms are part of the substantive human freedoms of every individual. Therefore, I prefer to conceive of social and economic freedoms as individual rights which require some measure of constitutional guarantees. However, as Rothbard points out, the insertion itself of rights into a written constitution does not guarantee their effective enforcement by a State (Rothbard, In: Boaz, 1997, 36 – 41). The same applies to establishing freedoms in laws, which does not guarantee actual safeguarding of those freedoms. The bottom-line is that only actually enjoyed rights are relevant and whether those are based on constitutional rights, other legal guarantees, or more informal institutional safeguards is, in my opinion, of secondary importance.

An individual’s social opportunities, her social freedoms, are perhaps most closely related to Sen’s concept of capabilities, which refers to a person’s freedom to choose the life she wants to lead. At least, if equal social opportunities are interpreted as all individuals enjoying equal access to education and health care. It may be more appropriate to rephrase this at a more abstract level: all individuals should enjoy equal chances of being educated and staying healthy. The former refers to actual opportunities, whereas the latter points at processes, in this case educational and health care processes. The distinction is clear. Unfreedom can come from lack of access to educational facilities (opportunities) or from poor quality of the educational system (processes). Similar remarks can of course be made with respect to health care. Social opportunities have an immediate link with the other
opportunities and economic facilities. An important indicator of economic freedom is the right to rural development, a media enterprise's social freedoms cannot be separated from its economic opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs' (Sen, 1999: 11).

In my perception, Sen's social freedoms address both opportunities and processes. The economic freedoms of the theoretical argumentation of chapter three refer to an individual's economic facilities, or to the 'opportunities that [she] respectively enjoys to utilize economic resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange' (ibid, 1999: 38/39). In general, this refers to the economic entitlements of a person, which include her personal resources and the general conditions of exchange in the economic system of a nation-state. Sen also distinguishes between two perspectives on the relation of market mechanisms to freedom. The first perspective emphasizes opportunity. Arbitrary controls in an economic system can take some economic freedom away from an individual. Therefore, each individual is perceived to have a right to participate freely in economic transactions, irrespective of whether those transactions are efficient. The second perspective focuses on efficiency aspects of the market mechanisms (processes) and claims 'that markets typically work to expand income and wealth and the economic opportunities people have' (ibid, 1999: 26). This argument for free market mechanisms is based on the unfreedom of poverty in itself, resulting from inefficiencies of market mechanisms, caused by arbitrary restrictions. An essential element of rural development toward increased economic freedoms for individuals is 'the replacement of bonded labor and forced work, (...) with a system of free labor contract and unrestrained physical movement' (ibid, 1999: 28), the freedom of employment. In their assessment of Vietnam's rural transformation, Kerkvliet and Porter mention three 'social coordination mechanisms', which can conceptualize development in any given nation, 'how should resources be distributed; how should production be done; and who shall make decisions and rule on these matters?' (Moore quoted in: Kerkvliet and Porter, 1995: 1/2).

Apart from the more general importance of social and economic freedoms for rural development, both freedoms have significant relevance for electronic media and their role in rural development. I would like to distinguish between two perspectives, an individual and a media enterprise perspective. One aspect of an individual's interest in social and economic freedoms in relation to electronic media, is the social freedom of access to electronic media in general and of active participation in electronic mass media in particular. The opportunity of physical access through availability of electronic media outlets is one aspect, but I consider accessibility, or the social opportunity to actually access and use an electronic media facility, as far more relevant. An individual's economic freedom also influences her actual opportunity of access to electronic media, in the sense that access to almost all electronic media requires a transfer of financial means, although communal access is possible. Another aspect is an individual's economic freedom to start and sustain her own independent electronic media enterprise.

Through information exchange and provision, electronic media can facilitate social opportunities for people in rural areas. However, if electronic media are expected to also play a social actor role in rural development, a media enterprise's social freedoms cannot be separated from its economic freedoms, the two are intertwined in support of the political freedom to express opinions and exchange information, ideas and experiences to facilitate local development. I will make a distinction between electronic mass media and networked electronic media in identifying indicators for actual social opportunities and economic facilities. An important indicator of economic freedom is the right to establish and sustain independently operating electronic mass media. This freedom is typically expressed in formal, legal institutions and regulations, but also illustrated in the actual conditions under two freedoms. Literacy, for example, is needed in many cases to participate in political and economic activities and is definitely required to participate fully and, as much as possible, on an equal footing in those activities. For my conception of development, social opportunities are crucial in order to make autonomous development and self-empowerment feasible in rural areas and 'with adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs' (Sen, 1999: 11).
which those electronic mass media have to operate. I consider the actual presence or absence of local independent electronic mass media an indicator of the social and economic freedoms of a nation-state's socio-political and economic context. Economic facilities, provided through socio-political and economic contexts, include issues of ownership, access to financial resources, regulations and economic policy incentives. The regulatory aspects also include possibilities for individuals and electronic media outlets to access State-held information, the opportunities to exercise the right to reply or a chance to voice minority viewpoints in mainstream electronic mass media (Hamelink, 1994: 133 - 135). In the case of networked electronic media, the issues are different, since access (economic facilities) and accessibility (social opportunities) more specifically refer to the situation of an individual herself.

5.6 AUTONOMY, EMPOWERMENT AND DEMOCRACY

Part of the attraction of democracy lies in the refusal to accept in principle any conception of the political good other than that generated by 'the people' themselves (Held, 1996: 297)

In his book on democratic systems, Held draws the outlines for an alternative to liberal/libertarian and socialist/Marxist interpretations of democracy (Held, 1996). According to him, it is 'liberalism's central weakness ...' to see markets as powerless mechanisms of coordination and, thus, to neglect the distancing nature of economic power in relation to democracy' (ibid, 1996: 308, italics added). An example of the influence of neo-liberal free market economics on information provision and exchange in a democracy is provided by Herman and Chomsky's analysis of structural factors affecting the behavior of (electronic) media enterprises (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). I will elaborate in more detail on that analysis in chapter six, but for now I will limit myself to Held's political philosophical perspective. In his opinion, Marxism's weakness is that it reduces 'political power to economic power and, thus, [neglects] the dangers of centralized political power and the problems of political accountability' (Held, 1994: 308). Despite the opposite views of the two political philosophies, Held claims that they mainly differ in their interpretations on how to create 'the circumstances under which people can develop as free and equal' (ibid, 1996: 300, italics added).

The key concept of both political philosophies is autonomy, whereby liberals/libertarians focus on a negative notion of individual liberty (freedom from State-interference) and Marxism/socialism converts a positive notion of individual liberty into State-intervention in the interest and on behalf of the people (a positive notion of liberty at nation-state level). In my conception of development, I have indicated my preference for a combination of negative and positive individual liberty and I will first address the negative notion, or Held's principle of autonomy:

Persons should enjoy equal rights and, accordingly, equal obligations in the specification of the political framework which generates and limits the opportunities available to them; that is, they should be free and equal in the determination of their own lives, so long as they do not deploy this framework to negate the rights of others (ibid, 1996: 301)

In my opinion, this perception of autonomy presumes the ability of an individual to self-determination, but it does not include the means to realize that self-determination, or self-empowerment. Although Held does discuss the need for an 'empowering legal system, for citizens and political agencies alike' (ibid, 1996: 320), he appears by and large to include empowerment in his concept of autonomy and perceives popular participation in political deliberation and decision-making processes as complementary to empowerment. However, in line with my conception of development, I would like to clearly distinguish empowerment from autonomy as separate conceptions and I prefer an interpretation of empowerment which extends beyond the political to the social and economic freedoms of an individual, much like Sen's capabilities.

Empowerment can be interpreted exclusively at an individual level and aimed at increasing an individual's capabilities or her freedoms to choose different lifestyles in an individual sphere of non-interference. However, in a context of nation-states, people's lives cannot be disconnected from society and its political, social and economic decision-making processes. Therefore, empowerment has a dimension at the level of society as well. Held argues that his principle of autonomy would require a system of collective decision-making and adds that, for such a system to be democratic, it would have to
provide (i) effective participation, (ii) enlightened understanding (Mill’s informed public), (iii) voting equality, (iv) control of the political agenda and (v) inclusiveness. In my opinion, Held hereby implicitly acknowledges that autonomy will have to be coupled with empowerment. I also believe that the degree to which the five elements make up the democratic system of a nation-state provides an indication of the conduciveness of a nation-state’s socio-political and economic context to social change. In that context, I conceive of social change as establishing autonomous development spheres for people in rural areas in combination with empowerment in the political, social and economic domains of society.

In his discussion of a law of peoples (Rawls, 1999), Rawls argues in favor of political autonomy for citizens over the sovereignty of a State. He claims that his law of peoples ‘will restrict a state’s internal sovereignty or (political) autonomy, its alleged right to do as it will with people within its own borders’ (Rawls, 1999: 26). Rawls’ conception of a law of peoples is based on the assumption of liberal peoples, for which he identifies three features, ‘a reasonably just constitutional democratic government that serves [the citizens’] fundamental interests; citizens united by what Mill called common sympathies; and finally, a moral nature’ (ibid, 1999: 23, italics added). Rawls further states that international assistance for establishing decent basic institutions in a developing societies (together with economic savings) ‘assure the essentials of political autonomy: the political autonomy of free and equal citizens in the domestic case, the political autonomy of free and equal liberal and decent peoples in the Society of Peoples’ (ibid, 1999: 118). However, Rawls once more restricts his argumentation to the political aspects of democracy. Based on a principle of autonomy, Held elaborates a similar alternative to the concept of democracy based on State-sovereignty. Unlike Rawls, Held also includes social and economic aspects in his conception of democratic autonomy, which is an attempt to increase depth and scope of democratic practices. Still, both Rawls and Held focus on autonomy and do not appear to perceive empowerment as a separate issue. Furthermore, Held’s alternative includes a few, perhaps overly, prescriptive suggestions for civil society. I prefer a conception of political autonomy of the people, which both authors share, to assess the conduciveness of a nation-state to social change. However, unlike Rawls, I think that conceptions of democracy should not be limited to the political domain. At the same time, I prefer to substitute Held’s suggestions for civil society with my conception of empowerment. In short, I favor political autonomy of the people in combination with political empowerment to facilitate political participation by citizens. In my opinion, autonomy and empowerment in social and economic fields will allow individuals and communities to develop civil society in a way that suits their purposes. I claim that the conduciveness to social change of a nation-state is determined by the degree to which autonomy and empowerment are feasible in the political, social and economic domains.

The extent to which citizens of a nation-state are sovereign determines the scope and depth of the democratic system of that nation-state. In my opinion, increased sovereignty of people is similar to increased autonomy, which can be combined with participatory politics, de-centralized administrative structures, devolved decision-making processes, devolved authority and power, more grassroots-oriented development policies, as well as in equally enjoyed political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities, in other words, self-empowerment. A combination of autonomy and empowerment for people in rural areas is most feasible in nation-states or societies with maximum depth and scope of democratic systems. Therefore, I assume the following four democratic institutions and practices to determine the democratic deficit or value of a nation-state:

- formal democratic institutions: representative government, a constitution, multi-party elections, universal adult suffrage and popular political participation;
- democratic practices, e.g., changes of government through elections and acknowledgement of differences of opinion in debate;
- democratic practices, e.g., popular participation in public discussions, policy and decision-making (political, social and economic) on development (Roberts’ depth and scope variables); the degree to which the political system and administrative structure of a nation-state are (de)centralized; and
- the orientation and degree of centralization of a nation-states development policies and activities, respectively.

Other indicators of a democratic deficit are the extent to which accountability of political
representatives is incorporated into democratic systems, the constraints on popular sovereignty, imposed on citizens, and approaches to existing socio-economic inequalities within a nation-state.

5.7 AND ELECTRONIC MEDIA

*He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that* (Mill, 1858, In: Collini, 1985: 38)

Following Held's argumentation, the conceptions of autonomy and empowerment of individual people in rural development require a democratic setting in which information provision and exchange play a crucial role. Held focuses on the role of information in democratic practices and, like Mill, stresses the importance of an informed public as a condition for meaningful popular political participation. Secondly, he points at the use of communication for participation by citizens in political processes. Although Held does not explicitly mention electronic media, an important contribution of electronic media can be establishing *electronic forums* for public discussions on political, social and economic issues, in line with the freedom of opinion advocated by Mill. The nature of the forums will differ for electronic mass media and networked electronic media, but in both cases Dworkin's concept of free speech as a matter of principle is essential for the successful use of electronic media as forums for public information provision and exchange. Apart from playing a role in political processes, electronic media can also facilitate social and economic processes, or even perform a role as social actor. Information provision and exchange can facilitate dissemination of local knowledge, offer educational opportunities and provide people in rural areas access to relevant economic information. I will specifically discuss the role of information provision and exchange through electronic media in the social and economic domains in chapter six.

It seems as if there are ample opportunities for electronic media to facilitate the various aspects of rural development, but the case studies will illustrate that in Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru, only limited use is made of the above mentioned opportunities for electronic media. In my opinion, one reason for this apparent paradox is that the majority of the opportunities only exists in connection with a conception, such as ‘democratic autonomy’, or interpretations of autonomy and empowerment as in my conception of development. Both conceptions are not necessarily popular, since they often involve the devolution of State-power to people in civil society, as well as an increased degree of accountability of those in power. However, if the role of electronic media in rural development is to extend beyond news, entertainment and information provision on economic issues, individual people, as well as electronic media enterprises, need to have extensive political, social and economic freedoms: autonomy and empowerment. I have identified four elements of socio-political and economic contexts of nation-states, which illustrate how potential roles of electronic media in rural areas have been demarcated by a nation-state:

- individual political, social and economic freedoms, as guaranteed by constitution and law;
- government policy on electronic media in general;
- legislative and regulatory frameworks for electronic media (including institutions); and
- economics and ownership.

I have addressed individual freedoms in earlier sections and without those three freedoms any discussion about free information provision and exchange through independent electronic media is futile. However, some elaboration on the other factors influencing the role of electronic media is required. The emphasis is on the present, or potential, use of electronic media in the context of political, social and economic freedoms. For each case study country, descriptions of the policies on electronic media, the legislative and regulatory framework for electronic media are provided, as well as a brief analysis of the influence of economics and ownership of electronic media enterprises on the role of the media in rural development.

I conceive of policy-making as a framework for analysis, resulting in referential guidelines for the respective policy domains. In the end, however, individual and organizational decision-making processes determine to what extent policies actually influence and shape reality. Therefore, I do not interpret a nation-state's policy on the role of electronic media as a decisive factor of how conducive a
nation-state is to the use of electronic media in facilitating social change. Nevertheless, in my opinion, presence, as well as content, of policies on electronic media do provide an illustration of how electronic media are perceived by a nation-state’s established powers. The preferences for roles of electronic media in rural development also illustrate to what extent autonomy and empowerment are perceived as feasible or desirable options. To determine the preferences, I use the analytical concept of information traffic patterns, which is elaborated in section 6.3.

A second, and perhaps more explicit, influence on a potentially facilitating role for electronic media in rural development is exerted by laws and regulations on electronic media. Apart from political rights to free speech, assembly and association, usually enshrined in a constitution, laws on electronic media strongly influence ownership, foreign influence and financing of electronic media enterprises. Moreover, laws also shape the form and size of the sphere within which electronic media are de facto allowed to play a social role in society, independent of the State and other vested interests. A legislative and regulatory framework can suppress that social role, allow it from a neutral point of view, but also stimulate it through incentives and supportive legislation and regulations. In my opinion, a nation-state which is conducive to social change will at least lean towards the latter option.

The influence of economics on the role of electronic media in general, and in rural development in particular, is often underestimated. In the case of neo-liberalism, much of the underestimation originates in the conception of the presumed neutrality of economic power and the indiscriminate nature of free market mechanisms, ignoring various structurally determined biases in media enterprise behavior, as expressed in information provision. In my opinion, the influence of such biases increases with the size of media enterprises. At the other end of the political spectrum, the Marxist/socialist perception of economic power as evil or at least untrustworthy, has led to State-ownership of electronic and other media enterprises. Although different in nature, however, the biases resulting from State-ownership also tilt the content of information flows towards the preference of vested interests in society. Held mentions ‘open availability of information to help ensure informed decisions in public affairs’, as well as ‘democratic mechanisms of citizen juries to voter feedback to enhance the process of enlightened participation’, as two general conditions for his model of democratic autonomy (Held, 1996: 324, italics added). Therefore, in my opinion, the extent to which State-ownership of media enterprises or concentrations of economic media power exist in a nation-state negatively influences a nation-state’s conduciveness to social change through the facilitating role of electronic media.

Finally, I briefly discuss a distinction I make between two facilitating roles of electronic media in rural development. First, information exchange through electronic media can facilitate a deepening of democratic processes. This perspective emphasizes is the political dimension of information. However, I also acknowledge the interdependence between the political, social and economic domains of society in the sense that social and economic oriented information exchanges can have an indirect impact on the political domain. Secondly, information exchange can facilitate dissemination of information content and knowledge accumulation. Such an accumulation of knowledge also has a political dimension, since increased social and economic freedom will have an impact on the position of people in the political domain. This chapter has mostly been dedicated to democracy and democratic practices and, therefore, I restrict the continuation of the discussion to the first perspective. In chapter six, I elaborate on the second dimension of information exchange in development.

In his analysis of social movements in Peru from 1970 to the late 1990s, Martin Tanaka points at a shift in the relation between popular sectors of society, and their respective organizations on the one hand, and the State and the political arena on the other (Tanaka, In: Crabtree and Thomas (eds.), 1999: 411 - 436). According to Tanaka, social movements formerly opposed and confronted the State from a position of strength in order to obtain their share of publicly available resources. Depending on their strength and the distributive capabilities of the State, Tanaka distinguishes eight ideal-types of political participation. I will use his ideal-types to sketch an evolution in relations between the State and its citizens in Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru.

However, according to Tanaka, the struggle has gradually shifted to an emphasis on winning over the general public for political positions through the use of the mass media. From Tanaka’s perspective, the most relevant aspect of electronic mass media is the increasing influence of mass media on political
dynamics through the public forum function. He argues that the increased influence of mass media on political processes indicates a shift towards a politicized media (media-política). He interprets the shift towards a politicized media as an increased need for the State, social movements and individuals to formulate and propagate their opinions and demands through mass media in order to influence public debate. Political participation, as a general concept, evolves into a participation in discussions in the political arena through access to electronic mass media. The capabilities of development’s stakeholders determine nature and content of the public compromise (compromiso público), as the stakeholders advance their interests in the public discussion on political, social and economic issues. This analysis once more confirms the importance of Mill’s conception of the purpose of freedom of opinion, as well as Dworkin’s emphasis on freedom of speech as a matter of principle. Finally, Tanaka’s analysis stresses the importance of the actual equality in social opportunities and economic facilities with respect to electronic mass media.

Tanaka restricts his analysis to the mass media and the situation for networked electronic media differs slightly, if only because some of these networked electronic media do not reach as wide an audience as electronic mass media. From the perspective of the three freedoms, currently economic facilities (access) and social opportunities (accessibility) have a higher practical priority in most rural development policies than increased political freedom and deepened democratic practices. However, in my opinion, this is largely a short-term, pragmatic perspective, since issues such as the limits to free speech on the Internet are already widely discussed and controversial in nation-states where the actual value of the other two freedoms appears to be increasing continuously. From the perspective of the influence of I&C power structures, political freedoms for information exchanges on the Internet are of major importance. In particular given the intrinsic nature of networked electronic media to support decentralization and devolution of power and independent information exchanges. Therefore, in my opinion, the extent to which independent information exchange via networked electronic media is advocated through rural development policies illustrates the conduciveness of a nation-state or society. Similar to electronic mass media, networked electronic media can contribute to establishing a public forum for discussion. Another opportunity for networked electronic media in rural development is its use for political activism by NGOs, local organizations and other people-based groups in civil society. Gustavo Lins Ribeiro points out that NGOs, which were already accustomed to networking in the real world, particularly have been able to utilize various aspects of networked electronic media for basic coordination purposes, information exchanges and increasingly for their political needs. From an

Table 5.2 Political participation ideal-types (Tanaka, In: Crabtree and Thomas (eds.), 1999: 417)

| Strong collective identities: participatory democracy | Strong collective identities: movimientismo |
| Weak collective identities: elitist democracy | Weak collective identities: negotiation |
| Strong collective identities: corporativism | Strong collective identities: social movements |
| Weak collective identities: (neo)clientelism | Weak collective identities: pragmatism |

22 In an essay on cyber-politics, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro points out how the diversity of the groups which took part in the Internet in the early days of its existence influences the discussion on issues like ‘freedom of speech versus censorship, public space versus private space, and large corporation and capitalist interest versus community needs’ (Lins Ribeiro, In: Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998: 333). The different political positions of groups like the military (initiators of the network’s foundations), electronic engineers and the scientific and academic community (participants in early professional information exchanges) and members of a California counterculture (perceiving the Internet as an empowerment tool) still determine the discourse on the above mentioned issues. Lins Ribeiro also points out that only a relatively small group of cyber-activists conceive of the Internet as a potentially political tool.

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optimistic perspective, Lins Ribeiro discusses the possible emergence of a virtual civil society more or less parallel to the civil society in the real world. The main advantage, according to him, would be that civil societies in various geographical locations in the world, through a virtual civil society, could be linked to support each other (Lins Ribeiro, in: Alvarez, Dagnino and Escobar, 1998: 332 - 345). I agree that the emergence of a virtual civil society is not just a utopian vision, but the essential question is whether with that emergence notions of self-empowerment and autonomy of people in rural areas would be compromised. In my conception of development, NGOs are as much outsiders as government related institutions, albeit often with more people-friendly motives for their actions. I acknowledge the important mediating and organizing role played by NGOs and other similar organizations, but, in my opinion, a virtual civil society should be based on rural people-initiated and -sustained local organizations. In my opinion, the main political objective of a virtual civil society would be increased popular sovereignty in the form of political participation by the people themselves in decision-making processes affecting their lives and the environment in which they live.

The most important contribution by networked electronic media, however, may be to reduce the dependency on information sources external to rural areas through creating independent and local rural information exchange networks. Such networks would consist of the actual beneficiaries of increased knowledge levels. The advantages of such networks are discussed in chapter six, where specific attention is paid to the value of information. Given the importance of information and the current socio-economic conditions in rural areas, political freedom is as important for networked electronic media as it is for conventional electronic media, particularly in the context of Mill’s interpretation of free speech. The prevailing preference for urban areas in the political arena further emphasizes the importance of political freedoms for networked electronic media, in this case with respect to popular participation in political processes. In my opinion, the extent to which a nation-state positively values free information exchanges determines the importance attached to securing widespread access and accessibility to electronic media in rural areas.

5.8 SYNTHESIS: CONDUCTIVENESS TO SOCIAL CHANGE

The conductiveness to social change of a nation-state is the central concept that addresses the extent to which autonomous development spheres of empowerment are feasible in a nation-state, or likely to become feasible. In chapter two, a distinction has been made between social change at individual and societal levels. Although the emphasis of the dissertation is on individual social change, in many developing countries structural change is required in order to create the conditions for the individual social change of my conception of development as freedom of choice. In my opinion, a certain level of conductiveness to social change of the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state is crucial to development, as well as to a contribution by electronic media to rural development as freedom of choice. My perception of the importance of the conductiveness to social change of socio-political and economic contexts is based on the basic assumption that:

_The political and administrative system of a nation-state, its development policy and the orientation of that policy, as well as the nature and structure of its economy determine the room to maneuver for the development process, and in particular the application of electronic media in that process._

The discussion in this chapter addressed a number of theoretical aspects of the socio-political and economic context of a nation-state, such as individual freedoms, devolution of authority and power, conceptions of democracy, including Popper’s protection from a tyranny of the majority, Mill’s emphasis on private spheres of non-interference by the State and Rawls’ principle of popular political participation and idea of a deliberative democracy, as well as formal democratic institutions and democratic practices. In my opinion, an effective multi-party system is an important formal democratic institution and, with respect to democratic practices, the key terms are depth and scope. I have used Roberts’ model for deepening and extending democracy to tentatively determine the impact of that aspect of the democratic setting of a nation-state on the degree of conductiveness to social change. However, in my opinion, using Roberts’ model does not imply automatic links between matching ideal-types of democracies and the nature of socio-political and economic contexts. This immediately
leads to my main problem with using Roberts’ otherwise useful model: how to classify communitarian regimes like the Communist Party-led ones of Vietnam, China, Cuba and North Korea?

The discussion of democracy indicated that conventional definitions of democracy are ambiguous and that conceptions of democracy often do not go beyond defining a set of formal democratic elements such as representative government through regular elections, multi-party systems and a democratically conceived constitution. In my opinion, the extent to which democratic practices are present in society, as well as their depth and scope, more accurately illustrates a rule by the people. The extent to which democratic practices are established and safeguarded as a constitutive element of the socio-political and economic context of a society is perhaps even more important. In my opinion, the generic democratic practice is popular participation in all relevant affairs of a nation-state. Rawls emphasizes participation in political processes, thus limiting the scope of participation to the political domain. In addition, he remains unclear on the depth of participation. Roberts extends the scope of participation to issues and institutions in social and economic domains and the depth of popular participation to almost complete sovereignty of citizens. Both Roberts and Tanaka elaborate in some detail the democratic practices they distinguish, albeit from different perspectives. Tanaka’s concept of a politicized media translates political participation into access by people and civil society to electronic mass media which operate as a public discussion forum. All three authors more or less implicitly assume a constitutional democracy as the socio-political context for democratic practices, but they do not explicitly exclude communitarian regimes. Therefore, I assume that democratic practices are not limited to nation-states perceived as democracies, as well as I do not perceive the absence of democratic practices to be the exclusive domain of nation-states referred to as authoritarian or communitarian. The analytical concepts of Roberts and Tanaka are useful to evaluate the conduciveness of socio-political and economic contexts to social change, by roughly assessing the presence of democratic practices. With respect to the applicability of Roberts’ and Tanaka’s concepts, I expect that communitarian and democratic societies only differ in the implementation of democratic practices. The prevailing conception of democracy in a nation-state, as well as the characteristics and qualities of the formal democratic institutions and democratic practices largely determine the value of the democratic deficit of a nation-state:

- formal democratic institutions: representative government, a constitution, multi-party elections, universal adult suffrage and popular political participation;
- democratic practices, e.g., changes of government through elections and acknowledgement of differences of opinion in debate;
- democratic practices, e.g., popular participation in public discussions, policy and decision-making (political, social and economic) on development (Roberts’ depth and scope variables); the degree to which the political system and administrative structure of a nation-state are (de)centralized; and
- the orientation and degree of centralization of a nation-state’s development policies and activities.

I conceive of the democratic deficit as an important indicator of the level of conduciveness to social change. Apart from the three aforementioned indicators of a democratic deficit, both Held and Rawls point at the need for autonomy and, more implicitly, at a need for, mainly political, empowerment of individual people. To support his claim, Held defines a principle of autonomy, while Rawls develops a theoretical argumentation featuring the idea of public reason at the foundation of a law of peoples. Rawls and Held both favor sovereignty of people over sovereignty of States in the political domain. I conceive of the extent to which socio-political and economic contexts of nation-states accommodate for such a conception of sovereignty as an indicator of the democratic deficit or value of a nation-state.

In my opinion, another important indicator of the level of conduciveness to social change is the status of individual human rights in a nation-state and, in particular, the political freedom of speech. Therefore, the second aspect of the evaluation of the conduciveness to social change of a nation-state is conducted along the lines of three freedoms (individual and in society as a whole), political freedom, social opportunities and economic facilities. The focus will be on individual access to electronic media and the position of electronic media, both conventional electronic mass media and networked electronic media. I will assess liberties for individuals and electronic media, particularly freedom of speech as a matter of principle and for the purpose of an informed public discussion. The main assumption is that equal liberties guaranteed in writing do not always necessarily materialize in reality, ‘democracy has to
be seen as creating a set of opportunities, and the use of these opportunities calls for analysis of a different kind, dealing with the practice of democratic and political rights. (...) in general much depends on how freedoms are actually exercised' (Sen, 1999: 155).

In my opinion, a distinction can be made between relative degrees of conduciveness to social change. I have defined three relative degrees of conduciveness on the basis of Roberts’ typology of democracies, based on the depth and scope of democratic practices. Therefore, low conduciveness relates to a relative degree of hierarchical control over the political domain. Medium level conduciveness refers to hierarchical control over an extended domain, which could run from a political to a socio-economical domain, but which can also refer to mass control over the political domain alone. Finally, high levels of conduciveness to social change refer to popular sovereignty (autonomous spheres), or mass control, over an extended domain ranging from politics to socio-economics. The second central concept, interactivity, addresses the intrinsic nature of electronic media to facilitate different modes of combination. In chapter six, I elaborate on the various aspects of that central concept and distinguish between three levels of functional interactivity. The combination of three levels of conduciveness and functional interactivity results in a matrix of nine tentatively defined ideal-types for information provision and exchange in rural development (section 6.7).

In the introduction to this chapter, I argue that the individual autonomy and empowerment, which I expect to result from a policy framework aimed at increased individual freedoms, require a setting of democratic practices in a State strong enough to consistently pursue policies towards increased individual liberties, even against prevailing power structures’ vested interests in a status quo. In chapter six, I apply an analytical concept called information traffic patterns to help reveal I&C power structures, which control information flows relevant for rural development and people in rural areas. The presence and the socio-political and economic freedom to establish conversation patterns, one of the four information traffic patterns, through independent rural networks is, in my opinion, a major indicator of actual political freedom of speech and, with that, of the conduciveness to social change of the socio-political and economic context.