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

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7 INTRODUCTION TO THE CASE STUDIES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The field research for the case studies has been conducted in three periods of two months each in Indonesia, Vietnam and Peru, respectively. The collected material, as well as the results from country specific literature reviews, is presented in the case studies of chapters eight, nine and ten. Validation or rejection of the basic assumptions of chapter two is not the objective of the case studies, nor is it the intention to validate or reject the relation between the central concepts of conduciveness and interactivity. The purpose of the case studies is to provide material to illustrate the basic assumptions, as well as the suggested relation between the central concepts by means of case country examples of the ideal-types of tables 6.3 and 6.4. Therefore, the case study chapters contain descriptions of the socio-political and economic contexts of the three case study countries, as well as overviews of the situation of electronic media. In the first part of chapter eleven, the respective socio-political and economic contexts are assessed on their conduciveness to social change, using the argumentation of chapter five as a theoretical framework. The second part of chapter eleven uses the electronic media overview of the case studies, as well as additional case study material, to illustrate the preferred and actual ideal-types of electronically mediated information flows in the case study countries. Before discussing the structure of the case study chapters, this introduction briefly reviews the theoretical argumentation of chapters three through six. The objective of the review is to summarize the main issues of the theoretical part of the dissertation, which provides the theoretical context of the case studies.

In chapters three and four, a conception of development has been defined and a referential policy framework has been outlined on the basis of that conception. The broad and theoretical approach to the subject of development in those two chapters provides a context for the more specific, but still theoretical, subjects of the following two chapters: the conduciveness to social change of socio-political and economic contexts (the first central concept, chapter five) and the influence of power and the relevance of interactivity (the second central concept, chapter six) on the role of electronic media in rural development. In my opinion, a society is conducive to development as freedom of choice, if (i) it establishes and safeguards actually enjoyed equality of individual political, social and economic freedoms, which enable people to choose between alternative lives, and (ii) its socio-political and economic context is conducive to social change. Chapters three and four explain that my conception of development is a theoretical basis for autonomous development spheres of empowerment in combination with a non-interventionist role of the State. However, contrary to libertarians I do conceive of a role for the State in development, but only to create conditions for increased individual political, social and economic freedoms in rural areas. In short, my conception of development uses Hayek's libertarianism on the basis of a Rawlsian arrangement of basic structures in society and in combination with Sen's concept of development as freedom.

The need for socio-political and economic contexts to be conducive to social change was expressed in chapters three and four. In chapter five, some theoretical, mainly qualitative, aspects of socio-political and economic contexts were introduced, such as formal democratic institutions, democratic practices, political freedom of speech, social and economic freedoms and the feasibility of autonomous spheres. Furthermore, the concept of a democratic deficit, as a key indicator of a conducive context, was discussed. The three case studies intend to provide material for the assessment of their respective democratic deficits in chapter eleven. The assessment is part of the evaluation of the conduciveness to social change of the

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1 In order to justify the potential paradox in this combination of theories I must quote Rawls once more, since he claims that 'political philosophy is realistically utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practical political possibility and, in so doing, reconciles us to our political and social condition' (Rawls, 1999: 11).
contexts in the same chapter. Therefore, the case studies mainly contain qualitative data on the theoretical aspects of the socio-political and economic context of Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru. Finally, the case studies provide an overview of the situation concerning electronic media, which focuses on the relevant elements of the socio-political and economic context, such as constitutional liberties and rights of free speech, electronic media related aspects of legislation, as well as of the regulatory framework. In general, the case studies address the first central concept as discussed in chapter five, while chapter eleven addresses both central concepts.

Chapter six discussed the influence of power, power structures and vested interests on the potential contribution of electronic media to rural development, in particular the nature and content of information flows. The theoretical argumentation on information, knowledge and communication networks further indicated that providing information in itself does not guarantee an effective and positive contribution by electronic media to information dissemination and knowledge accumulation in rural areas. The discussion of the second central concept, interactivity, pointed at differences between electronic media with respect to their capability to electronically mediate information at different interactive levels of between sender and audience. The central concept of interactivity allows for a distinction between electronic mass media and networked electronic media. The differences in interactivity can have an impact on the social actor role of electronic media, as well as on their capability to facilitate independent, interactive information dissemination in rural areas. In the synthesis of chapter six, a specific way to apply electronic media in rural development, that is, as a combination of electronically mediated rural networks and independent electronic mass media, has been suggested. I have also argued that, by using electronically mediated rural networks, existing centers in I&C power structures can be bypassed and horizontal and vertical interactive communication can be established. Under specific conditions, independent and locally based electronic media can play a complementary role to networked electronic media. I have explained why I do not expect contributions to information dissemination in autonomous rural development from the side of national electronic mass media, or electronic mass media conglomerates. The second part of chapter eleven and chapter twelve use the case study material to support the argumentation of chapter six, to evaluate the basic assumptions and to answer the primary and secondary research questions.

7.2 QUESTIONS RESULTING FROM FIELD RESEARCH

The objective of the field research periods was to collect data answering the main research questions, as well as the secondary questions. However, during field research in Vietnam, Indonesia and Peru, interviews with representatives from government institutions, telecom companies, Internet providers, radio and television stations, NGOs and others, resulted in the following two additional questions concerning electronic media in rural development:

- should electronic media in principle be used in development to facilitate enhance top-down oriented information provision as a part of national level development plans, or to facilitate enhance bottom-up networked information provision and exchange in rural development; and
- are the needs for information provision and exchange of rural people communities best defined through formal, top-down administrative procedures or through more informal rural organizations and institutions at grassroots level?

In my opinion, the answers to these questions determine the short- and long-term perspectives for electronic media (and more importantly, which electronic media) in rural development. I conceive of top-down oriented information provision as a short-term approach to electronic media use, which essentially only increases the quantity of information. In addition, it strengthens existing I&C power structures and confirms the status of dependency of people in rural areas. The long-term approach, directed at electronically mediated networks in rural areas, requires conducive socio-political and economic contexts and an increase in individual political, social and economic freedoms. In my perception, information provision is in line with top-down development policies, prevailing in countries like Vietnam and
Indonesia, and it is the economically preferred option in the free market economy in Peru. The long-term approach refers to individual and structural social change in the sense of increased feasibility of creating autonomous development spheres for empowerment of individuals in rural areas. In chapter eleven, I illustrate these positions with case study material and in chapter twelve the additional questions are answered more elaborately by analyzing the situation of electronic media in each of the three countries and by comparing the results of the analyses.

7.3 STRUCTURE OF THE CASE STUDY CHAPTERS

The theoretical argumentation in chapters three and four was partly structured around three of Amartya Sen's five freedoms: political freedoms, social opportunities and economic facilities. The other two freedoms, transparency guarantees and protective securities, are not included in the theoretical argumentation, partly because of the perceived stronger interdependence of the other three. Despite the fact that he introduces all five freedoms together, Sen specifically connects the first three freedoms, stating that 'political freedoms help to promote economic security', 'social opportunities facilitate economic participation' and 'economic facilities can help to generate personal abundance as well as public resources for social facilities' (Sen, 1999: 11). In my opinion, the status of three individual freedoms, as well as the conduciveness of the socio-political and economic context, determine the feasibility of the autonomous spheres of my conception of development as freedom of choice. Therefore, the three case country studies are structured around the following subjects:

- a general introduction to the political situation;
- an overview of democratic institutions and practices, the administrative structure and the political freedoms;
- a brief assessment of the situation for social and economic freedoms in rural areas;
- an evaluation of the feasibility of autonomous development spheres for self-empowerment; and
- a brief overview of the situation concerning electronic media.

At the end of each case country chapter are preliminary conclusive remarks addressing the conduciveness to social change of the particular country, as well as some comments on my perception of the impact the degree of conduciveness has on the role of electronic media in rural development. The preliminary conclusive remarks are subsequently elaborated in more detail in chapters eleven and twelve.