Shayna Plaut
389-(0)70-437-602
splinterpus@hotmail.com
31 October 2003

Information Impasse:
Mapping Communication Patterns between Romani Media and Romani NGOs in the
Republic of Macedonia[1]

"[Roma media] should discuss education, unemployment, social status, Roma culture, language, Roma youth programming, Roma traditions/holidays, [along with] things that are important to Roma even if it is not Roma specific such as multi-ethnic tolerance and cooperation." Redzepali Cupi, Student, Gostivar

BACKGROUND

With a population of 2.2 million people, The Republic of Macedonia is a highly multi-ethnic country serving as a "home" to six officially recognized "nationalities" with varying degrees of harmony. Macedonia is the only country that awards Roma "nationality" status in the constitution; however official recognition does not always translate into a sustainable reality. (PER 2001) The majority of Roma are consistently surviving below recognized standards for health, economic viability, and education; infact Roma (with an official population of 43,707 based on the 1994 census and an unofficial population spanning 60,000-260,000) are nearly universally recognized as the most marginalized population within Macedonia (Barany: 2002, www.worldbank.org 2003). Operating under extreme economic restraints, many of these issues were addressed by various sectors within civil society most notably NGOs and the media.

The mid 1990s saw an explosion of NGOs, often generously backed by international donors, within Macedonia. Many of these NGOs work with a specific ethnic community; Roma NGOs were no exception. At the time of this writing there are 120 registered Romani NGOs in Macedonia, 30 of which are considered active (pc: Memedova 11 September 2003, MCIC NGO Directory). The mid 1990s was also a time for a rapid increase in private radio/television, and later in the decade, e-media; many of these new radio and television stations were also founded to serve a specific ethnic community. Currently there are 155 legal electronic media outlets in Macedonia, five of which cater to the Romani population (pc: Belichanec 2003, **www.srd.org.mk**).

Recognizing that both NGOs and the media are key elements of civil society – and often responding to similar goals – one would expect a sustainable working relationship between Romani NGOs and the media: a forum for partnership and change, a two-way line of communication. And yet reality speaks otherwise. There is a clear lack of **communication, defined for the purposes of this report as information sharing, between Romani NGOs and Romani media.** It is no coincidence that these two "openings" of the society occurred concurrently, what must be analyzed and corrected is the silence that followed. This research,

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utilizing a mixture of interviews and document-based analysis will attempt to illuminate the reasons behind such silence while offering structural suggestions for increasing communication.

METHODOLOGY

Goals of research:

- To provide current data about Romani media and Romani NGOs in Macedonia
- To map the current level of communication between Romani media and Romani NGOs in Macedonia
- To compare the patterns of communication between Romani media, Romani NGOs and expectations of a small segment of the Romani public throughout Macedonia

Technique:

The technique used to gather information will be a mixture of interview and analysis of documents provided (formatting scheme and annual report) by the Romani media and Romani NGOs, respectively. These documents will be used as a cross-check to the information provided during the interviews.[2]

Different questionnaires will be prepared for interviewing Romani media, Romani NGOs, and non affiliated people. These questionnaires can be found in the appendix to this report. All questionnaires will be pre-written with numbers corresponding to the questions. Questions will be asked in such a way so that answers correspond directly to the questions.

Upon completion of all interviews, the information will be compared on two levels: all answers to the same questionnaire will be evaluated for trends, and all the information gathered in the same city will be evaluated for similarities and discrepancies. Some of the data gathered from the Romani media outlets and the NGOs can be translated into quantitative data whereas the information from the non affiliated people can provide anecdotes which can be used as a balancing tool. Quantitative data, will be presented first followed by descriptive analysis.

- Certain answers can be turned into quantitative data i.e.: When did the bulk of Romani media outlets begin to broadcast legally? Does this coincide with when the NGOs began to work? What percentages of NGOs are members of national NGO networks etc? What percentages of Romani media receive their information on line?
- Other information can be seen in terms of patterns – local NGOs want more communication with national media, Romani media want to be better updated on NGO activities, nearly all Romani NGOs utilize the media as a means of publicity not as a means of reaching their target group.
- A focus will be placed on comparing the goals of the Romani NGOs with those of the media and with the expectations that non-affiliated people have for Romani media.

Sample:

Legal Romani Media – Romani media granted a license from the Macedonian Broadcasting Council in addition to e-communication totaling **seven** media outlets. Such media exists in Skopje (BTR, Shutel and MRTV-Roma program), Gostivar (Roma Radio), Shtip (Radio Cherenja), Prilep

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[2] All interviews were conducted in either Romani or Macedonian unless specifically noted. Interviews were translated by Denis Durmish a native Romani and Macedonian speaker.

(Radio Ternipe), and Kumanovo (e-media sent to Romnews.org), respectively. The existence of such media determined the cities visited.

Active Romani NGOs – NGOs in the five cities mentioned above that are currently engaged in at least three projects and have been in existence for at least

24 months totaling **ten** NGOs. (note: in Skopje due to the very high number, representatives of half of the active Romani NGOs were interviewed; organizations were chosen from the various sub-topics: one children's NGO, one cultural NGO, one women's NGO, and one advocacy NGO). These NGOs are: DARHIA, Dendovas, Luludi and the Roma Center of Skopje (Skopje), Mesechina (Gostivar), Association for Human Rights Protection of Roma –AHRPR (Shtip), Romani Shukaripe (Prilep) and DAJA, ARKA and DROM (Kumanovo).

Non-affiliated People- Roma who neither work for an NGO nor media outlet, but consume media (watch television and/or listen to the radio), and live in one of the five cities mentioned above. Three such people were selected per city totaling **fifteen** people. Every effort was made to ensure diversity in terms of age, economic status, and educational level. Information gathered from non-affiliated people was NOT quantified as the pool was too small to be representative, but the information is used as a "check" to that provided by the media and NGOs.

Indicators

NGO Questions

The questionnaire is designed to answer five groups of questions:
- to map the history and current make-up of the Romani NGO: locale, audience, funding (most notably sustainability), and internal means of quality control.
- What is the goal of the NGO, what need does the NGO see itself filling? What is the target group of the NGO?
- Where does the NGO get its information from and to whom does it give its information?
- What are the internal structures established to connect the NGO with Romani media?
- How does the NGO value the media?

Assumptions are made that Roma NGOs will be focused primarily on the Romani population but with specific target groups within that population. There is an expectation that although many NGOs are project driven, the projects will have some cohesion so that the NGOs will become experts in a specific field (if they are not already). There is also an assumption that all organizations have a specific structure with delineated responsibilities and that, depending on the size, one person will be specifically charged with information and publicity. A further assumption is that NGOs often run on a currency of information exchange and tend to be in rapid-fire contact with one another regarding their area of expertise. Lastly, there is an assumption that all NGOs want publicity to both promote their work to the public and to reach their target group resulting in the establishment of a system of communication with the press, particularly the press that matches that of the target group.

Media questions

The questionnaire is designed to answer five groups of questions:
- to map the history and current make-up of the Romani media: locale, audience, funding (most notably sustainability) and internal means of quality control.
- What is the goal of the media, what need does the media see itself filling? Who is the media's audience?

- To compare the formatting scheme presented to donors with what is actually broadcasted and to cross-check this with the station's self perception/goals.
- How stations get their information in terms of finding and covering stories.
- What are the internal structures established to connect the station with civil society. How does the media value the NGO sphere?

The director of the media outlet, chief editor, and a journalist will all participate in different parts of the interview. In some outlets people will be serving in a multiplicity of roles.

Assumptions are that all media will have a mixed formatting scheme including news, informational programs, some children's programs, and music/entertainment. Expectation is that the broadcasting will be local, will be in a mixture of Romani and Macedonian, and will be in communication with the various sectors of society in order to provide accurate and up-to-date news, including if not especially the NGO sector. A further assumption is that a major focus of the broadcast will be about the place of Roma within Romani society and Macedonia/the world as a whole therefore a special emphasis will be placed on following events of civil society. The expectation is that media outlets will be in some communication with the Romani public.

Questions for non-affiliated people

The questionnaire is designed to answer five groups of questions:
- Basic demographic data
- Current media consumption, thematically categorized
- How the current media scene can be improved thematically and structurally
- How Romani media is currently conceptualized
- How Romani media can be improved thematically and structurally

It is assumed that the media and the NGOs should be targeting the people interviewed. It is also assumed that the Roma population is highly media-literate, knowing which media to consult for information on various topics, and often operating with the advantage of being multi-lingual. The goals, if not the reality, of the media and the NGOs should be in tandem with that of the Roma population interviewed.

Restraints on Research

The research on the patterns of communication between Romani media and Romani NGOs could not have taken place without the help of my cultural and linguistic interpreter Denis Durmish. Denis is an intellectually and socially savvy Rom who not only translated Macedonian/Romani into English but also helped select NGOs and unaffiliated people to interview. All this to say that as good as Denis is; if I was fluent in Macedonian the information would be more accurate. There were also the extreme time constraints of a ten-week project schedule and limited funding.

If this research were to be done from another perspective I would recommend the following specific changes:

- The same project should be undertaken in the other ethnic minority communities of Macedonia which have both media and NGOs. This would generate a larger perspective of how the ethnically focused NGO sector and media sector communicate with one another. This will help focus the attention on patterns of communication rather than risk ethnic-gheottoization of what appears to be a systemic problem within the civil society of Macedonia.

- A minimum of ten non-affiliated Roma in the five cities mentioned should be interviewed to ensure that a more accurate picture could be painted, and that statistical data could be calculated.

- The researcher would spend at least one day observing the media product (broadcasts) of the Romani media. Although we were able to hear live shows/news at three of the Roma media outlets, such observation was not systematized.

FINDINGS

Strategic Partners…

> *"After a while I found out that it was very important to have a relationship between the NGOs and the media. The media can be another institution that is fighting for social change."*
> *- Zaklina Durmish, President, Dendovas, Skopje*

An active Romani NGO in Skopje had a plan – the members were organizing a series of events for International Romani Day, April 8th. Speakers were invited, posters made, a space rented and finally a press release drafted. Two days before the event, the press release was faxed and/or emailed to every media outlet in Skopje – Roma and non-Roma, national, and local. Only one journalist showed up. What went wrong?

There is considerable potential for collaboration between Romani NGOs and Romani media: they are often founded within one year of each other, the issues they were created to address are often similar and they even share a similar list of donors. More importantly, their audience is the same, and their audience is hungry for more information, and in order to get such information, most of them turn to (and are often disappointed by) the Romani media in their city.

Nationally, Roma NGOs were founded a bit later than Romani media; eight out of ten were founded between 1997-2002 whereas three out of six Roma media outlets began before 1997. However, when analyzing the data on a local level, **most of the NGOs and media were founded at approximately the same time**.[3] These mutual "birthdays" can be seen as symptomatic of growth within civil society.

Roma NGOs

Romani NGOs can be found throughout Macedonia with the bulk of the active NGOs based in Skopje. Very few of the NGOs could supply reliable data regarding the size of their client base however on average they served 245 people annually.[4] Over 32 donors were supporting the ten NGOs interviewed with the majority receiving funding from both international and national donors. The most frequently mentioned international donors were OSCE, UNHCR and OSI-Budapest; national donors were Soros-Macedonia, MCIC and ECMI. Only Luludi (Skopje) received governmental support. All Romani NGOs supplied project proposals including annual reports and most were willing to make such reports public.

Romani NGOs were often founded with very **general goals and specified their focus on the basis of specific projects**. The target groups of these NGOs varied however a majority are more "ethnically" oriented than issue oriented, serving a variety of needs within the Romani population of their particular city/town. A change in project often meant a change in focus so that **one NGO could, and often does, work in three or four very divergent fields**. Of the ten Romani NGOs interviewed:
- Three work with Roma youth/women
- Two work with Roma on a national level
- One works with Roma children (local)

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[3] The exception to this was Skopje where the media was founded in 1994 and 1997 and the NGOs were mostly founded between 1997-99.

[4] The exception was Romani Shukaripe of Prilep which claimed to serve 6,000-7,000 people.

- One works with Roma culture (international)
- One works with both Roma children and with Roma human rights
- One works with Roma human rights on both a national and regional level
- One works with Roma exclusively on a local level

However, when one looks at the projects in which the NGOs are engaged, a clearer picture emerges:
- Six work on human rights issues
- Four provide legal advice
- Four work on both formal and informal education
- Three provide court monitoring
- Three work on activism and advocacy

Many of the NGOs were divided into different departments however there was quite a bit of overlap in focus; this may partially explain the media's reluctance to recognize the NGOs as "experts" in a specific field. **NGOs that were regularly contacted by the media for expert opinions: DROM, ARKA, Dendovas, and Association for Human Rights Protection of Roma were by far the most focused in their activities.[5]** As Azbija Memedova, Coordinator of Roma Center of Skopje explained:

> **After we define what we are doing then we can raise the issue and use the media means. We need to recognize that the media can integrate the population into the society. Right now one leader of a Roma political party says one thing, the other one says something different and this gets reported in the media and it can destroy us.**

Communication between NGOs was often divided between those NGOs in the same geographic location and those working on a similar focus; such communication was structurally sound but often insular. On average NGOs were in regular contact with:
- Seven local NGOs
- Six National NGOs
- Six international NGOs

All NGOs were members of at least one (on average three) NGO networs. Most notably: RNVO 2002, DOSTA E, and ECMI, all of which have list serves. These list serves often served as a bridge between the "news" and the often insular cycle of NGO communication. **Although all NGOs reported they consumed Romani media to some extent, only 50% use the Romani media in their information regarding the Romani public from Romani media.** Seven of the NGOs stated they regularly use the NGO network list-serves to report their activities and to learn about other NGO activities, funding opportunities and news. By far the most common source of information for Roma NGOs (80%) is personal contacts and "walk-ins." When asked how people know to come to them for services or to share information, Dilbera Kamberovska, president of DAJA (Kumanovo), stated it best, "We are consistent; we've been here for 10 years. We are always at conferences. People know us." This "word of mouth" publicity was very common and often served as the main source of public relations policy.

The media component, though valued, is rarely codified and any public-relations actions are poorly streamlined and sporadically implemented; there is a lack of consistency in structure and in strategy. . **This is particularly accentuated when Romani NGOs are working with Romani media: although seven NGOs regularly invite local and national media to their events, only**

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[5] Mesechina is also at times contacted for quotes by the media but this tends to be about the state of the Romani population in Macedonia in general.

four regularly invite the Romani media. Out of the ten NGOs interviewed, only one (ARKA) stated it was generally satisfied with the media attention it receives and yet laid criticism on the Romani media's apparent indifference to their activities. The specific internal structures of the NGOs media outreach are:

- 6 have a written media contact list
- 6 create printed materials (brochures, posers etc.)
- 5 regularly write press releases (of these only three have a specific person/department who regularly drafts such press releases)
- 4 have trained PR/communication staff (the level of training varies from a one week training course, to prior journalistic experience to sophisticated training courses held overseas)
- 3 have a specific spokesperson
- 1 has a PR/media development department
- 1 presents information differently to Romani media differently than non-Romani based on assumed audience.

Romani NGOs are well aware of the power of the media; as demonstrated repeatedly by their requests for more media attention. The majority of NGOs interviewed want to use the media to "make [their] work transparent." (pc: Amet 13 October 2003). **However, nearly all Romani NGOs complain that media is only interested in contacting them when a story is "hot"; yet only Mesechina and ARKA have set protocols to make a story "hot".** Most of the Romani NGOs create some of the structures recognized as necessary for successful public relations but only one (Mesechina) utilizes a full "arsenal" of public relations tools. Further research can also highlight whether this problem can be found in other, non Romani, NGOs.

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Romani Media

Romani media, with the marked exception of e-media, are all local media serving a listener/viewer base of 15,000 – 200,000. Legal Roma media is found throughout Macedonia with a concentration in the western part of the country and Skopje.[6] **According to their written mission statements, all Romani media were founded with the goal to inform and educate the Romani population in their community and they all (to differing degrees) have news, educational programming, and contact shows.** All Romani media, with the exception of MRTV and Radio Roma, are primarily supported through international donors. Again with the exception of Radio Roma, all Romani media hold weekly meetings to decide upon the content of their broadcasts. None of the Romani media have a reliable demographic breakdown of their audience.

Roma media is typically broadcasting in both Romani and Macedonian language with MRTV/BTR broadcasting almost exclusively in Romani while Roma Radio and Radio Cherenja broadcasting almost exclusively in Macedonian.[7] According to information presented during the interview and further review of their programming scheme, it is evident that **all Romani media cover (again to differing degrees): human rights, legal issues, activism, and culture thus mirroring many of the issues addressed by Romani NGOs.**

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[6] There is also an abundance of pirate Roma media throughout the country, particularly radio, which would benefit from observation/analysis.

[7] By statute MRTV is only allowed to broadcast in Romani with subtitles in other languages. BTR also utilizes subtitles but includes 55 minutes of Macedonian language news. Radio Roma and radio Cherenja both have "learning Romani" language programs that span from 30 minutes to one hour daily.

It is clear that Romani media does attempt to respond to the audience's desire for both informational and cultural recognition. There is, however, **a severe gap between how Romani media envisions itself, and what the programming scheme actually shows**. Roma media is heavily dependent on music/entertainment as opposed to the staff intensive field of news, interviews, and investigative reporting.[8] When examining BTR's current programming scheme, aside from 85 minutes of daily news, the rest of the programming is exclusively music videos and films. Although this may be an extreme example, it is also quite telling considering that the station was founded and runs on the mission of "educating our Roma people". (Dimov pc: 5 September 2003). **Two thirds of the Roma media (MRTV and Shutel being the sole exceptions) spend at least 2/3 of their time on the air playing music;** these figures do not include the computer-generated night music broadcast.[9]

This schism between mission and reality was often explained by "lack": lack of funding, lack of equipment, and lack of training, all of which, when analyzing the budgets and premises, are true. There also appears to be a lack of vision. This can be seen in two parts: **One, Roma media does not have reliable information of who is watching/listening (nor do they necessarily see this as important) and secondly, Roma media does not utilize the potential power of working with Romani NGOs to obtain information regarding the Romani community.** Both of these deficiencies point to "lack" of responsiveness/reciprocity with the audience they are expected to serve.

None of the Romani media outlets conduct demographic surveys of their audience. BTR and Shutel both have monthly viewership surveys but these are only utilized to count the number of viewers, rather than the ethnic, educational, economic, age or gender composition of their audience. Radio Roma, Radio Ternipe and Radio Cherenja and MRTV do not even have the benefit of a marketing survey. When asked how programming decisions were made and success measured without such information **all media outlets relied on assumptions of what their audience wants/needs.** As Enise Demirova of Radio Cherenja (Shtip) stated:

> **We know their needs because I'm from here; I live here and I follow the issues. I am directly involved in the mahaala and have been for 10 years; my husband (who is a journalist at Cherenja) has been working with Roma issues for 22 years.**

However it is evident that the Roma audience's desires are not being responded to. When asked what he would like to see/hear on Romani media Sushica Ajdin, a Rom who works in the hospitality industry from Skopje explained:

> **… They should have documentaries. It needs to be more educational, especially for the children. It should include international news – information about the rest of the world. This will help promote and inspire our children to continue their education. This is not just me saying this; this is what every second Rom would say. I would tell them this myself but it'll have no affect...**

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[8] When asked why people listen/watch their station 2/3 stated the mixture of music, information and education; only Radio Roma and Radio Ternipe believe they are listened to exclusively for their music.
[9] On paper Radio Ternipe's programming scheme is only 36% music but it has since become 80% music due to lack of funding and reduced advertising interest.

Although they have contact shows, only audience complements usually receive a response; only one station (Radio Charenja, Shtip) changed their programming scheme based on requests from their audience.

Romani media, as all media, envisions itself as a service to the Romani population in their town/city. **All Romani media outlets recognized themselves as a potential educational and informative tool, but their sources of information are disproportionately informal networks/personal contacts and the government rather than other factions of civil society.** However, when one examines the mission statements/model formatting schemes of the NGOs and media, respectively, it becomes apparent that partnership is not only possible but essential for either of these two sectors of civil society to truly reach their goals of the oft-cited but rarely explained, "Romani emancipation".[10]

"Emancipation" does not take place in a vacuum; this is another factor quickly agreed upon by the Romani NGOs, Romani media and the Romani public interviewed. As Nori Rusanovski, of Prilep explained, "We live in a greater society and we need to know about it...but they also need to know about us." In fact, when non-affiliated Roma were asked what three issues should be covered on a Roma media station the answers were:
- "other ethnicities/wider society" - 11 people
- Roma culture - 7 people
- Roma news in Macedonia and other countries – 6 people

Roma media recognizes this multicultural potential and often states, "informing non Roma about Roma" as one of their goals. All Roma media count a varied, but consistent, percentage of non-Roma as loyal listeners/viewers. This is in direct contradiction to the statements often made by both NGOs and potentials donors both of whom assume only Roma will listen/watch a Romani media outlet.[11] An informal but telling example occurred in the cramped studio of Radio Roma in Gostivar: The phone rang; the callers were two Albanian girls bemoaning their lack of love-life. They were hoping Radio Roma could play them a song to cheer them up. Aliradin (the owner, director and DJ) listened patiently, offered some advice and then put on the song. The song they requested was a Serbian love-ballad.

Roma media can and does serve **as a source of cultural pride, as an informative medium and as a cultural bridge to both Roma and non-Roma but it is not living up to its own goals or potential.** Lack of funding, lack of equipment, and lack of training are all external issues-potentially solvable with a well written project proposal and a sympathetic donor. But the lack of communication between Romani NGOs and Romani media is symptomatic of a problem within civil society and the impetus for change must also come from within.

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[10] This phrase was used in 85% or all interviews, both Romani NGOs and Romani media.

[11] Some stations are more responsive than others to the wishes of their non-Roma audience. Radio Cherenja in Shtip, at the behest of their Turkish listeners, recently added a daily 30-minute show in Turkish to their schedule. This program proved so successful that they are now planning a Vlah-language program.

ANALYSIS

Current (Incomplete) Communication Network

"I want to work closer with Roma media in general, Macedonia-wide. Currently the communication is not good; it's at the lowest level. The media rarely comes to events."
– Tahir Selimoski, President, Romani Shukaripe, Prilep

"Communication" is often cited as a factor for success or failure within all segments of civil society but often times the "communication breakdown" is assumed to be in the wrong place. Romani NGOs and Romani media both have communication structures established *within* their respective spheres; the often cited lack of communication lies *between* the NGO sector and media sector. **What this points to is *not* a lack of communicative structures, or even skills, but a lack of mutual recognition of place and importance within the greater civil society.** The research thus points not to a *lack* of communication but an *incomplete* communication network.

Romani NGOs are in consistent communication with one another: exchanging information in often overlapping circles, participating in conferences/seminars and at times cooperating in joint projects. This dialogue is **based on both geographic proximity and similar thematic goals**. **On average, NGOs are in contact with seven (7) local NGOs (geographic affiliation) and six (6) national and international NGOs (thematic goals).** Ahmet Jasharevski, president of DROM (Kumanovo) illustrated this point well by stating, "We are an activist based NGO and information is meant to be acted upon…therefore we must share the information." (pc: 18 September 2003). Although not all Romani NGOs define themselves as "activist" focused, all interviewed belong to a formal NGO network most notably, RNVO 2002 (which is also a list-serve), and seven out of ten use the formal NGO network(s) to present their activities.

Romani media is also organized into both formal and informal networks: sending information to one another, lending equipment and at times even file/program sharing. All Romani media, with the exception of Roma Radio in Gostivar have at least one strategic media partner outside of their city.[12] E-media, although structured differently than television or radio, is also in consistent contact with other e-media makers. **All Roma media- again with the exception of Roma Radio in Gostivar - are in contact with both national and international information networks.** A clear example was presented by Omar and Enise Demirova of Radio Cherenja (Shtip). Based on their strategic location in Shtip, Radio Cherenja was the first media outlet to cover the tragic death, caused by severe child abuse, of a young Roma child in March 2003. This information was then sent to Roma and non-Roma media alike: Cannel 77, Radio Shtip, A1, Sitel, BTR, and Shutel; Radio Cherenja was credited as the source. (pc: Demirova 29 September 2003).

As can be seen from Radio Cherenja's experience, Romani media is in consistent contact with non-Romani news sources/networks. Radio Cherenja, BTR and Shutel all received daily information from the Macedonia Information Agency (MIA) along with Roma-specific news sources. Radio Ternipe had to suspend its subscription to MIA because of lack of funds but continues to receive *Roma Times* (based in Skopje), and is also in partnership with the local radio in Prilep often exchanging information about local and national events.[13]

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[12] It must be noted that Radio Roma only recently became a legal radio station and receives no outside funding which limits its networking potential. Radio Roma does receive information regularly from Mesecina however neither side is particularly satisfied with the level of communication and collaboration. (pc: Hajradin and Skendari, 23 September 2003.**)**

Therefore the problem of communication between the Romani NGOs and the Romani media does not lie in a lack of organization nor a lack of structure, but in a mutual lack of respect for each other's importance. **Although Romani NGOs invite local and national media to 60-70% of their events, Romani media is only invited 40% of the time.** When asked why this was the case the NGOs most often cited "lack of professionalism," "lack of consistency" and "[that they] must often pay for time on the air". In fact, the underlying reason appears to be that of worth and market; **media is most often conceptualized as a means of publicity and legitimization to the greater society – not to the "target group" of the NGO[14].** In other words, media attention is for the outside world and therefore, **Roma media is seen as having little strategic importance, whatever its symbolic value. This perception stems from a specific vision of media as a means of publicity rather than as a means of informing.** This framework runs counter to that of the Romani audience they are all attempting to reach. All fifteen non-affiliated Roma, spanning ages 16-55, were familiar with the Romani media in their area and viewed its sheer existence with a sense of pride but twelve of them also listened/watched the media in hopes of learning about Romani issues.

Romani NGOs' blindness is mirrored in the Romani media. **Although all Roma media have run at least one story on a Romani NGO, Roma media rarely reaches out to Romani NGOs for quotes, expert opinions or to survey the current scene within the Romani community.[15]** None of the Roma media stations have a current Roma NGO directory and yet all but Radio Ternipe have a list of the current ministries and their spokespeople. **When Roma media was asked to whom they turn for information/collaboration on a story, NGOs were consistently rated below personal contacts and governmental sources**[16].

The phenomenon of parallel networks constitutes the basis of communicative and collaborative breakdown between Romani NGOs and Romano media. **This points to a faulty framework where the media, or at least Roma media, is not seen as an important part of civil society.** This is not to say that Romani media is not seen as important, but it tends to be relegated to the domain of ethnic pride, not influential journalism. As Feat Kamberovski from ARKA (Kumanovo) stated, "…we want to work with MRTV 1, 2 and 3 – especially MRTV 1, its national – everyone watches it…" (pc: 19 September). This statement assumes that since more people watch MRTV, it is therefore a more important medium, who happens to be watching MRTV is of secondary importance because it is assumed to be "everyone."

Kamberovski's opinion is reflective of most of the NGOs interviewed. **Although all NGOs expressed a desire to work more closely with the media, the focus was almost exclusively national media and Macedonian local media; only three NGOs specifically mentioned their desire to be in closer collaboration with Romani media.** This mindset is recognized by the journalists of BTR, Roma Radio and Radio Ternipe, all of whom bemoaned the fact that they are only contacted by NGOs when the NGO wants publicity for an event, but not as a reliable source of information. Selman Bajram, director and journalist for Radio Ternipe, recounted many stories where he was given two hour notice to cover an event for a local Romani NGO. According to

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13 At this time there is no consistent Roma news-agency in Macedonia but an informal region-wide Roma Media Network has been established with the help of donor Medienhilfe. More time would be needed to assess the viability of this endeavor.

14 The Romani NGO "Mesecina" stands as a marked exception to this rule; their information and coordination department is evenly split between utilizing media as a means of reaching their target group on one hand and sharing information with the NGO sector on the other. They are the only NGO interviewed that uses the media, in addressing their target group, as a strategic tool in their activism.

15 Shutel recently began an interview/talking head Roma NGO show hosted by Ashmet Elezovski who is also responsible for much of the e-media communication reaching the romnews.org network. Ashmet works for DROM in Kumanovo but attempts to keep his position as a journalist and as an activist separate.

16 Radio Cherenja did state they collaborate with NGOs in the decision making process however, Radio Cherenja and the NGO Cherenja are both run by Enise Demirova.

these three sources, numerous phone calls to NGOs to request collaboration on a story or to come in as a guest were ignored or turned down.

It is also apparent that Romani media awards more credence to personal and governmental sources/activities than to the work of NGOs. Kamberovski continued:

> **It is pretty sad when these other Macedonian and Albanian television stations are interested in our work and Shutel can't even pick up the phone…Roma media is not doing their job. They are too selective and this runs counter to their purpose as a public service. (pc: 19 September 2003)**

Ljatif Demir from DARHIA (Skopje) also feels his organization's work is ignored by Romani media, "In Skopje we never use Roma media because we send faxes and they never send a reporter." His analysis as to why this is case? "Because they don't want to inform their viewers about our activities." (pc: 8 September 2003) Such a perception can be more powerful than whatever the truth may be. **This cycle of mutual distrust and disregard between NGOs and the media can only serve to damage both sides.** More research is needed to see if this is specific to Roma media or is endemic within all Macedonian media.

CONCLUSION

Reexamining the case of the Romani NGO in Skopje that organized the event for April 8ᵗʰ World Roma day one can see a pattern of mistakes addressed in this research. The NGO did not have a list of targeted journalists. The members did not call up the journalists prior to sending the press release to discuss the event. The author of the press release did not change the press release depending on whether the media invited was Romani or non-Romani, local or national thereby tailoring the content to the targeted audience. They did not call the media after sending the fax or email to ensure that it was received. More importantly the NGO did not call the media to find out why it did *not* attend. But the NGO can not be totally blamed. The media was not in contact with the NGOs and therefore was unaware that this manifestation was occurring on an international level. This lack of knowledge points to a lack or respect for the activities of the NGO; no governmental-sponsored event with 1,000 participants would be systematically ignored by (nearly all) the media.

Healthy media, when following their mission, should serve as a reflection of the society in terms of both content (entertaining, informing, educating) and structure (staffing, coverage, funding). Ethnically specific media is usually established to respond to the specific needs/interests of a given community in the most accessible language.[17] Therefore, ethnically-specific media can be said to have a higher responsibility in knowing, and addressing, the needs of their target group/audience. As can be shown through the research presented above, Romani media in Macedonia clearly do not fulfill this responsibility. But one can not just point fingers at the Romani media/NGO sector; all Romani media (with the exception of Roma Radio in Gostivar) and all Romani NGOs are supported by international donors, and the same donors are often funding the Romani NGOs. The goal of both the Romani media and the NGOs is to fight the marginalization of Roma in order to increase their "emancipation". It is clear that this can not happen without greater cooperation between the Romani NGOs and the Romani media. Such cooperation can and should be encouraged by the donors.

As stated from the beginning of this report, the Roma population is the most marginalized of all ethnicities within Macedonian society. I have consciously used the term "marginalized" rather than "discriminated" because marginalization means "being pushed to the side" and not recognized as a worthy object of discrimination. In other words to be marginalized is to be simply ignored. Roma are often seen as a population unworthy of coverage unless there is a scandal. Further research in the form of media monitoring should take place to track mainstream media's coverage of Roma issues/people and compare that to other ethnic minorities of equal size within Macedonia (Serbian, Bosniak, Vlah and, depending on the next census' figures, possibly Turkish).[18] This issue of marginalization by non-Romani society and non-Romani media must be directly addressed.

There is a risk of ethnically specific media serving as a means of ethnic polarization/segregation. Romani media stands as a rare exception to this situation. All non-affiliated Roma interviewed were extremely media-literate knowing which station/channel to turn to for specific news and all

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[17] Ethnically specific media is also created in response to systematic discrimination by the majority population's media. This discrimination can either be in terms of blatant hate speech or the marginalization of population as a whole. (Downing: 1986)

[18] Further attention can also be placed on MRTV 3, the "international" channel of national television in terms of budget, equipment and time allotment. MRTV – Roma program was consistently recognized by NGOs and "non-affiliated" people alike as the best trained and professional of all Romani media but also the most poorly funded.

were keenly aware of the *lack* of professionalism within Romani media. This information should serve as a barometer to the international donors which support Romani media along with the Romani media itself. As stated earlier, all Romani media count non Roma as audience members and all non-affiliated Roma interviewed were hungry for domestic and international news in addition to news regarding Roma in Macedonia and abroad. This too, can be seen as a reflection of larger goals within Romani civil society: the media could and should be a tool of information, culture, and pride rather than the fulfillment of a quota system that makes everyone feel good, does nothing.

RECOMENDATIONS

"The first thing I would do if I was in charge of a television station? I'd do what you are doing right now - conduct a survey regarding media consumption/opinions."
- *Ervin Asahovski, student, Kumanovo*

"I'd make sure there was more daily news and presented in a more multiethnic manner. More children's programs. More balanced in terms of ethnicity and gender– all sides presented, not politically colored."
–Seadet Ibrahimi, nurse, Gostivar

"The channel should be in Romani and if they (Roma) don't know Romani then they can watch the Macedonian stations…. The media is a way of education, a way of culture. There should also be general information regarding Macedonian news and international issues… It should be with the Macedonian media because then the Macedonian people can see the situation and learn"
– Vejda Shaban, retired, Skopje

Romani NGOs

1) Every effort should be made to **hone** the activities of the NGO into a **consistent** and **tangible** focus – to become **issue oriented NGOs**. This will enable the NGO, and the staff, to develop a reputation as an expert in a specific field, thus lending credibility to their public statements.

2) A change in the internal structure of Romani NGOs to **assign one person** the responsibility of serving as **a liaison for media**. A percentage of Romani media coverage should be set as a goal to mark success. This person will be specifically trained in "tracking" and maintaining contact with the media. This person's salary should be calculated into the operating budget.

3) A **current list of active** Romani NGOs, including **the experts** working in such NGOs, needs to be updated and distributed to **all media, especially Romani media**. This data base should be organized by city and by theme.

Romani Media

4) A **demographic marketing survey** should be conducted in every city where there is legal Romani media. This would serve as a basis for audience based programming decisions.

5) A change in the internal structure of Romani media to **assign each journalist a "beat."** One of these "beats" should be civil society thereby **serving as a liaison to civil society**. A percentage of stories about Roma NGOs and the use of NGOs as sources of quotes/information should be set as a goal to mark success. This person's salary would be calculated into the operating budget.

6) Romani media should **consider partnering with a non-Romani radio or television** station to share equipment. This may serve as a starting point to share stories thereby increasing the pool of available information/sources.

7) Romani TV/Radio, already on-line, **should use the internet to communicate with e-based Romani media** i.e.: list serves, NGOs online etc. thereby collaborating on stories.

8) A **current list of active** Romani media, **including journalists specializing in covering civil society**, needs to be updated and distributed to all NGOs, especially Romani NGOs. This list should be organized by city.

Romani NGOs and Romani Media

9) A clear division needs to be made by Roma media regarding **what is considered advertisement** (thus needing to be paid for) and what is covering a story. Roma NGOs should also be aware of the distinction. This will need to be **codified and applied consistently** with prescribed penalties for violation.

10) **Roma media should subscribe to the active and open Macedonian based Romani NGO list serves** (RNVO 2002@yahoogroups.com, roma_students@yahoogroups.com). Such information can be used to both generate story ideas and to search for "expert opinions." Roma **E-media should send their stories to the Roma radio/TV stations** to solicit media attention.

11) **Initiating monthly community forum** meetings where community members, including NGO activists, meet with the media to discuss current issues of concern and programming requests.

Donors

12) Funding should be made available for **every Romani media outlet to conduct a demographic marketing survey** prior to being established and every six months thereafter.

13) Romani media should be held to **the same standard of quality as non-Romani media.** If this is presently untenable, then **training should be allocated into the budget.** Continuing to fund unprofessional media, without any incentive to increase quality is patronizing to the Romani media and the public.

14) Special training on **business models and management** must be incorporated into any donor strategy to e-media thereby allowing Romani media to eventually become as **self sustainable** as private media. Every effort should be made to include a trained CFO in any existing or new Romani media outlet.

15) **Fund a civil society liaison at each Romani media outlet and fund a public relations person at each Romani NGO.** Romani media should be asked to set an annual goal of coverage (percentage of stories about Roma NGOs and the use of NGOs as sources of quotes/information by Romani media) to serve as a predefined marker of success. Romani NGOs should be asked to set an annual goal of coverage (set percentage of Romani media coverage) to serve as a predefined marker of success. These goals/realities should be **reviewed by donors on a quarterly basis to assess viability and plan strategy**.

16) **Establish** **a Roma Media Agency** where information regarding Roma throughout Macedonia is **accumulated and sent to both Roma and non-Roma media outlets**. This center would be a part of **an established news agency** making use of existing resources/expertise; special emphasis would be placed on the activities taking place within civil society.

APPENDIX

QUESTIONS FOR RADIO AND TELEVISION ROMA MEDIA

1. When were you founded?
2. Where does your broadcast reach?
3. How big is your audience base?
   - How do you know?
   - speculation? Internal survey? External survey/marketing analysis?
4. How are you funded (percentages and gross)? For how long?

5. What is your formatting (programming) scheme? How was this decided? How often is it reviewed? - Can I have a copy of it?
6. What language(s) do you broadcast/write in? How was this determined? Has it changed?

7. How much of your news or feature formatting is self produced and how much is syndicated? From where? How is this determined?

8. Who is your audience? (age, ethnicity, gender, class, education level)
9. How is this assessed?
10. Has it changed?

11. Why do you think people watch/listen to your station?
12. What kind of need does this station fill? Social? Cultural? Political? Entertainment?
13. Do you have a mission statement explaining this?
If so, when was it established? By whom? Has it changed?
14. Do you use the mission statement as a guide for programming?

15. If the international motto of journalists is to educate-inform and entertain – what does this mean for your station? Is this realistic?
On the formatting schedule can you tell me which ones fit which genre…What would you need to fill this goal?

16. Are you a member of any information networks?
If so, what information networks (local, national and international) are you a part of? Who contacts you with story ideas/information? Government? Individuals? NGOs?

17. Give me an example of a story that you covered.
Please walk me through the process of how the story came to your attention and the steps you took in covering the story.
Where do you first find out about a story?
Who do you contact for collaboration/sources/quotes: the government? Business sector? Influential people? NGOs?

18. Do you feel that your station MISSES any stories about people/events? If so, why?

19. Research from one year ago showed that a majority of people involved in media assume that more money will equal better media; do you agree with this? What would more money allow you to do, how would it make your job easier?

Questions for Roma NGOs

1. When were you founded?
2. Are you an umbrella organization or are you direct service?
3. How many beneficiaries do you serve annually?
4. How are you funded (percentages and gross)? For how long?
5. Do you have an annual report? May I have a copy of it?

6. What kinds of services issues do you work on?
7. What other NGOs do you work with on a local, national and international level? How do you stay in contact with them? (see if they mention email at all)

8. Where do you personally get your information regarding social issues/events (again see if email is mentioned) affecting Roma…Do you ever listen to/watch (name the Roma station in the area) to get information?

9. What populations were you created to serve? i.e: Only Roma? Anyone who lives in the community? Only Roma children?
10. What populations do you actually serve? If there is a discrepancy – why? If there is not, how do manage to reach that population so specifically?

11. What is your current PR strategy? Wait till the media contacts you? Send a fax? Have specific people target the media…Who decided on this strategy? Has it changed?
12. Does the media ever contact you about your events? Do they ever call you for an expert opinion?

13. Do you feel that a relationship with the media could benefit you? Hurt you? Who is your target group with the media: the larger public, the NGO world or your potential clients?
14. Which media would you specifically want to work closer with? Any media you would want to stay away from?

15. How would you go about pitching a story to the Roma radio/TV station? Would it be different then how you pitch it to one of the local stations or A1 or MTV? If so, how?

Questions for the blacksmith's daughter and the school teacher's son...

1. What city/town do you live in?
2. For how long have you lived there?
3. Is that where your family is originally from?
4. Who lives at home with you?
5. *What is the last grade you completed in school?*
6. What language(s) did you use in school?

7. *What languages do you speak?*
8. What is the language primarily used at home? (If grandparents live in the house…) Is that the language your grandparents use with each other? With your father? What language do the young people in your house use with each other?

9. Do you watch television? If so, what stations do you watch for:
   - International news
   - Macedonian news
   - Local news
   - Documentaries
   - Upcoming events
   - Sports
   - Music videos
   - Soap operas/sitcoms
   - Information regarding Romani issues – please be specific as to what kinds of issues…
10. If you could change three things about the BEST TV station in Macedonia what would they be?
11. Have you ever called up/written to a TV station to complain and/or complement their work?

12. Do you listen to the radio? If so, what stations do you listen to for:
   - International news
   - Macedonian news
   - Local news
   - Upcoming events
   - Sports
   - Music
   - Information regarding Romani issues – please be specific as to what kinds of issues…
13. If you could change three things about the BEST radio station in Macedonia what would they be?
14. Have you ever called up a radio station to complain and/or complement their work?

15. Do have an email account? Do you ever receive information about upcoming events via email? Do you ever go to such events because of the postings?
16. Are you on any list serves such as: Roma Students? Or RNVO 2002? Do you ever get the announcements forwarded to you from other people or organizations?
17. Do you ever surf the web? If so, what kinds of information are you looking for?
Do you ever go to a website devoted to Roma issues? If so, what kind of information are you looking for?
18. Do you have your own web page?

19. Are you familiar with local Roma media in your city/town? Are you aware of the Roma media here in Macedonia? (Macedonia has 2 Roma TV stations and 4 Roma radio stations and, at

a minimum, 6 active Roma email groups/list serves) If so, how did you find out? If no, why do you feel you did not know this?

20. When people say they are a Roma TV station or Roma radio station – what does that mean to you? How should it differ from "non-Roma" radio/TV? What issues should they be covering? What language should it be in?

21. Are there benefits to Roma media being a different channel? Drawbacks? Should it be a separate channel or can it be a different show? What about a collaborative show?

22. Are you a member of any community group here in (name the city/town)? If so, what is your role? Do you go to meetings? Do you help provide transportation? Do you hold an official position?
23. How did you find out about the community groups?
24. Are there other organizations working on similar issues?
25. How do you find out about what they are doing?