

PARTICIPATION AND MEDIA ACCESS IN CONTEMPORARY ROMANIA

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Putting people first in development projects comes down to tailoring the design and implementation of projects to the needs and capabilities of people who are supposed to benefit from them.

Norman Uphoff

Introduction

As we seek to reconsider the theory, policy and practice of access to electronic media, we wish also to examine what preconditions are necessary for such access to occur, and in what ways we can best facilitate actors for meaningful access (as they might define it) to exist. It is not sufficient merely to supply the equipment and training in electronic media among people who are beginning to emerge from years of state oppression, as is the case in both the developing world and in the emerging civil societies of eastern and central Europe. We must also look at the ways in which people fear public participation in communications, as well as strategies for overcoming these fears. Only with broad-based support and participation can truly democratic access to media begin to be realized.

Diaz Bordenave (1994, 26) calls participation "...the process in which a person sees himself or herself as a unique individual and at the same time as a member of a community." He argues that participation is a human need and, as such, it fits with the value of the individual's right to self-determination. From a structural standpoint, participatory communication systems provide alternatives to the system dominated by transnational corporate interests (Reyes Matta 1986; Hochheimer 1988; Boyd-Barrett & Thussu 1993; Kivikuru 1993).

Uphoff (1985, 379), however, makes the case that, "unless the intended beneficiaries are already organized and accustomed to involvement in formal development programs, some procedures for introducing participation should be explicitly worked out." It is in this context that Diaz Bordenave's (1994, 31) statement about

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