Social Participation in Indonesian Media and Art: Echoes from the Past, Visions for the Future

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Abstract
This article uses a critical and historical perspective to examine some of the achievements of Indonesian community media, the problems they have encountered, as well as the solutions they are offering. It analyses the similarities and differences with earlier genres with an explicit participatory agenda, including certain forms of LEKRA literature and art of the 1950s and 1960s, 'people's theatre' since the 1970s, and 'conscientization art' since the 1980s. One of the main challenges for contemporary community media has been to reconcile class differences in the collaboration between media or art facilitators and local communities. These and other factors have affected the accessibility, distribution, sustainability and reach of their ideas, activities and outputs. The article demonstrates how facilitators and practitioners have tried to solve some of these problems through the exploration of alternative media networks, formats and content.

Keywords
community media, social participation, cultural history, visual arts, Central Java

Introduction
This article focuses on the development of community media in Indonesia. Community media are independent, grassroots-based communication initiatives that are supposed to provide an alternative to the mainstream

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public and commercial print and broadcast media. These initiatives can be seen as an aspect of the renewed freedom of expression since the fall of President Suharto’s New Order regime (1967-1998). They are also a reflection of trends in the international media landscape, particularly the cultures of interactivity and interconnectivity that have been rapidly developing since the introduction of the World Wide Web and mobile technologies in the early 1990s. At the same time, they have their roots in a long tradition of social commitment and participation in a variety of Indonesian cultural genres.

I will use a critical and historical perspective to examine some of the achievements of Indonesian community media, the problems they have encountered, as well as the solutions they are offering. My comparison will not include interactive media that have individual expression and consumption rather than community cohesion or change as their main purpose, such as the bulk of ‘social media’ using internet and mobile phone applications. It will also exclude traditional art genres that have their own modes of social participation and community building, but not the activist agenda of community media.1

First, I will analyse the similarities and differences with earlier genres with an explicit participatory agenda, including certain forms of LEKRA literature and art of the 1950s and 1960s, ‘people’s theatre’ (teater rakyat) since the 1970s, and ‘conscientization art’ (seni rupa penyadaran) since the 1980s. Then I will focus on the various initiatives of media activists in the village of Timbulharjo, Central Java, as a specific example of contemporary community media. Not only have these activists been at the forefront of the development of community media in Indonesia since the early 2000s, they have also covered a variety of media, ranging from print bulletins to radio and internet. Their experiences illustrate both the potential and the limits of community media in Indonesia, and resonate with some of the characteristics of the historical participatory genres.

One of the main challenges for contemporary community media has been to reconcile class differences in the collaboration between media or art facilitators and local communities. These and other factors have affected the accessibility, distribution, sustainability and reach of their ideas, activities

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1 An example of the first is people’s personal Facebook pages; an example of the latter the Javanese social dance genre tayuban (Hefner 1987).
and outputs. The final part of this article will demonstrate how facilitators and practitioners have tried to solve some of these problems through the exploration of alternative media networks, formats and content.

Community Media

In Indonesia, community media or media komunitas have been described as media ‘from, by and for the people’. According to this definition, community media are a type of participatory media in which ‘ordinary’ people, that is, non-media professionals, can contribute to content, management and ownership. Following Raymond Williams (1980), Atton (2002:4, 25) describes community media as a form of alternative media, comprising various degrees of the ‘decapitalization’, ‘deprofessionalization’ and ‘deinstitutionalization’ of communication. Alternative media would facilitate a more democratic form of communication, as they give access to media production, distribution and consumption to people who are excluded by the financial, professional and institutional structures of the mainstream media. They are not limited to media with an explicit or radical political agenda, but include any media that enable people to reflect on and transform processes of communication in relation to their specific social circumstances.

Community media have their international roots in groups using pamphlets, radio, audio and videocassettes as well as other media for a specific cause. For instance, community radio has been used for demanding better working conditions for Bolivian and Columbian miners in the late 1940s; for fighting government broadcasting monopolies in Europe in the 1960s and 1970s; and for promoting democracy in South Africa after the fall of the Apartheid regime in the early 1990s (Fraser and Estrada 2001:6). Nowadays community media in Indonesia and elsewhere are seen and used as a tool in the struggle against the intensified commercialization, monopolization, and homogenization of the mainstream print and broadcast media.

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2 Dari, oleh dan untuk rakyat (Nazarrudin and Hermanto 2009; Jurriëns 2009a:41-58; Birowo 2010).


Since 1998, Indonesia has experienced a spectacular growth in commercial print and broadcast media. While audiences have easier access to a larger quantity of media, they are not necessarily exposed to forms of information, entertainment, and artistic expression of greater variety or higher quality, however. Instead of a true decentralization of media ownership and content, in line with the post-New Order ideal of regional autonomy (otonomi daerah), national players have simply usurped regional media businesses, while successful regional players have expanded their businesses to regions elsewhere in the archipelago (Ida 2011:14-8). The public, formerly state-owned radio and television stations Radio of the Republic of Indonesia (Radio Republik Indonesia, RRI) and Television of the Republic of Indonesia (Televisi Republik Indonesia, TVRI), are still in a struggle of redefinition or self-discovery, and have not provided a valid alternative to and on behalf of the general public or specific groups and communities in society. It is in the context of this lack of audience participation and representation in the Indonesian commercial and public media that community media have grown and developed.

Ideas about the history and concept of community media spread to Indonesia through the educational and practical training programmes of international organizations such as UNESCO. Initially only involving a dozen of pioneering print bulletins and radio stations in predominantly Central and West Java, nowadays hundreds of community radios can be found throughout Indonesia. Since the early 2000s, Indonesian community media initiatives have also incorporated other technologies, such as video, television, and internet. The 2002 Indonesian Broadcasting Law (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 32 Tahun 2002 tentang Penyiaran, particularly part 6, paragraphs 21 to 24) includes community media as a fourth official broadcasting category, besides public, commercial and subscription broadcasting services.

In terms of technology and approach, community media reflect some of the main cultural trends and phenomena of our time. Exploiting the communicative possibilities of a single medium, or convergences between multiple media such as radio, television, video, mobile phone,

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5 In September 2001, UNESCO organized an influential seminar on community radio in Jakarta and Yogyakarta and distributed a handbook on community radio (Fraser and Estrada 2001) in Indonesian and English to radio practitioners nationwide.
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and internet, they promote social interactivity, connectivity, conviviality, and DIY culture on, and sometimes also beyond, the local level. As mentioned, Indonesian community media also build on creative genres in post-Independence Indonesia with a political agenda of social commitment and participation, such as forms of LEKRA literature, people’s theatre, and conscientization art.

Social Engagement in Art: The Institute of People’s Culture 1950-1965

No other institution in Indonesian history has put the issue of social commitment in culture and art higher on the agenda than The Institute of People’s Culture (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, LEKRA). LEKRA, which existed from 1950 until 1965, was informally linked to the Indonesian Communist Party (Partai Komunis Indonesia, PKI), and encouraged artists to demonstrate social commitment in their works and activities. LEKRA also introduced participatory genres and methods, although in its literature and other art there was a stronger tendency to represent local people rather than engage and work with them directly.

In that sense, contemporary community media are less ambiguous: social engagement is not only something to be represented, but also something to be demonstrated or performed through the actual participation of local communities. The relation between the intentions and interests of local communities on the one hand, and the creation and distribution of art and media works on the other, is usually mediated by third parties with their own approaches and agendas, and therefore not unproblematic. The concept of community media itself, however, encourages coherence between content (social issues) and format or style (social participation).

Keith Foulcher (1986) has observed a lack of such coherence in LEKRA literature and other art. Reflecting President Sukarno’s discourse (1949-1965) on the Indonesian post-colonial state and its position in the world, LEKRA promoted a combination of nationalism, anti-imperialism and modernization that was rooted in the reality and ambitions of the rakyat (‘society’ or ‘the people’) (Foulcher 1986:28), a term also commonly used in the context of contemporary community media. Initially, in LEKRA’s Mukadimah (‘Preamble’) founding statement of 1950, ‘the people’ referred to class and material interests, but in the mid-1950s the idea was formulated by the institute in terms of an emotional commitment to values (nationalism,
anti-imperialism, modernization, justice, equality) that went beyond class divisions (Foulcher 1986:29). Artists were supposed to share this ‘state of awareness’ or ‘state of mind’ and reflect it in their creative works. Foulcher (1986:25) argues that this type of social commitment was restricted predominantly to the ‘content’ of art, but never really translated into a distinct aesthetic theory, style or production method:

In its development […], it is the pursuit of appropriate ‘states of mind’, which marks LEKRA’s aesthetic philosophy. Its evaluative criteria were never stylistic or methodological, and it never in practice questioned the material basis of cultural production in Indonesia. This meant that LEKRA engaged with, rather than negated the bourgeois nationalist tradition, adopting some of its products and some of the tendencies within it, even as it condemned others.

LEKRA promoted an idea of socialist realism that was based on the work of the Russian author Maxim Gorki (1868-1936). This socialist realism was a form of realism in its attempt to represent the nature, essence or truth of society and everyday life; it was socialist in presenting an idealist, revolutionary vision of the future with suggestions, changes and solutions for a better Indonesia (Foulcher 1986:23, 37-9, 50, 121, 141). Usually, there was no explicit concern with the construction of a political form of socialism, however, but rather a ‘revolutionary realist’ focus on ‘immediate, concrete issues, and ‘the struggle for justice in a radical nationalist context’ (Bodden 2011:463-4).

In terms of style, the socialist or revolutionary realism of LEKRA-related artists shared many characteristics with the modern, if not modernist, outlook of the rival ‘universal humanist’ camp.6 The creation and evaluation of LEKRA art was generally based on the same criteria of originality and individuality, although in terms of content and attitude towards reality the work rejected the ahistorical and asocial general values of the universal humanist artists. According to Foulcher (1986:41-51, 122-3, 134-7), the paradoxical and theoretically problematic character of combinations

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6 An important statement explaining the Indonesian notion of universal humanism, without using the actual term, is the Surat Kepercayaan Gelanggang (Letter of Gelanggang Beliefs) of October 1950. This statement, issued by the nationalist, non-Communist art collective Gelanggang (‘Arena’), expressed the belief that the development of a modern national culture and literature in Indonesia would not be fundamentally different from that in Europe or other parts of the world (Foulcher 1986:2-3).
of modern western styles, such as realism and expressionism, and people-oriented (*kerakyatan*) content remained largely ignored or unsolved by the LEKRA artists and art critics. Although the integration between message and approach or presentation is at the heart of contemporary community media theory, in practice incongruities remain, as in the Timbulharjo alternative media initiatives discussed later in this article.

This is not to say that LEKRA did not promote innovative artistic methods or formats, distinct from the universal humanist tradition and partly continued in today’s community media. For instance, LEKRA provided material, organizational and promotional support to painters and other visual artists that were part of so-called *sanggar* (Holt 1967:218; Foulcher 1986:41-2). In *sanggar*, which originated from the time of the Revolution (1945-1949), a senior artist taught painting and other creative skills to young aspiring artists. The artists normally worked as a cooperative and lived as a commune in an *asrama*. They also organized art exhibitions and workshops in the open air that were accessible to the general public (Spanjaard 1998:120; Foulcher 1986:140). Examples of these communities were the Pelukis Rakyat (‘People’s Painters’), who used the slogan ‘Art for the people’ (*Seni untuk rakyat*), and the Seniman Indonesia Muda (‘Young Indonesian Artists’) of the 1940s and 1950s.

LEKRA also published reportage-style short stories by ordinary people who normally would not present themselves as literary authors in the cultural affairs section of the PKI daily *Harian Rakyat* (‘The People’s Daily’). In terms of content, these stories can be seen as early examples of media ‘from and for the people’, although the newspaper itself was not managed or owned ‘by the people’, as would be the case in more recent community media. The stories were not published in their original regional languages,

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7 Michael Bodd (2012:455) has nuanced Foulcher’s observation by pointing out that in various theatre and dance genres of the time ‘potentially radical aesthetic ideas […] were being formulated and developed through practice on a variety of local “stages”’. These included mobile theatre and dance groups and so-called *sendratari* dance drama spectacles that were meant to be more accessible to the ordinary people than classical performing art genres. Nevertheless, even in these cases, direct and relatively spontaneous audience participation in performances was limited, and often only allowed after a rigorous review process guided by the PKI cadres (Bodd 2012:468-9).

but translated into the national language. Most likely, they were also extensively edited and rewritten in other ways. According to Foulcher (1986:54), this genre remained ‘a minor tendency overshadowed by the direction of the movement as a whole, and its “proletarian” character is still mitigated by the fundamental “modernizing” and “national culture” elements of LEKRA ideology’.

In the early 1960s, when LEKRA became more directly involved in party and state politics, it demanded a stronger social commitment of artists and cultural activists by encouraging them to ‘move down’ (turun ke bawah or turba) and live, work and otherwise fully participate in local communities (Foulcher 1986:107, 110). On the one hand, the usually urban-based artists and activists were to undergo a personal transformation as a result of the physical deprivations and psychological hardships of living in the countryside; on the other hand, they were also prompted to conduct research about and examine the revolutionary potential of regional art forms and culture (Shackford-Bradley 2000).9

Shackford-Bradley (2000) argues that ‘the very concept of “descent from above” is based on a spatial configuration of class that is uncompromisingly hierarchical’. Ironically, the term itself continued to be used by state officials during the New Order to refer to their official visits to the Indonesian slums, villages, and outer regions (Shackford-Bradley 2000). The aspect of class division would not be solved by the people’s theatre and conscientization art of the following decades, and it still poses a real challenge to today’s community media facilitators. In general, community media facilitators have a higher education than their target groups, and the length and depth of their immersion in local societies is relatively limited.

9 The concept of turba was influenced by Maoist thought, particularly the idea of xia fang (‘to go out into the countryside’), and marked LEKRA’s growing orientation towards Chinese communism since the late 1950s (Shackford-Bradley 2000). This new orientation also influenced the introduction of the slogan Politik adalah Panglima, or ‘Politics is the Commander’, which not only urged artists to retain their socio-political commitment, but also implied that LEKRA would become increasingly involved in state politics as a means to further develop Indonesian art and culture. Only from 1964 to 1965, a stronger, direct impact of PKI on LEKRA became manifest (Foulcher 1986:107-8).
Early Participatory Media: People’s Theatre since the 1970s

After Suharto took over power from Sukarno in 1965, LEKRA and PKI were banned, and hundreds of thousands of their real or alleged members were imprisoned or killed in a series of violent events that took place in Java and other islands. The universal humanist approach of individual expression and international and decorative styles became the officially approved creative practice, while socially and politically engaged art and media were discredited, censored, or banned. This does not mean, however, that artists and media practitioners did not attempt to express socio-political commitment in various other, often innovative ways.

The New Art Movement (Gerakan Seni Rupa Baru, GSRB), for instance, deliberately distanced themselves from academic, politically accepted, or universal styles, such as abstract modernism, post-impressionism, and classical realism. They were influenced by the 1960s Pop Art movement in the United Kingdom and the United States, the West German sculptor Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) (Hardi 1979:14-5), and early twentieth century Dadaism and surrealism, and adopted and reinvented genres such as performance art, happenings, installations, mixed media, found objects, and photorealism. They engaged with the daily realities of contemporary consumer culture, and sought to level ‘the aesthetic distance between the art of urban mass culture—such as becak decoration, folk arts, or seni rupa di kaki lima (“street” art, comprising such expressions as posters, T-shirts, bumper stickers, comics and the many other articles commonly found for sale in urban street stalls and shops)—and contemporary art as practiced by graduates of art academies’ (Miklouho-Maklai 1991:1).

According to FX Harsono (2009e), co-founder of GSRB and prolific artist and essayist, the movement had a different, broader idea of people’s issues (kerakyatan) than the previous generations of socially engaged artists. In their works and statements, the young artists, children of both the New Order regime and the era of globalization, gave expression to issues of national and international concern, such as ‘the environment, displacement, labour, humanity, war, the culture of violence and the conflict between traditional and modern culture’ (Harsono 2009e:106). Brita Miklouho-Maklai (1991:26) observed that GSRB attached equal importance to form and content for

expressing their ideas, whereas earlier movement such as LEKRA focussed on content rather than form. However, similar to the majority of LEKRA literature and visual art, GSRB was about representing social commitment rather than enabling direct social participation. The decision of artist-activist Moelyono (1997:124) to create the ‘conscientization art’ that will be discussed later in this article was also partly in protest against the fact that GSRB seemed to speak on behalf of the ‘ordinary people’ rather than engage in real dialogue with them.

The principles and sources of social engagement of another art form during the early New Order regime, people’s theatre, were much closer to those of the community media of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. An institution that best illustrates the connections between people’s theatre and modern community media is the Yogyakarta-based catholic media production centre PUSKAT Audiovisual Studio. PUSKAT has contributed to the development of Indonesian people’s theatre through its involvement with the Arena theatre group since 1971 (Hatley 2008:134-7; Bodden 2010:58). In the 1980s and 1990s, it gradually expanded its activities to other art, media and topics, including religion, youth, regional culture, agriculture, and ecotourism. In 1995, it established its own community radio station Balai Budaya Minomartani (Jurriëns 2009:153-4), which focuses on children’s programmes and Javanese arts including wayang kulit and gamelan, and is based on principles similar to those of people’s theatre, such as accessibility, participation, and ‘conscientization’ or creating social awareness through education.11

Arena’s version of people’s theatre was influenced by various international sources, particularly the work of the Brazilian educator and philosopher Paolo Freire, the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, the Philippine Educational Theater Association (PETA), the German playwright Bertold Brecht and the Canadian theatre activist Ross Kidd (Erven 1992:187; Bodden 2010:59-62, 68). Aspects of these sources, especially Freire’s idea of conscientization, are reflected in the people’s theatre theory as formulated by Fred Wibowo (Bodden 2010:80-1), who was the artistic leader of Arena from

11 This idea of conscientization has been developed in Paolo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). This book also inspired Augusto Boal’s version of community theatre, called the ‘Theater of the Oppressed’ (1979).
the early 1970s to the early 1990s, and later became the managing director of PUSKAT. This theory comprises the following six points:

1. The stories of performances must have their origins in local social conditions;
2. The scripts of performances should be created and arranged by the local people themselves;
3. Performances should be kept simple, and make use of easily accessible, locally available resources;
4. They should break down the barriers between performers and audiences, and avoid the use of professional actors;
5. They should not aim at catharsis, but at raising awareness about social problems;
6. They have to effect change and create conditions for a better world by building dialogue between people.

If these six criteria are followed, people's theatre can become, in Wibowo's words, a true 'people's feast' (pesta rakyat) and a 'rehearsal' for complete social change, including material improvement (Bodden 2010:80-1). PUSKAT has based its community radio station and community media training workshops on similar ideas. The members of another Yogyakarta-based group, the Indonesian People's Theatre Group (Kelompok Teater Rakyat Indonesia, KTRI, established in 1989), took the idea of people's theatre to a more radical end than Arena, by living and working full-time, in turba-like fashion, with local communities (Hatley 2008:136; Bodden 2010:74-6).

Community media facilitators such as PUSKAT have not only worked with local groups, but also trained NGOs to combine their development programmes with theatrical and other cultural techniques for informal education and social conscientization (Bodden 2010:74). It is in this complex interaction between cultural workers, NGO activists and local communities in people's theatre and other cultural activities at the grassroots where conflicts of class and other interests have arisen. One issue that emerged in various forms of 'workers' theatre' (teater buruh) in the 1990s, for instance, was that collaborating (well-educated, middle-class) NGO activists valourized theatre groups more in terms of their contribution to a labour movement than in terms of their own artistic development. For the workers themselves, on the other hand, theatre was not only a medium
for representing everyday life reality, providing education and building solidarity, but also for enjoying the pleasures of association, recreation, and relaxation (Bodden 2010:227-9). Middle-class artists, art critics, and journalists, for their part, often ignored or criticized the artistic value of workers’ and other grassroots theatre. The performances were primarily seen as tools for creating awareness, not for providing aesthetic sophistication or innovation (Bodden 2010:239-42, 256-8).

This type of criticism echoed the conflict between style and content in the creation and discussion of LEKRA art during the 1950s and 1960s. I argue, however, that rather than suffering from a lack of artistic quality, grassroots theatre and, in its following, other community media present a specific, new type of aesthetics. This aesthetics, in line with the content and production mechanism of grassroots performances, has a strong contextual, interactive, and dialogical character. It constitutes an important alternative to the universal humanist aesthetics of time- and space-transcending originality and individuality, which became the dominant and politically endorsed line after the abolition of LEKRA in 1965. According to Michael Bodden (2010:241), ‘rather than searching for universal values, workers’ theatre embraced the local, specific issues of its primary audience and did so in a way that allowed the audience to join in the fun. This ‘intimacy’ was then joined with modern notions of theatre as an educational medium’. In the current age of computer-mediated interactivity and connectivity, aspects of this alternative aesthetics have moved more to the centre of creative production and consumption, although, both in Indonesia and elsewhere, community media as a whole are still battling to find social and political acceptance.

Creating Awareness: Conscientization Art since the 1980s

Indonesian artists have applied Freire’s idea of conscientization not only to theatre, but also to drawing, installation, and other visual art. The Indonesian pioneer of such participatory visual art is Moelyono. According to Moelyono (1997a; 1997b), art, as a means of education, expression, and dialogue, can make people critically aware of their position and role in society, and encourage them to voice their aspirations and alter their prospects for the future. He has used various names for his art, which all refer to social participation, social awareness, and social change, including
‘conscientization art’ (*seni rupa penyadaran*), ‘renewal art’ (*seni rupa pembaruan*), ‘virtuous art’ (*seni rupa kagunan*),12 ‘public art’ (*seni rupa publik*), ‘community art’ (*seni rupa komunitas*), ‘art at the margins’ (*seni pinggiran*) and ‘Village Unit Art’ (*Kesenian Unit Desa*).13

Since the mid-1980s, Moelyono has promoted his thoughts about art and education through his work as an art teacher in East Java. For years, he has been rotating between a Catholic high school in the town of Tulungagung, a teachers’ training college in the town of Kediri, an art institute in Surabaya, and a small elementary school serving the tiny fishing villages of Brumbun and Nggerangan in the Tulungagung regency (Wright 1994:216). Since 1993, Moelyono has also run his own art foundation in the town of Tulungagung, called Foundation of Community Art (*Yayasan Seni Rupa Komunitas*). The foundation provides art education, documentation, workshops, discussions, and children’s art festivals and exhibitions (Brangwetan 2011). Moelyono (2005:5) has brought his art programmes also to provinces outside Java, including Aceh and Papua.

Moelyono has used his art classes as a means to improve and create awareness about the material, mental, and physical wellbeing of his students (Wright 1994:214-6; Harsono 2009d:57-62). While drawing is his preferred medium, he also uses other, three-dimensional media such as rattan sculptures as interactive tools for play and instruction (Aditjondro 2005:87). He tries to provide education and social change ‘from below’ by asking children and their parents direct or indirect questions about everyday matters, such as the problem of clean drinking water.14 By encouraging them to give

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12 *Kagunan* here means ‘a skill, a technique, and a practice that can be controlled and practiced by all people’ (Moelyono 1997a:228-9). In Old Javanese, *guna*, the base word of *kagunan*, has the connotations of ‘goodness, good characteristics, character, virtue, ability, skill, expertise, capability, holiness, use, benefit, service, charity, power’ (Moelyono 1997a:124). For Moelyono (1997a:129), these characteristics confirm that art is not restricted to the practices and judgments of an educated and/or wealthy elite, but forms ‘an inalienable aspect of everyday life’ and implies deeply rooted (Javanese) communitarian values.

13 *Kesenian Unit Desa* is play on *Koperasi Unit Desa*, or Village Unit Cooperation, a New Order government economic initiative to improve the living standard of farmers (Moelyono 1997a:93). One of the purposes of Moelyono’s Village Unit Art was to provide a platform for protecting and reviving local art traditions, such as traditional horse dance (*jaranan* or kuda lumping) and glass painting (*lukisan kaca*) in East Java (Moelyono 1997a:92-106).

14 Moelyono (1997a:95-6) decided to work predominantly with children, not only for pedagogical reasons, but also out of pragmatic and safety considerations. While living in
expression to these issues in art, he hopes that his students can break away from habitual ways of observing and behaving, and produce imaginative ideas and practical solutions (Wright 1994:217-8).

In August 1988, Moelyono organized an exhibition in Jakarta with drawings from the East Javanese fishing village children, which, in line with his idea of seni rupa penyadaran, was titled ‘Transformative Dialogue’. The exhibition catalogue was not a normal art catalogue, but also included texts, maps, statistics, and photographs that presented a geographical and social portrait of the villages and their residents (Wright 1994:216-7). The money from the art works sold at the exhibition was used to fund local projects such as water storage facilities (Harsono 2009d:61). Moelyono (1997b:86-91) has done projects not only with rural communities, but also urban groups. On 12 August 1993, for instance, he used installation art as a medium to mobilize a group of factory workers in Surabaya for an event at the Surabaya Art Council, called ‘An Art Exhibition for Marsinah’. This controversial exhibition, which commemorated the first 100 days since the rape and murder of local worker-activist Marsinah, was closed by the police soon after its opening (Moelyono 1997b:98; Fakih 1997:xxix).

It may be difficult to find the same degree of social commitment as shown by Moelyono among other community media facilitators. Even his supporters do not unconditionally accept every aspect of his approach, however. In an essay for one of Moelyono’s books (2005), the well-known Indonesian sociologist George Junus Aditjondro pressured Moelyono along with community media facilitators, local residents, and academics in general to re-evaluate their own position in various forms of social interaction. Aditjondro’s critical questions included the following: first, how can the oversimplification and confusion of categories such as ‘poor people’, ‘people with problems’, ‘villagers,’ and ‘children’ be avoided?; second, considering the variety of problems faced by local residents, who decides on the selection of key themes for public display and discussion with the outside world?; and third, what are the target audiences for exhibitions that

the Nggerangan and Brumbun villages, he was constantly interrogated by the local bureaucracy and security forces about his background and motives for working with isolated and poor communities. One of the returning, intimidating questions was about his familiarity with the Indonesian political events of 1965. This was a warning for Moelyono to avoid any suggestions that he was trying to revive communist ideology and the ideas and practices of LEKRA.
take place outside the local communities, and what is their connection with the communities and/or community media facilitators? (Aditjondro 2005:85-104).

Aditjondro (2005:84-5) wondered, for instance, why Moelyono (1997b:79-82), for an exhibition touring Java in 1989, highlighted the theme of the diversion of village land and resources for tourism purposes in Nggerangan and Brumbun, while many other issues could have been raised from the art works produced by the local villagers. Referring to the sale of artworks at the 1998 ‘Transformative Dialogue’ exhibition, he also warned for the risk of diverting projects from their original pedagogical and emancipatory purposes to merely becoming fund raising events. Similar to the lessons drawn from the teater buruh initiatives, and equally relevant to various forms of contemporary community media, this suggests that the interests of an outside party, no matter the sincerity of its social commitment, do not necessarily match those of the target communities. Aditjondro (2005:92-4) also referred to the more basic problem of community art and media activists needing to decide on the right moment to leave their target group and consider their mission of supporting community independence and emancipation accomplished.

**Contemporary Community Media: The Case of Timbulharjo**

A more recent example of similar issues is the range of local media initiatives in the Central Javanese village of Timbulharjo. In 2000, youth from the Dadapan area in Timbulharjo made use of the relaxed media regulations of the reform era to start a print bulletin, called Angkringan.15 The village youth believed the bulletin would be an effective means to, firstly, assist people in communicating their thoughts and organizing and monitoring themselves; secondly, strengthen the role of local people in controlling corruption in their village administration; thirdly, give specific interest groups a stronger bargaining position in negotiations with other groups; and, fourthly, unite the various village factions (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:171-2).

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15 *Angkringan* is Javanese for a small outdoor food stall where people come together to eat and chat. Typically, it consists of a bamboo carrying pole with a basket or chest for storing and presenting food on either end.
The *Angkringan* bulletin is published four times a month and costs only Rp. 750 (approximately A$ 0.08) per copy. Apart from the income from sales, the production costs are covered with the money from advertisements of local small trade. In addition to local news, the bulletin publishes national news of local relevance, for instance about an outbreak of a virus. The first edition of the bulletin, published on 14 January 2000, critically discussed the way in which the village government had handled money for a poverty reduction project. Partly as a result of the publication of stories about the mismanagement of the poverty reduction funds, the village head was forced to step down.

In July 2000, the *Angkringan* bulletin was the only community medium to receive one of the annual media awards of the Jakarta-based NGO Institute for the Studies on Free Flow of Information (Institut Studi Arus Informasi, ISAI). The prize money of Rp. 2,500,000 (approximately A$ 450) was invested in the establishment of a community radio station, also called Angkringan. The station started broadcasting in August 2000 (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:171-3; Jurriëns 2009a:147-9). Its advantage over the print bulletin is that it has a larger reach and can also be understood by illiterate people. As the villagers are usually busy with their normal work and other activities during the day, the broadcasts take place every night from 8 to 11 pm. The broadcasts discuss issues such as land certificates, social insurances, and public housing (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:174).

Since 2007, the Timbulharjo citizens have also used the community radio infrastructure to broadcast internet signals. The advantage of this system is that users do not have to pay individual internet connection fees, but can share the costs with each other, which amount only to several thousand Rupiah (less than A$ 1) per household per month. To receive the internet signals, the Timbulharjo citizens use so-called ‘wajanbolic’, or modified *wajan* or frying pans, which are not only cheap but also have symbolic value as basic cookware that can be found in almost every Indonesian household and *warung* (food stall). The wireless internet service, called AngkringaNet, provides the local people with internet links to the outside world as well as an intranet exclusively for the community. The AngkringaNet website contains various Open Source software programmes for general use, and also enables people to access and contribute to a Village Database with information about local governance, economy, health and other issues. Community members are also trying to use the internet
service for the local production, broadcasting and reception of television programmes (Jurriëns 2009b).

The various Angkringan community media receive operational support from the Yogyakarta-based NGO Combine Resource Institution (CRI), which itself receives financial support from The Ford Foundation. As The Ford Foundation requires that every partner organization of CRI has legal status, the Timbulharjo community established the Timbulharjo Citizens’ Communication Forum (Forum Komunikasi Warga Timbulharjo, Fokowati), an official body for the coordination of the local media initiatives, on 27 May 2001. Fokowati aims to contribute to a ‘participatory, transparent and accountable governance of the Timbulharjo village’, and tries to maintain its independence by not accepting any members of the village government (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:174-5).

The Angkringan community media discuss issues that were raised during workshops organized by Fokowati and involving representatives of all the major interest groups in the village, including women and youth. The five key problems highlighted during the workshops were the mismanagement of land certificates, students leaving high school prematurely, unemployment, the lack of financial support for local businesses, and inadequacies in the village’s material infrastructure. With support from CRI, Fokowati was relatively successful in bringing these issues to the attention of the village government. Initially the Angkringan community radio station was even provided with a space at the village meeting hall. After a while, however, their phone connection began to be interrupted by members of the village government who disagreed with some of the broadcast content, in particular about the government’s mismanagement of land certificates (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:196).

According to a detailed study of the Communications Studies programme at the Tertiary Institution for Village Community Development (Sekolah Tinggi Pembangunan Masyarakat Desa, STPMD ‘APMD’) in Yogyakarta, the availability of community media and other public institutions in Timbulharjo has not sufficiently improved people's political participation in terms of ‘voice’, ‘access’, and ‘control’ (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono and Astuti 2005:183). ‘Voice’ here means to be able to express one's opinion about issues related to governance and development; ‘access’ to be able to influence and participate in the creation of government policies and public services; and ‘control’ to be able to monitor the operations, policies and financial situation of the government (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and
Edwin Jurriëns

Astuti 2005:168-9). Although community media can serve a broader spectrum of more subtle types of politics—the politics of local identity, gender, or the media, for instance—the focus on administrative politics is useful for testing the reach, depth and strength of the ideal of social empowerment through community media.

According to the STPDM ‘APMD’ report, one of the problems directly impacting the Angkringan community media has been Fokowati’s lack of initiatives after the partnership with CRI formally expired. The only people willing to participate in the activities are the local educated elite. The majority of the Timbulharjo population does not understand the idea and function of Fokowati, due to a perceived lack of media literacy, or an antagonism towards a communication forum that was introduced by an external organization. While the total population of Timbulharjo counts more than 16,000 people, the discussion forums are attended by an average of only 20 to 40 villagers. Because of technical and financial problems, there have also been interruptions in the publication of the Angkringan bulletin (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and Astuti 2005:196-200).

On the basis of the Timbulharjo experience, the STPMD ‘APMD’ research team published three recommendations to improve the effectiveness of community media. Firstly, local citizens should be made aware of the presence, function, and benefit of community media, and be given a sense of ownership of these media. Secondly, community media should be supported by ‘transformative’ leadership that is able to formulate and put into operation democratic policies. Thirdly, education should be provided to help people transform themselves, and become the subjects rather than the objects of communication practices, and consequently also the initiators rather than the targets of local policies (Sulistyowati, Wuryantono, and Astuti 2005:201). In short, some of the main issues have been accessibility and participation, political support and reach, and media education. Indonesian community media facilitators and practitioners are aware of these and other difficulties in their work, and are in a continuous process of self-reflection and improvement.

Media Distribution and Institution Building

One clear theme to draw from these contexts is that collaboration between art or media activists and local communities typically involves a complex
negotiation of conflicting interests and class differences. The success of these negotiations depends on the transparency of the arrangements and the depth and length of dialogue between the various participants. The failure of some (aspects of) of these negotiations puts the idea of media ‘from, by and for the people’ in critical perspective. At the same time, however, community media initiatives should be credited with publishing stories and creative ideas to the outside world that would normally not reach the mainstream media.

For the participants in community media initiatives, the distribution of media content is usually a bigger challenge than the production of such content. Indonesian community video facilitators and practitioners, for instance, do not have access to the mainstream channels for the distribution of films and DVDs. In commercial cinemas, there is a lack of digital projection facilities that allow the screening of film as well as video (Videochronic 2009:39). Commercial DVD outlets such as Disc Tarra only distribute videos that meet the required minimum number of copies (usually 1,000 copies or more) and carry a tax ribbon issued by the Film Censorship Board (Videochronic 2009:41). A problem for video artists is that they may not be invited to exhibitions and festivals if their work is already available on the World Wide Web. The organizers of video festivals themselves are often confronted with complex organizational problems and copyright and censorship issues (Videochronic 2009:39).

Many video activists also refuse to have their work broadcast on public or commercial television, because they feel this would compromise the independent or radical character of their activities. Those who do not object to working with mainstream television institutions often miss out on receiving royalties, because their work is regarded as non-profit in nature (Videochronic 2009:40). Community television is still in its early phase of development in Indonesia (Nazarrudin and Hermanto 2009), and video activists and community television practitioners are often not aware of the complementary values of their activities and ideas.

Faced with these challenges, Indonesian alternative video practitioners have come up with many creative solutions to make their work accessible to the public. These solutions include screenings at alternative venues, such as independent cinemas, foreign cultural institutions, art galleries, campuses, political centres, village halls, boarding schools and family homes. Films and videos are also shown outdoors, continuing an Indonesian cinema tradition of projecting movies on mobile, temporary screens or layar tancap.
(literally, ‘screens that are stuck into the ground’) (Videochronic 2009:38).

Another form of distribution is the sale of DVDs or VCDs in alternative bookshops, on promotional internet sites or in so-called distro or small ‘distribution’ shops for independently produced fashion, music, video, and other creative work (Iskandar 2006:106-7; Uttu 2006).

Support for the distribution of alternative video is also provided by the Australia and Indonesia-based NGO EngageMedia. EngageMedia attempts to build an on-line network of video activism in the Asia-Pacific region, so facilitators and practitioners can easily get in touch with each other for exchanging materials and ideas. One of the NGO’s initiatives has been an open source video-sharing platform called Plumi. The system makes it possible for local organizations to set up video archives ‘which run on a server hosted locally in the office of the organization, making uploading and downloading to the archive extremely rapid. Videos can be watched by anyone on the local area network and easily copied to USB sticks, DVDs and CDs’ (Videochronic 2009:49). EngageMedia expects from the organizations that make use of its facilities to publish their work under Creative Commons (CC), which is an alternative copyright system to ‘help authors share their work while keeping their copyright and specifying certain conditions’ (Videochronic 2009:51).

One of EngageMedia’s counterparts and a frontrunner in the exploration and application of alternative video distribution is the Yogyakarta-based community video facilitator Kampung Halaman (‘Home Village’). Kampung Halaman (2010c) was founded in 2006 by Cicilia Maharani, Dian Herdiany, Elanvito, Zamzam Fauzanafi, and M. Abduh Azis, and specifically focuses on youth as the key to social transformation. Its main programme, the Youth Media Community Lab, provides participants with training about how to conduct research, make videos, organize video screenings, start up creative media businesses, and set up local media centres. The participating groups receive assistance from Kampung Halaman for approximately two years, after which they are expected to continue their activities independently (Kampung Halaman 2010c). In November 2011, Kampung Halaman received the International Spotlight Award from the US President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities for their engagement programmes with local youth (Youth Program Awards 2011).

In collaboration with EngageMedia, Kampung Halaman has developed Depot Video, a Plumi-inspired facility that enables students, academics,
and the general public to easily download and save community videos. It also publishes community videos in the form of DVDs, which are distributed for free to local communities, NGOs, schools, universities, and national and international film festivals. Another distribution strategy is monthly community video screenings, called ‘Nonton bareng di kampung’ (‘Let’s watch together in the neighbourhood’). The screenings always take place in other communities than the ones that created the videos, in order to facilitate the inter-local exchange of materials and ideas (Videochronic 2009:38). Kampung Halaman has also been involved in documentary film competitions as a means to produce and distribute community videos.  

Two special annual events organized by Kampung Halaman are the Indonesian Youth Media Camp and Jalan Remaja 1208 (‘Youth Street/Path 1208’). The Indonesian Youth Media Camp provides media training to young community leaders, while Jalan Remaja 1208 teaches local youth how to create and share their own videos and video blogs (Kampung Halaman 2010b; 2010e). Kampung Halaman has attempted to give a more sustainable character to community video production and distribution through the establishment of community media centres. An example is Opak House, situated near the Opak river in the Karang Ploso village in Bantul, Central Java. The centre, which consists of a library, theatre and activity room, was founded with help from Kampung Halaman in 2007, when Bantul was still recovering from the severe impact of the earthquake that hit the region on 27 May 2006. The purpose of the centre is to make the local youth aware of both the problems and assets of their communities, and to help them find a balance between individual and communal interests, and between modern and traditional communication and information media (Kampung Halaman 2010d).

An example of a community video from Karang Ploso is My lovely flowers (2006). This nine-and-a-half minute video was created by a group of village

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16 In December 2008, Kampung Halaman in collaboration with the Documentary Community held a workshop ‘Diversity through documentary films’. Five film proposals were selected to compete for a production scholarship of Rp. 25,000,000 (approximately A$ 3480). The winners created the documentary Sepintu Pemali, sedulang timah (‘At the door of Pemali, there is a pan of tin’) about pluralism and multiculturalism on the ‘tin’ island of Bangka. In March 2009, Kampung Halaman (2010a), with support from The Ford Foundation and the Tifa Foundation, took the documentary on a highly successful road show in Bangka.
girls between four and nine years old. The video shows the girls wandering their earthquake-damaged village in search of people who can be interviewed about the post-disaster reconstruction efforts. From a production perspective, this is a very simple documentary, but it enabled the young girls to re-address the impact of the earthquake with each other and other people they would normally not easily talk with, such as adult neighbours, local decision makers, and visiting students. The video is a telling example of the broader aesthetics used in many community media: relatively short narratives about local events in a local language, presented from a personal point of view, with unfixed camera or other recording positions, and deriving from a variety of fictional and documentary genres.¹⁷

Some local groups refuse Kampung Halaman’s offer to install internet facilities in their villages, because of fear of exposure to pornography and other unwanted materials (Videochronic 2009:45). EngageMedia’s plans for building an on-line community video network are not always well-received, either. Some communities have ideological objections against collaboration with other interest groups as a single network, while others fear a lack of human resources for maintaining such a network (Videochronic 2009:34). There are also groups who prefer to communicate directly with other community members rather than to try and address a relatively abstract and unknown internet audience (Videochronic 2009:46). EngageMedia itself rightly acknowledges that ‘the fact that the technology exists and certain groups have an affinity for video is not enough to form effective networks. Networks must begin from common political goals and shared understandings’ (Videochronic 2009:64).

Creating Common Ground

Community media facilitators and practitioners have tried to meet, exchange thoughts and materials, and create common ground not only through on-line communication, but also through face-to-face encounters. Both on- and off-line meetings provide public visibility to and education about community media, and give these media a stronger position in

¹⁷ This goes against Henk Schulte Nordholt and Fridus Steijlen’s (2007:9) observation that community videos predominantly imitate soap opera and other popular styles from mainstream television.
dealing with the competition and resistance from the social, political, and business establishment. More than just being two of the buzzwords of our time, connectivity and networking can function as effective strategies for community media initiatives to increase their accessibility and social and political reach.

An example of a face-to-face meeting that was specifically designed to create common goals and shared understandings was the community media festival Jagongan Media Rakyat, or ‘Social Gathering of People’s Media’, held in Yogyakarta from 22 to 25 July 2010. The festival was organized by CRI with support from The Ford Foundation, the Humanist Institute for Development Cooperation (Humanistisch Instituut voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, HIVOS) and several other institutions. In addition to practitioners from public, commercial, community, campus, and school media, it attracted the participation of civil society activists, community leaders, academics, artists, and primary and secondary school teachers and pupils (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010a). The festival events comprised a national seminar on village poverty; workshops about handicraft, art, technology, and Open Source software; local music, dance, and theatre performances; and presentations and discussions about community media and other socio-political issues, including environmental sustainability and the rights of women and workers (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010b).

The participation of organizations such as Sekolah mBrosot illustrated that the festival organizers acknowledged the importance of education in advancing the development of community media. Sekolah mBrosot is an informal education and activity centre in the village of Brosot, located in the Bantul area south of Yogyakarta. The centre organizes many activities, especially for children and women, ranging from theatre and literature to handicraft and cooking workshops. It also comprises a professionally run library with an impressive array of local, national and international literary and academic references. These references provide the community with

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18 The idea of the festival was developed by Akhmad Nasir, then Head of CRI and a Social and Political Sciences graduate from Yogyakarta’s Gadjah Mada University. Nasir originates from Timbulharjo and was the main force behind the various Angkringan community media initiatives.

19 It consists of the collections of the founders of Sekolah mBrosot, the public intellectuals and human rights activists Hersri Setiawan and Ita F. Nadia, and also includes donations from the Indonesian publishing company Gramedia and one of the Monash University
a means to contextualize historically, socio-politically and/or theoretically their self-representations in artistic activity and other media. The library is not only an invaluable source of knowledge for the Brosot community, but also attracts scholars and students from Yogyakarta and beyond. Although the favourable material and intellectual conditions of Sekolah mBrosot may not be available to the majority of other alternative art and media initiatives, the school could nevertheless serve as a model for the integration of community media in a wider educational context.

The central event of the Jagongan Media Rakyat, the national seminar of 22 July 2010, was meant to identify and find solutions for problems with the collection of correct data about poverty levels in Indonesia. These problems include the use of different interpretations and variables for measuring poverty as well as delays in information updates. An example was the 2008 Bantuan Tunai Langsung (‘Direct Cash Help’) government programme for the distribution of cash money to poor people, which, due to a lack of reliable information, resulted in the unequal allocation of funds. The seminar aimed at developing a national information system for the collection and comparison of micro-data and statistics from various Indonesian regions. The discussions drew participants from national and regional government institutions, aid organizations, NGOs and universities (Jagongan Media Rakyat 2010c).

In the context of the development of community media in Indonesia, Jagongan Media Rakyat stood out for two reasons: firstly, an effort was made at building networks of community media and other, governmental and non-governmental, organizations; secondly, the discussion of community media was directly linked to providing education about and finding solutions for specific socio-political issues. The festival can be seen as one of the first focused attempts to strengthen the impact of community media beyond individual institutions and communities.

The use of the concept of ‘people’s media’ rather than ‘community media’ in the festival’s title may also signal a re-orientation from the libraries in Melbourne. In the 1960s, Setiawan was the Head of the Central Javanese branch of LEKRA. After years of imprisonment in Indonesia and exile in the Netherlands, he returned to Indonesia in 2004 to re-engage with cultural activities and youth in his home village. Although Sekolah mBrosot does not espouse any particular political ideology or art theory, the community-based character of its library and creative activities is not surprising considering Setiawan’s background.
general principles of alternative media to the more explicit political agenda of ‘tactical’ or radical media, which are aimed at directly influencing the opinion of the general public and key decision makers. In a research conducted by EngageMedia with the Yogyakarta-based Kunci (‘Key’) Cultural Studies Center, tactical video is distinguished from two other categories of ‘video activism’: experimental video and grassroots video.20 I regard tactical video as a subgenre or an approach rather than a category of its own, as it hovers, by its very nature, between different forms of alternative media (Garcia 2007:6-7).

Jagongan Media Rakyat also seemed to be moving community media into the direction of creative or experimental activism by welcoming the participation of visual artists. This combined focus on education, politics and creative imagination may strengthen community media’s effort to break through the dominant paradigms of the mainstream media and to expand its reach to policy makers and the general public.

Conclusion

Indonesian community media confirm Edward Aspinall’s (2012) argument that after the destruction of the PKI in 1965, leftist ideas and activities of ‘commitment to the interests of the ‘little people’, hostility to ‘the elite’, and the high value placed on mass action as a form of political engagement’ continued to exist, in various form and degrees, during and after the New Order. This means that community media are not purely a post-New Order phenomenon, but build on and diverge from the ideas and activities of earlier socially engaged movements and genres. At the same time, however, for the majority of the post-1965 art and media initiatives analysed in this article it is irrelevant to talk in terms of ‘left’ or ‘right’, as they do not express explicit political-ideological thought.

20 According to this study, experimental video tries to change the relationship between the medium and its audience through aesthetic and technological experimentation and the deconstruction of imagery, while grassroots video attempts to transform communities by involving them in the process of media production (Videochronic 2009:26). Grassroots video is synonymous with the in Indonesia more common concept of community video (video komunitas), while experimental video is normally referred to as video art (seni video) or (new) media art (seni media [baru]) (Jurriëns 2009c).
Movements such as LEKRA and GSRB showed their social commitment predominantly by representing socio-political issues and talking on behalf of specific groups. Forms of workers’ theatre, Moelyono’s conscientization art and contemporary community media, on the other hand, not only provide socio-political content, but also allow social groups to directly participate in creative production, management and ownership. In that sense, there is a correlation between media content and approach or style.

This means that the analysis of social engagement in media and art needs to differentiate between social commitment and social participation. Genres of social participation can be complex, as they have to mediate the different and often conflicting interests of art and media facilitators on the one hand, and local communities and other social groups on the other. Some of the problems include the limited accessibility to and social participation in media initiatives, the lack of education about community media, as well as the limited distribution, political reach and sustainability of works, ideas and activities.

One of the overarching problems of the community media initiatives has been their fragmentation. According to Aspinall (2012), fragmentation is symptomatic of the Indonesian radical movement at large, and caused, among other things, by the activists’ over-reliance on NGOs:

Different NGOs develop specialized expertise in different segments of Indonesian social and political life rather than focusing on broad agendas and alliance building. Most are organizations of professionals and intellectuals with no desire to build a mass base. They also compete with one another for donor funding. The dominance of this NGO model continues to be a chief source of the fragmentation and splintering that characterizes Indonesia’s broad left today.

Aspinall (2012) acknowledges, however, that activists in post-New Order Indonesia have played an important role in putting pressing social issues on the political agenda, such as health care and social security schemes. Similarly, community media initiatives have not only brought to the surface some of the major flaws in the mainstream media system, especially the lack of diversity in ownership and content, but also tried to provide solutions in the form of alternative media programmes and structures.

The Jagongan Media Rakyat is a promising initiative to bring NGOs, local communities, government parties, artists, and others together, create a more focused socio-political agenda, and strengthen the viability and expand the reach of community media. The video archives of Kampung
Halaman and EngageMedia serve similar purposes, and try to build connectivity between various community media initiatives by exploring and developing on-line technologies. While these initiatives may not be capable of or aim at creating a mass movement according to the principles of the old left, they have partly succeeded in urging and providing alternatives for a more equitable and diverse Indonesian information and communication landscape.

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