

From: Kozolanka, Kirsten; Mazepa, Patricia; and Skinner, David. (eds.)  
*Alternative Media in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2012.



## Transformations of Practice, Policy, and Cultural Citizenships in Community Television

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Community television is like an invisible giant. It is a sector of the Canadian broadcasting system worth more than \$100 million annually and yet this cultural behemoth remains largely unknown to most Canadians. Even public outcry in 2008 over the demise of local television and the subsequent creation of a \$60 million Local Program Improvement Fund failed to bring community television issues into greater public focus. As is the case for the other kinds of non-traditional media discussed in this volume, the policies, issues, and especially potentials of community television remain misunderstood and understudied.

The creation of community channels was envisioned as a way for Canadians to make and see television about their own communities. It has been shaped from the beginning by the competing forces of broadcasting policy, commercial interests, and a desire for creative expression on the part of communities across the country. From its inception within the National Film Board's Challenge for Change project as a radical experiment in the democratization of mass media in the late 1960s, to its de facto commercialization and deregulation in 1997, to its subsequent re-regulation and emergence as a heterogeneous terrain of cultural production in the early twenty-first century, community television in Canada is the product of competing and often opposing cultural forces. As a result, broadly speaking, there are two kinds of community television in Canada: (i) cable-company-produced programming and (ii) independent community production. It is in the latter that we find the only recognized

contribution to televisual culture in the broadcasting system, independent of corporate and market constraints. It is the only legislatively recognized element within the Canadian television broadcasting system whose structure is founded on public action and participation.

An important question facing the community television sector in the early twenty-first century is its continued relevance in a digital age. But what is often underappreciated are the unique opportunities offered in comparison to online experiences. Opportunities such as professional skills-learning in collaborative productions, access to costly professional facilities and equipment, and subsidized training and live broadcasting are not typically available in online contexts. Community television remains – even with an active Internet culture – a vital means for expanding cultural citizenships well beyond the democratically feeble offerings of consumerism and into the kinds of capacities that encourage and engender public action.

This chapter sketches some of the salient contours of these new geographies of community television in Canada by focusing on two cases of independent community production, one in rural Cape Breton and the other in one of Canada's poorest urban communities, Vancouver's Downtown East Side. By situating today's practices in a historical policy context and by examining how some of these practices help communities determine their own social, cultural, and political existence in both rural and urban settings, I argue that Canadian community television as it is emerging among independent producers is an overlooked and vital site for the expansion of democratic accountability through cultural citizenships. I conclude by briefly considering Canadian policy in an international context of trends that raise difficult questions about community television's future. Despite localized successes, the existing regime in Canada, I suggest, is a public policy failure. Most importantly, community television's complexity and potential social contributions have yet to be addressed in any meaningful way by regulators, elected officials, and the public alike.

### **Community Television as Cultural Participation**

Community media has historically been theorized as a site for oppositional discourses – that is, for news and views that oppose or challenge dominant ideologies in any given culture (Waltz 2005). More recent scholarship recognizes community media's more politically heterogeneous practices and roles as a *constructive* as well as destabilizing element within civil society. Downing and Fenton (2003, 190), for example, describe the cultural territories of community

media as “mediating space” between private and public interests, and Rennie (2006, 36) argues for recognition of community media as a “legitimate participant in social governance,” along with market forces and the state. These views complicate the traditional counter-hegemonic expectation usually associated with the “alternative” in alternative media: “Within such vision, community media does not have to be marginal or defined by opposition, but is capable of offering new avenues for participation that work with an acceptance of the difference, diversity and power structures of the contemporary world” (ibid.). It is a vision of community media that can either challenge existing power structures or exist within them as a vehicle for addressing democratic deficiencies by facilitating greater participation in governance. In either case, shaping and defining the relationship between citizens and social institutions is central to its purpose and effect.

Community media, or “citizen’s media,” as C. Rodriguez (2001, 151) prefers, also play an important role by “reshaping identities, reformulating established social definitions and legitimizing local cultures and lifestyles.” They emerge in civil society, a conceptual and cultural space where dominant powers of state and private markets can be scrutinized and challenged, and where tendencies toward monopoly – whether over the production of knowledge, allocation of resources, or public meaning – can be directly opposed (Habermas 1987; Howley 2005; Carpentier, Lie, and Servaes 2003). Such tendencies don’t preclude influence by market forces and state interests, but suggest a category of cultural production not dominated by either. For example, commercial sponsorships allow local businesses to support particular programs and changing government regulations continue to structure community television’s operating environment. But production can and does occur with varying degrees of independence from either in community settings, and it is in this latter form that we encounter the greatest potential for participation by Canadians, not only as production volunteers, but as contributors with significant levels of creative control over programming.

The different kinds of participation offered by citizen’s media point to a key issue in public communication – exactly *who* gets a say. Dahlgren (1995) describes a vast cultural landscape of overlapping and ever-widening concentric circles of knowledge and experience, the smaller circles associated with subgroups, with ever-larger circles widening out to include more and more of a generalized public who share increasingly more and more generalized knowledge. Participation in the widest of the concentric circles, Dahlgren (ibid., 134, emphasis added) argues, “begins to pull us in the direction of *citizenship*

as a form of identity." Community television is one forum for ordinary Canadians (including poor, marginalized racial and ethnic communities, and non-corporate producers to express, participate in, shape, negotiate, reconfigure, and determine relationships between individuals and the wider social and political realities encountered on a day-to-day basis.

The concept of "cultural citizenship" helps to explain some of these broader connections between social participation and culture through access television, for example. King and Mele (1999, 605) have observed that "by shifting our analysis and critique from cable access programming (i.e., the 'product') to its production (i.e., participation) we redefine the traditional notion of the public sphere to include meaningful action on the part of local citizens from various backgrounds in a medium otherwise dominated by commercial and corporate interests." King and Mele (referencing Rodriguez) further suggest that even if the motivations of public access producers are not political, production itself is fundamentally meaningful: "The experiences of media authorship and participation reveal the power of information production otherwise mystified by advanced technologies and 'behind-the-scenes' decisions of television editors and producers (C. Rodriguez 1996)" (ibid., 608). Cultural citizenship also locates cultural production's excesses (that is, in excess of program content alone) within a framework that recognizes independent public participation as essential to the development of civil society. Community television brings groups of strangers together to accomplish difficult technical feats that can be achieved only through collaboration and with access to professional studios and equipment requiring specialized training; it thus invigorates a range of capacities that, at the very least, enhance abilities to participate in public action.

It should also be remembered that people enjoy in culturally creative processes for many reasons, not only to exchange information. These include, for example, to establish or strengthen a sense of identification, for sociability and security, for expression, pleasure, and entertainment, and for personal and community empowerment (J.P. Jones 2006; Stanley 2006). Community television provides important analytical and epistemological resources, but it also operates on many other experiential and communicative levels, such as the acquisition of technology skills, learning to get a message across, expanding openness to diversity, creating social bonds, and addressing collective issues (King and Mele 1999). There is also a range of individual and community capacities that can be developed and enhanced through participation in production processes: building self-confidence, collaboration skills, and conflict

resolution, developing community and social cohesion, constructing rhizomatic networks, assisting civic awareness and participation, preserving languages and local histories, and (re)creating institutional relationships (K. Goldberg 1990; Stanley 2006, 13-14; Lithgow 2008).<sup>1</sup> These all suggest the many ways of tracing the often ephemeral implications of cultural participation and by doing so help us gain a better understanding of how these practices work to shape Canadian society.

### **A History of Policy Uncertainty**

When community television was first invented (c. 1967), it was an unexplored medium for cable companies, activists, and artists alike. By 1972, more than a hundred cable systems across Canada voluntarily offered a community channel, with most programming being created by independent community producers on their own equipment (K. Goldberg 1990, 15). The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) introduced regulations in 1975 that required cable companies above a certain size to provide a community channel with financial support (at the time 10 percent of gross revenues) (CRTC 1975). These early regulations were an attempt to standardize the quality of a service mandated as the “primary social commitment” on the part of cable companies in return for single provider regional licences (K. Goldberg 1990). Access channels were also an effective way to convince cautious Canadian households to purchase cable services. At the time, Canadians were reluctant to pay for television which they received for free through broadcast, but were intrigued at the prospect of seeing themselves and their communities on cable (*ibid.*).

Standardization of services brought pressure from cable companies for the standardization of programming. In 1972, more than 75 percent of programming was produced by independent community members; by 1978, it was less than half (*ibid.*). A report commissioned in 1982 by Rogers Cablevision in Toronto found that, even then, independent programming was virtually non-existent and that programming had become increasingly conventional (*ibid.*). In the 1980s, artists abandoned the community channel after repeated conflicts over content with cable company managers (Abbott 2000). Cable companies were exercising a judicially untested authority over community expression by censoring programming they deemed unacceptable.

In 1986, the CRTC allowed sponsorship advertising – text over still images – for the first time on the community channel (CRTC 1986). This encouraged

cable companies to explore the commercial potential of access programming, with some charging community producers for airtime and requiring minimum levels of paid sponsorship for programs. The commercialization of the community sector then accelerated, prompting a public outcry. In 1990, responding to these complaints, the CRTC initiated a review of community channel policy. The end result, Public Notice CRTC 1991-59, both encouraged and discouraged the commercialization of community programming. On the one hand, it ensured that commercialization would continue by allowing sponsorship advertising and reducing by a full half of the expected level of financial support from cable companies. But it also protected community television's unique role in the Canadian broadcasting system by prohibiting cable companies from charging fees for access or tying access to advertising, and by setting out new roles and objectives for the community channel which importantly acknowledged community television's public service value.<sup>2</sup>

In the years following, cable companies continued to organize most community channel programming with the active participation of thousands of volunteers across Canada (Community Media Education Society 2008; Sid Tan, pers. comm., 2008). Some programs were entirely controlled by cable company employees, whereas others fostered higher levels of creative and editorial input from community members. In many jurisdictions, community programming was centralized through single regional offices. In others (Vancouver, for example), cable companies operated multiple neighbourhood production offices throughout a licence area. Typically, these offices were equipped with cameras, edit suites, and production vehicles, with a small number of cable company staff who provided training and volunteer opportunities for hundreds of community members.

In 1996, the CRTC proposed changes to the funding formula. Cable companies (including direct-to-home satellite distributors) were required to contribute not less than 5 percent of gross revenues toward "the creation and presentation of Canadian programming" (CRTC 1996), but only 1.5% (and only the largest cable companies were required to do this) needed to be allocated to the provision of a community channel. The remainder could be paid into a production fund that financed Canadian-produced commercial programming. When the changes were implemented in the following year, the CRTC included the surprise provision that the 1.5% contribution was a voluntary commitment. It (CRTC 1997) declared that the "community channel has achieved a level of maturity and success that it no longer needs to be mandated" and that "apart

from the benefits to the public through local reflection, the community channel provides cable operators with a highly effective medium to establish a local presence and to promote a positive image for themselves." In effect, the CRTC had deregulated community television.

Fallout was swift. In Vancouver, for example, six out of nine neighbourhood production offices were closed. Across Canada, cable companies began to aggressively manage their community channels like commercial properties. A period of political conflict ensued, pitting cable companies – encouraged by the CRTC to use community channels for corporate promotion – against community organizations and independent producers.

One of the central issues then, as it is now, was access to production resources and schedule time. Cable companies wanted more control over programming, which meant less community participation. In one particularly egregious example, Vancouver's Shaw Cablesystems eliminated three hours of weekly community-generated programming (produced through a non-profit group with whom I was actively involved at the time called Independent Community Television Co-op, or ICTV), offering instead a mere two minutes per week. At the time, Shaw's community channel manager told a CBC news reporter that at Shaw, "access is an evil word" (CBC 2002). By the end of 2002, in most jurisdictions, independent community programming had all but disappeared, and in its place was a distinctly more conventional (and commercial) approach to programming (Community Media Education Society 2008; Cathy Edwards, pers. comm., 2008; Tan, pers. comm., 2008).

Another element of the ongoing conflict over community television was corporate use of the channel to generate revenues. Cable company programs resembled commercial programming to such an extent that even commercial broadcasters complained to the CRTC that the new regulation had, in effect, granted cable companies their own commercial channels which were being used to compete with private broadcasters for advertising (Canadian Association of Broadcasters 2001). The cable companies themselves were not shy about their designs. In a 2001 submission to the CRTC requesting a relaxation of rules governing sponsorship advertising, Rogers Cable argued that existing earnings from community channel sponsorships – at that time already well over \$1 million – could be increased an additional \$1.7 million if moving images were allowed (Rogers 2001). In the same year, the CRTC launched a major review of all community-based media policy, including that governing community television. Over the course of eighteen months, two draft policies were

proposed and over a thousand submissions were received from members of the public, community groups, cable companies, and broadcasters.

A new policy framework was introduced in 2002. The regulations expressly situated community television within the legislative framework of the 1991 Broadcasting Act, which identifies community programming as one of three *equal* elements that make up the Canadian broadcasting system along with “public” and “private” (CRTC 2002). Several comments made by the commission in the new policy are instructive. For example, the commission states that “access by citizens to the community channel has always been a cornerstone of the Commission’s policy” and that “the factor that most distinguishes the content of community programming from conventional television services is the ability of community programming to turn the passive viewer of television into an active participant. From this participation flows programming of a nature that is as varied as the imagination and skills of the participants” (ibid.). The commission also reiterated its expectation that licensees should “give the community the widest opportunity for self-expression by actively encouraging groups and individuals to present program ideas, produce their own programs with or without the help of the licensee’s staff, and submit videotapes and films produced by them for broadcast by the licensee” (ibid.). The new policy unequivocally restated that “the Commission considers that providing and encouraging citizen access remains one of the most important roles of the community channel” (ibid., appendix). The commission also incorporated the public service roles and objectives from CRTC 1991-59 essentially unchanged.

What was not addressed in the 2002 policy was control of the substantial financial contributions required of cable distributors to support their community channel activities.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, cable companies on average contributed 4.6 percent of gross revenues toward community programming, or a total of \$85.5 million across Canada (Statistics Canada 1999). By 2003, contributions had declined substantially to 1.8 percent (Statistics Canada 2004). Despite significant increases in gross revenues for the cable industry overall (from \$1.8 billion in 1995 to \$6.1 billion in 2006, a whopping increase of 239 percent), community channel spending increased a more modest 43 percent in the same period, from \$85.5 million in 1995 to \$121.9 million in 2006 (Statistics Canada 1999, 2007). More problematic is that despite the size of these expenditures, there has been little precise accounting for how these monies are actually spent. Even the parliamentary committee responsible for its review, the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, was unable to obtain detailed

accounting information from cable companies for its 2003 report on the Canadian broadcast system (Canada 2003, 30).

Lack of financial accountability aside, the new policy created a tiered system of community television (cable company managed and independently produced), but ignored how these changes affected participation and the kinds of experiences fostered. Because independent production falls outside of the employee and management structures of cable companies, it allows for greater creative control by participants and thus fulfills the original policy mandate by presenting the widest opportunities for public expression in terms of aesthetic decisions (the look and feel of programming), notions of appropriateness or community standards, political orientations, and sexual, racial, and class preferences. These kinds of differences were more apparent in some jurisdictions than in others. In Vancouver, for example, where independent producers were the first to negotiate airtime and equipment-sharing agreements under the 2002 policy, programs were subsequently censored by the cable company because of concerns about professionalism, nudity, community appropriateness, and political sensitivities (a commentary that accused the United States of being a “rogue” nation was deemed unsuitable to air) (Community Media Education Society 2008; Tan, pers. comm., 2008).

Under the 2002 regulations, 50 percent of the community channel (for the largest classes of cable company licence) was to be made available for programs produced by community members independent of cable company oversight (see CRTC 2002, paragraphs 55-70). Significantly, the commission acknowledged the centrality of these independently produced programs by noting that, “while access programs [i.e., independently produced] are a central element of community programming, licensee-produced [i.e., cable company produced] programs *may* be equally valuable” (ibid., emphasis added). Independently produced programs were given primary importance. The new policy also created new classes of licence for different types of community television programming services: these included a stand-alone community programming licence that would allow non-profit community groups to operate the community channel should a cable licensee choose not to, a licence for community-based digital services, and a licence for community-based low-power television (50 watts or less on the VHF band, 500 watts or less on the UHF band) (ibid.).<sup>4</sup>

Under the 2002 policy changes, community television participation emerged in three distinct classes: first, cable company managed and produced programming (with varying levels of community participation from none to

some but with production and creative management governed by company employees); second, independent community production, in which creative control and production remained in the hands of independent community members (with varying levels of cable company technical support); and third, broadcast organizations that are independent both financially and operationally from cable companies. Evidence indicates that the first category has significantly diminished production opportunities and tends to create programs that resemble commercial television (CACTUS 2009; Community Media Education Society 2008; Tan, pers. comm., 2008). According to public advocates, in many if not most jurisdictions, volunteer opportunities have all but disappeared, and community channel managers are emphasizing commercial measurements such as audience share as a means for gauging the success of programming. Given such constraints, expanding opportunities for cultural citizenships tend to be found in the latter two forms of community television production.<sup>4</sup>

### **Case Studies: Fearless TV and Telile Community TV**

Although in many municipal jurisdictions there are no independently produced programs on the community channel, important exceptions do exist. One of these is Vancouver's Fearless TV (FTV), established in 2007. FTV is an example of independent community-based production (category two from the list above), where creative control over programs is independent of cable company management.

FTV was created through a series of workshops on community television in the Downtown East Side (DTES) of Vancouver.<sup>5</sup> FTV describes itself as a "cluster" of the DTES Community Arts Network, an umbrella group for various arts-related initiatives in the community, and for much of its programming, FTV collaborates with local arts organizations (such as Gallery Gachet, a local artist-run space, which serves as a production studio). The group has twenty members; half are considered core members and the other half are more peripheral in their involvement. A majority of members work, live, or have lived in the DTES. Members include community organizers, activists, students, journalists, and artists. They are all volunteers. On average, FTV produces four hours of original programming monthly.

The social context in which FTV operates is unique. Despite being part of the "world class" city that recently hosted the 2010 Winter Olympics, the DTES

is one of Canada's poorest communities: 67 percent of the population in private households is low income (City of Vancouver 2005a); 98 percent of households are rental units (City of Vancouver 2008); unemployment hovers at around 22 percent (the city average is 8 percent) (City of Vancouver 2005a); and the average household income is 70 percent less than the city average (ibid.). In this one-square-kilometre community, there are ten emergency shelters, twenty-eight free/low cost meal facilities, and nine community kitchens (ibid.). The DTES also has a severe drug and health crisis. Within a local population of sixteen thousand, an estimated one-third are intravenous drug users, and the area has some of the highest HIV infection rates in the Western world (Adilman and Kliewer 2000). In 2005, nearly a third of the province's drug overdose deaths occurred in this community (City of Vancouver 2005a). The DTES is home to North America's first safe injection site, where intravenous drug addicts can legally take heroin intravenously under the care of health professionals. And, in contradistinction to these alarming statistics and testament to its complexity, the DTES also has a number of positive community initiatives, including over ten thousand subsidized and cooperative housing units, seventeen artist-run centres and galleries, Canada's longest-running community radio station (Vancouver Co-op Radio, CFRO), and two community gardens (ibid.).

The DTES is also subject to ongoing upheaval from urban renewal and transformation. Development pressures are reducing the number of affordable housing units (mostly single-room occupancy hotel rooms) while increasing upscale market housing; neighbourhood gentrification is accelerating as the city looks for ways to expand housing markets near the downtown core (Lin et al. 1999; City of Vancouver 2005b). According to FTV founder Sid Tan (pers. comm., 2008), FTV was established to allow the people who already live and work in the DTES to have their voices heard and to represent their own community in response to these changes.

To fulfill this goal, FTV provides ongoing training for members in all aspects of television production: editing, camera, sound, directing, pre-production, and producing. According to Tan, the local cable company (Shaw Cablesystems) has, however, demonstrated reluctance and even outright refusal to offer training for FTV members. FTV's experience with Shaw has been unpleasant and antagonistic, to say the least. "It seems to us," Tan (ibid.) explained, "that the cable company would just as soon not have us; they are openly hostile." Despite such poor relations, Shaw does provide limited access to equipment

as required by the CRTC. Roughly once a month, FTV uses a three-camera mobile studio from the Shaw community channel studios to produce four one-hour television shows. FTV also uses cable company editing facilities but is allocated time in less convenient off-hour time slots. The programs appear on the community channel, on-line, at public screenings in the neighbourhood, and at private meetings held by local community organizations (ibid.).

FTV programs focus on local community members, organizers, artists, and activists. FTV also shows locally produced documentaries (one dealt with the impact that the 2010 Olympics was expected to have on the neighbourhood, and another focused on a local housing group). According to Tan, local arts, housing, poverty, and homelessness dominate FTV programming. Much of it concentrates on finding solutions to local problems. "We're trying to figure out how luxury housing and subsidized housing can exist side-by-side," explains Tan (ibid.). Programming has addressed lobby efforts by local groups to increase the provincial minimum wage and welfare rates; health outreach, emergency shelters, and accommodating the needs of mental health patients; local initiatives such as arts festivals, projects such as Insite (the safe injection site constantly threatened with closure), and the Wills Project (a cost-saving initiative by the provincial government to get neighbourhood residents to create wills); and fundraising efforts by local community non-profits.

FTV programming satisfies the 2002 CRTC policy objectives in a number of ways. The CRTC has repeatedly stated that access is the cornerstone of community channel policy and one of its most important goals. The CRTC has also acknowledged that participation is what drives diversity in programming. FTV is offering ways for highly marginalized groups to have their voices heard through creative control over production, their choice of guests, and their preferred topics of coverage. In addition to engendering a high level of citizen participation, FTV provides alternative points of view, ethnic diversity, and coverage of local events, all expressly stated goals and objectives for the community channel under the 2002 policy (CRTC 1991, 2002).

But the goals and objectives themselves recognize only some aspects of FTV's role in the local community. FTV programming (production and reception) increases awareness in the wider region about the people who live in the DTES and about the DTES as a community. It provides a context for people to come together to work collaboratively to produce television that interrogates political, moral, and policy positions. In speaking about its constituents, Tan (pers. comm., 2008) states that "they're poor, yes; but it doesn't mean that

they're not creative, politically active or socially responsible. They need an outlet, and we've got to show that real people live in the DTES who care about their neighbourhood. Fearless TV says: they're poor but they count. They're of value, because look at what they're doing."

FTV is actively involved in re-creating social identities, both of the neighbourhood as a whole and of the individuals and groups who live there. "Above all," says Tan (*ibid.*), "we are training community champions, giving voice to community champions, encouraging people to champion their community." FTV production and distribution demonstrates all aspects of cultural citizenship: enhanced capacities for community action, helping to build social networks, playing a role in negotiating collective values in the neighbourhood, and fostering civic participation.

The second case study is in an altogether different setting. Telile Community Television is an independent community broadcaster located on Isle Madame, a small island off the southeast coast of Cape Breton Island in Nova Scotia.<sup>6</sup> Isle Madame has a population of less than four thousand. Telile broadcasts over a radius of twenty-seven kilometres using a relatively small 450-watt transmitter. The station controls its own programming schedule, and because of Public Notice CRTC 2002-61, the local cable company is required to carry its signal, which is distributed on the west side of Cape Breton Island. The signal is also carried voluntarily by another cable company throughout the eastern part of Cape Breton. Telile does not receive financial help from either company.

Telile is located in one of the regional centres for Canada's Acadian community, a minority French-speaking culture whose ancestral roots date back over four hundred years in the area, and whose cultural identity remains an important aspect of public culture in the area. About half of Isle Madame residents self-identify as bilingual (CDÉNÉ 2006).

Like many Cape Breton communities, Isle Madame has depended on the fishery for its economic livelihood for centuries. But in the early 1990s, the federal government closed the east coast cod fishery, and overnight, one-third of the island's residents lost their jobs. Facing catastrophic economic and social collapse, residents mobilized to save their community. Telile Community Television was created in 1993 as part of that effort. Fearing a mass exodus of the population, and looking for solutions to the economic crisis, community leaders wanted to engage residents in a conversation about local economic development strategies. To get the word out, they began making programs in a little-used studio in the basement of the high school, and the

programs were scheduled on the local community channel. Telile was born in 1993.

In 2002, unsure of its tenure on the local cable system, Telile applied for and received an independent community broadcast licence under the new regulations (CRTC 2002). The station operates independently. Most revenues come from the sale of bingo cards in connection with a weekly one-hour televised bingo program. Some (but significantly less) revenue is derived from advertising on what is called the "community scroll" (a text-based community message board that fills up more than three-quarters of all air time) and through the sale of copies of popular programs. Annual revenues available for production and operations range between \$150,000 and \$200,000.

Telile has three employees: a station manager, a producer (who also manages the scroll and sells advertising), and a bookkeeper. The vast majority of programs are produced by the employees. The board of directors, which is responsible for administering the station, consists of nine elected volunteers. Based on the personal involvement and affiliations of the individual directors, the board indirectly represents more than forty local community organizations.

Programming cycles are planned six to eight weeks in advance. In addition to the community scroll, a significant portion of programming consists of live-to-tape recordings of local performances, including school performances, musicians, dance, and theatre. Each week, at least one new show is presented and repeated throughout the week. Programs focus on various subjects including coverage of council meetings and local elections, public service announcements including the rebroadcast of the provincial legislature's question period, and programs about local history and heritage. Telile also creates and airs profiles of local businesses and community leaders, provides coverage of community events and local economic development initiatives, and raises public awareness about local policy and planning. The station's cultural programming (involving musicians, festivals, religious events, and local artists) and its programs about local history and heritage all serve in the construction and maintenance of a unique Acadian and Cape Breton identity. Cultural programming underscores and valorizes local history, which helps shape collective values and preferences, and increases social cohesion through a shared sense of belonging. The community scroll also helps to build social inclusion by announcing community gatherings, job openings, and training opportunities. Programming also addresses community development issues by exploring strategies for local economic self-reliance and initiatives, such as the creation of a wind-farm.

The people of Cape Breton, like those in many rural areas worldwide, also experience significant levels of social exclusion and social fragmentation: 18 percent of the population lives in poverty (K. Lee 2000), and the unemployment rate hovers around 27 percent (CDÉNEÉ 2006). The region has the tragic distinction of having the highest cancer rates in Nova Scotia, a cancer death rate 25 percent higher than the national average, and mortalities due to bronchitis, emphysema, and asthma that are a full 50 percent higher in Cape Breton than the national average (GPI 2003). A 2007 report suggests that current rates of out-migration will result in upward of fifty thousand young people leaving Cape Breton between now and 2021, looking for better opportunities (CBCEDA 2007, 16).

The people in the communities served by Telile, like most Canadians, live in a cultural milieu dominated by non-local media flows that have little if anything to do with local life. Cable and satellite television services provide hundreds of mostly foreign-owned channels. Very little of what happens on Isle Madame and very few of the people or places that make up its communities ever appear within locally available media streams – except, that is, for the programming on Telile. The station was created in response to an economic and social crisis, and continues to play an important role in how residents define their identity and negotiate their rights, obligations, and relationships with each other, with the state, and with wider Canadian society.

### **Community Television in a Digital Age: What Next?**

Despite their differences, Telile Community Television and Fearless TV both engage in building social identity and inclusion by expanding control over symbolic resources. These are practices of cultural citizenship that have emerged through independent control over programming and production. Telile, in its rural setting, valorizes Acadian identity, heritage, music, and place, and through its scroll and community events coverage, provides a kind of cultural “soft tissue” for inhabitants of a sparsely populated and impoverished region. These messages encourage residents to remain in the community by legitimizing and celebrating local experience and increasing access to social opportunities, or what Sreberny (2005, 246) identifies as “recognition,” which is an important step in democratic communication building. Telile programming validates local identities that are ignored in commercial media and works to bolster a sense of pride in place, culture, and history. Similarly, FTV valorizes the humanity of people who must otherwise contend with prejudices in the dominant culture

that stigmatize the poor, drug users, and many of the racial groups that make up the Downtown East Side's population. Community television in these instances shares an interest in building community from the inside out and from the bottom up. It is a politics of participation through cultural production.

Both communities have been subject to and in a sense failed by dominant economic and political systems. And in both, citizens have responded to this failure by taking advantage of an opportunity created through federal regulation to participate in Canadian culture via community television. These are remarkable success stories. And yet, current policies fail to acknowledge the important ways in which these approaches to community television – independent and community-driven – expand public action. In both cases, community television is helping local residents to define their relationships not only with each other, but also within networks of state agencies that at the very least are having difficulties adequately addressing issues of local poverty and social exclusion. For the residents of Cape Breton who see their community and local cultures reflected in Telile programming, the channel emerges as a site where local identity is defined through ongoing problem solving. FTV similarly presents a site where residents have the opportunity to identify problems, discuss possible solutions, and make decisions about collective action. In both cases, programming is produced largely independent of the traditional market pressures found in commercial media contexts and largely free of direct federal influence.

Regrettably, there are no statistics documenting how many hours of community television in Canada are produced independently and how many are generated by cable company employees (although this may change under recently introduced regulation). Advocates who work in the community television sector suggest that most programming outside of Québec is made by cable company employees and that this explains in large part why community channels increasingly resemble commercial channels and why there are fewer and fewer opportunities for volunteers (Edwards, pers. comm., 2008; Community Media Education Society 2008; Tan, pers. comm., 2008). Utilized in this manner, community television fulfills only a fraction of its public service potential.

Furthermore, control over the \$100 million annual cable levy remains at the centre of community channel controversy. These funds have been spent with virtually no government oversight, and until very recently all attempts to obtain detailed accounting information from the cable industry – even attempts

by Parliamentary committees – proved unsuccessful.<sup>7</sup> Given the important cultural and citizenship work undertaken at all sites of independent production, and more importantly, those that could be better accomplished with greater access to resources for independent community producers, the current arrangement suggests an expensive (and expansive) policy failure. If community channel monies are being spent primarily on what amounts to additional commercial programming, the policy objectives for community television have been eviscerated.

The most recent round of changes to community television policy is both encouraging and discouraging (CRTC 2010b). Most discouraging is that despite widespread support for an independent fund to be created for the management of community television assets, individual cable companies have retained control of the resources. But new regulations are requiring greater public accountability from the cable industry for spending, programming, and production decisions. The continued importance of the independent sector has also been reinforced with clearer rules about spending: no less than 50 percent of community channel revenues must now be spent on independent community production. More problematically, the CRTC accepted submissions from cable companies that suggested they are currently meeting and in some cases exceeding these targets despite contrary submissions from individuals and groups across Canada. In other words, where the new policy promises potential improvements, it reinforces the status quo by leaving control over community resources in the hands of corporate entities with private agendas.

It is worth noting that despite the dubious quality of some of these policy gains, public interest advocates did influence the policy review process in important ways. The Canadian Association of Community Television Users and Stations (CACTUS) presented to the CRTC a comprehensive proposal for reallocating community television funds to support a network of independent community media centres. In keeping with a general shift toward “networked information economies” (Benkler 2006) and “redactional cultures” (Hartley 2000) and expanding public participation in cultural processes, these media centres would have thus emphasized skills training and production/distribution opportunities for more than 90 percent of the Canadian public (CACTUS 2009). Although the proposal was rejected, it significantly reoriented the conversation during the policy review process. At least one commissioner filed a strongly worded dissenting opinion supporting the independent management

of community television resources based in part on the CACTUS submission (CRTC 2010b).

Canada is not alone in raising questions about the relevance and continuing role of community television, although in most jurisdictions (with the notable exception of the United States), the importance of community participation is driving policy considerations. In the US, where there are over four thousand public access channels, there are growing concerns over the long-term survival of the PEG system (called PEG for dedicated channels for public educational and government-sponsored programming) in response to recent attempts by the larger cable companies to limit local municipal involvement (and thereby centralize programming in the hands of state governments), and by offering PEG channels only in low-resolution, poor-quality visual formats. Advocates also charge that access offices are closing at an unprecedented rate because, under existing regulation, PEG funds cannot be used to pay staff. Community access advocates are mobilizing public support for legislation that has been introduced in the Senate, called the Community Access Preservation Act (H.R. 3745), in an attempt to address these concerns (Alliance for Community Media 2010).

The European Union has called on all member states “to give legal recognition to community media as a distinct group alongside commercial and public media where such recognition is still lacking” and “to make television and radio frequency spectrum available, both analogue and digital” for community access programming (European Union Parliament 2008). Many European Union member states do have “open channel” policies of some kind as part of their terrestrial broadcast systems, but the type of support received and extent of public uptake varies widely (Edwards 2009).

In Japan, though there is no regulatory recognition for access television, most cable companies offer a community channel, and thirty-six of approximately five hundred over-the-air broadcasters also provide public access services (*ibid.*). In South Korea, the national broadcaster (Korean Broadcasting Service) is required to air a minimum of 100 minutes of citizen access programming per month; programs that air on KBS are compensated between \$5,000 and \$8,000 (*ibid.*).

We also find recognition of and support for community television in many South American countries, although their approaches also vary widely. Venezuela passed the “Organic Telecommunications Law” in 2000, allowing licences for non-profit television (there are now more than fifty stations);

Uruguay has set aside one-third of analog and digital bandwidth for community television; Bolivia recently recognized community television as a distinct category; Brazil has some seventy community stations; and Colombia has more than five hundred licensed community stations in operation (ibid.). Funding, access, and expressive freedom range in each jurisdiction.

In Canada, the emergence of on-line culture continues to transform how we think about participation in public communication. There was a time, for example, when advocates sought to have a community programming "lane" set aside in the "information highway," an "electronic commons" for citizens' media, in much the same way as a community channel is reserved within the cable signal (Surman 1994). This is a laudable idea (at least in principle), but today it is the major telecommunications companies that want the Internet transformed from one network equally accessible to all into artificially managed parallel networks, with speed and access determined by ability to pay. As discussed by Kate Milberry in Chapter 11 of this volume, "net neutrality" has replaced the "electronic commons" as the vanguard call to protect the democratic potential of the Internet (Barratt and Shade 2007).

One of the most forward-thinking ideas to date remains the CACTUS proposal for the creation of a network of community-media resource centres that would provide studios and training for community radio and television production, broadcast, website development, photography, writing and literacy, and sound and audio recording and editing. This is a vision of subsidized cultural access, much like a public library system, but taking account of the many ways that digital and on-line technologies have expanded opportunities for cultural participation and how these new practices are in turn reshaping the kinds of cultural experiences that citizens want and expect.

Our communications systems are changing, but the central relevance of cultural participation to democratic accountability remains. And even though independent community television in Canada does offer significant opportunities for public action, as demonstrated by the cases examined in this chapter, most access channel resources in Canada are at risk of being squandered, if only because the surrounding policy discussions continue to lack a basic understanding of community television's role in expanding cultural citizenships. In a time of profound instability in the media industries, Canadians would be better served by community sector policies that took into account these democratic potentials when addressing the sleeping giant's role in the future of Canadian broadcasting.

**NOTES**

- 1 Similarly, a lack of participation has been observed to undermine community television's wider potentials. See Howley (2005b).
- 2 Briefly, the new roles and objectives included engendering a high level of citizen participation and community involvement, actively promoting citizen involvement and training opportunities, seeking out innovation and alternative points of view, affording balanced opportunities for differing views, reflecting bilingual and ethnic diversity, and providing coverage of local events (CRTC 1991, 9).
- 3 Broadcast distribution units (or BDUs, the regulatory term for cable companies) are the only content distributors required to provide a community channel; direct-to-home satellite distributors and mobile telephone services are not obliged under the regulations to provide community channel services.
- 4 The community programming licence policy comes into effect only if a cable company or other distributor elects not to operate a community channel. This has happened twice under the new policy. In the first instance, the licence applicant reapplied to carry a community channel; the CRTC issued new regulations exempting cable licensees under a certain size from having to provide a community channel. There has also been one application for a community-based digital television service (CRTC 2007a). The application was denied because of an insufficient business plan. No community programming licenses or community-based digital service licenses have been awarded to date.
- 5 The following discussion is based on interviews and private correspondence with Sid Tan, founder and current executive director of Fearless TV.
- 6 The following discussion is based on interviews and private correspondence with Telile staff and directors, key members from its past, and local residents, as well as a review of twelve months of programming (see Lithgow 2008).
- 7 In the report from the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, *Our Cultural Sovereignty*, the committee expressed "dismay" that it was unable to obtain financial information from the cable companies about how community television resources were being spent (Canada 2003, 30). This, too, may be changing with the introduction of financial accountability and transparency provisions (see CRTC 2010b).