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The impact of commercialism on community: a case study of coverage of the Alexandra Renewal Project by two commercially-owned community newspapers.

Michael Tsingo

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies

Johannesburg
2009

Abstract

In a bid to reflect the role of commercial media in communities, this study examines the reportage, by two commercially-owned community newspapers, on the township of Alexandra's important community development story, the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP). Driven by a common assumption that commercialism poses a threat to the watchdog role of the media, and does not reflect community views, this study uses the theories of community media and media political economy to highlight the tension between commercial publishers and grassroots community media advocates. The study uses content analysis and interviews to reflect the role of the newspapers by critically analysing content and opinions about the coverage of ARP by the two newspapers. The dissertation argues that if the two commercially-owned newspapers, namely *Alex News* and *City Vision*, are covering ARP – a vital story for Alexandra's post apartheid revival, then they are moving towards fulfilling their community function as community media. However, a closer analysis of such coverage is key to questions on whether commercialism can balance between making money and serving communities.

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Declaration

I declare that this research report is my own work. It is submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts in Journalism and Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any form.

Michael Tsingo

___28th___ Day of_____June_____2009

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Acknowledgements

For my mother, Mrs. Tsungi Mupazi Tsingo, for her invaluable support during the course of my studies, and and my late father, Mr Amon Daniel Tsingo, who would have been the happiest man to see me achieve this. I would like to thank my mentor, Professor Anton Harber, for his guidance on this report. Finally, many thanks to my colleagues at Wits University for their assistance.

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List of Abbreviations

ACR	Alexandra Concerned Residents
ADF	Alexandra Development Forum
ADYF	Alexandra Development Youth Forum
AFA	Alexandra Football Association
AIP	Association of Independent Publishers
AMARC	World Association of Community Radio Broadcasting
ANC	African National Congress
ARP	Alexandra Renewal Project
ASFC	Alexandra Sheffield Football Club
AVCC	Alexandra Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee
DA	Democratic Alliance
IAAF	International All Athletics Federation
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
MDDA	Media Development and Diversity Agency
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
SANCO	South African National Civic Organisation
SAPS	South African Police Service
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WCR	Wynberg Concerned Residents

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

Drawing on the Township of Alexandra in Johannesburg, South Africa, this study aims to examine the role of commercially-owned community newspapers, herein, referred to as 'commercial community newspapers'. Examining this role will be done through a critical analysis of the newspapers' content as well as analysis of the opinions about their role from both the community and representatives of the publishers.

The central argument of this study is the assumption that if Alexandra's two commercial community newspapers report stories about the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), then they are working towards fulfilling their community functions since the ARP is vital to Alexandra's post-apartheid revival. The ARP is an important story for the citizens of the township of Alexandra because it is a flagship community development project designed to uplift Alexandra from the disorder and underdevelopment that it suffered during apartheid (see section 1.1.2 – pg 7). Implemented in line with the broader national urban renewal scheme and headed by the South African government's Department of Housing, it can be argued that the project is in the public interest of Alexandra's citizens. As such, it is logical to assume that it would be beneficial for the community of Alexandra to get any information about their development project on a weekly basis from whichever kind of newspaper.

Furthermore, in the absence of any community-run newspaper in Alexandra, it is also arguable that it could be helpful for the community of Alexandra to have journalists from commercial community newspapers asking ARP about the progress of the project on a regular basis. With this assumption in hand, this study explores the coverage of the ARP story closely in order to reflect the extent to which commercial community newspapers can fulfil a community function by *inter alia* telling relevant and otherwise untold stories and empowering the grassroots person, as expected of them by community media advocates such as the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), while pursuing a commercial motive at the same time.

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Commercially-driven community media are criticised for reasons explained later in this section and more detailed in Chapter Two, but a common assumption is that commercialism poses a threat to the watchdog role of the media, and therefore, does not reflect community views.

However, South Africa has seen a huge increase of commercially-driven community press in the past decade. By 2006, there were about 186 commercial community titles in the country, according to a census conducted then by the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP). An excerpt from the findings of the AIP census illustrates how widespread commercial community press is in South Africa.

> *Caxton and its subsidiary companies own about 155 'community' titles (including 10 'Get It' community magazines & 11 Urban News papers), while Media24 publishes 41 'community' titles, the Independent Newspapers Group publishes 14 similar titles (primarily in the Western Cape), and Johncom publishes 15 titles (but is rapidly expanding its 'community' media stable). The highest density for conglomerate neighbourhood newspapers is Gauteng, with 127 titles.*

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These publications have been dubbed different names. The AIP, as highlighted in the above excerpt, calls them '*conglomerate neighbourhood newspapers'*, probably because they are attached to large mainstream media and publishing companies such as Media24 and Caxton. This research prefers coining these publications 'commercial community newspapers', thereby describing precisely what they are at face value – free-of-charge newspapers with an exclusively local or nieghbourhood focus modeled to tell local stories while operating like any other commercial newspaper in terms of ownership and structure.

Commercial community newspapers cannot be classified grassroots community newspapers mainly because they are commercially driven and do not accommodate grassroots ownership, participation and/or control structures. Instead, genuinely grassroots community media projects in South Africa, which usually struggle

financially, are being forced either to cheaply sell their titles to commercial community publishers, after which the original owners become employees of the new owners, or face unfair competition and eventually choke (AIP 2006).

It is this rapid infiltration by commercial media into the community media tier that has raised concerns over whether these publications could find a balance between commercial and community interests. South Africa's Independent Broadcasting Authority (IBA) Act of 1993 defines the community media tier as one that is: *"initiated and controlled by members of a community of interest, or geographical community"*. The motive for this taxonomy is to enable unrestricted access, equitable representation and to allow for the expression of opinions without interference from financiers, be it the government or business entities. From this motive, community media was tasked to fulfill that special mandate.

Talking about the mandate of community media in South Africa demands an understanding of the definition of the notion, which seems to evolve with changing socio-political and economic environments. When community media emerged in South Africa, it largely was an alternative avenue of communication to execute precise political functions that were challenging the state controlled media of the apartheid regime (Johnson 1991). According to Johnson (1991:24), for a publication to be considered alternative within the context of the apartheid regime, it required that:

- *It is 'non-commercial', in the sense that the profit-motive is not the primary criterion for its establishment;*
- *its raison d'être is the fulfillment of a role within resistance in South Africa;*
- *it sees the established commercial media as not fulfilling needs or reflecting the aspirations of the majority of South Africans; and*
- *it is aimed at an audience of which a significant proportion is black.*

A decade later, the now democratic South Africa's concept of community media is strongly grassroots-based, where ownership by community, non-profit motive, and accessibility to and by the community are the benchmark characteristics. According to

Hadland and Thorne (2004:14), "*the roots of contemporary definitions of community media in South Africa can be traced back to the deeply influential Jabulani! Freedom of the Airwaves conference held in Netherlands in 1991*". At this conference, according to these two authors, community media was defined as an initiative that is "*controlled by members of a community, to express their concerns, needs and aspirations without outside interference*".

Hadland & Thorne (2004:16) further listed a number of points expected of any initiative to be recognised as community media by the South African National Community Media Forum:

- *It must be owned and controlled by the community, through its representatives;*
- *it must be non-profit;*
- *it must be accessible to the community it serves;*
- *the community must either be a geographic one or a community of interest; and*
- *it must service disadvantaged communities.*

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The South African National Community Media Forum's criteria is different from Johnson's criteria within the context of the apartheid regime, meaning that community media definitions, hence mandates, may differ with changing political, social, and economic environments.

It is important to note that the aspect of non-profit motive remains common between the two definitions above. Commercial practices are of concern as they can undermine the mandate of community media, be it political or developmental. Drawing from McChesney (1997), it is most likely that commercial media serves the interests of those who make it a profitable venture. McChesney (1998:5) also describes how the media, print in this case, had become almost a retail shop in its definition of, and nature of business,

"The newspaper industry became organized in chains and vastly less competitive as largest newspapers were able to bury their rivals. This concentration was assisted by

advertising…as the preferred form of non-price competition for large firms in oligopolistic markets".

Giving an example of the United States of America, McChesney (2004:7) observes,

"The commercial basis of U.S. media has negative implications for the exercise of political democracy: it encourages a weak political culture… and it permits the business and commercial interests that actually rule U.S. society to have inordinate influence over media content".

Nevertheless, South Africa's community press seems to be dominated by commercial publications that are distributed free of charge in specific geographic areas or suburbs. This research looks into two and the biggest publishers of commercial community media in South Africa, Caxton and CTP Publishers & Printers Limited and Media24.

As shown in the AIP 2006 census results excerpt above, South Africa's biggest commercial media houses are the ones that own most of the community titles in the country. These media houses target the affluent suburban communities as well as underdeveloped townships, most of which are undergoing economic and social reforms. Economic reforms in previously disadvantaged communities such as Alexandra and Soweto attract huge investments such as shopping malls, and these are proving a success because the new and mainly black working-class which is still living there is growing, and enjoying a new buying power

It is important to note at this stage that the non-profit distinctive requirement for community media in South Africa today excludes the largest pool of community press, which are owned and published by commercial media companies such as Caxton and CTP Publishers & Printers Limited and Media24.

As a result, a leading South African statutory body meant to encourage media development and diversity by, *inter alia*, supporting community media, the MDDA, has indicated an express interest in trying to ascertain whether this wave of commercialism is both relevant and suitable for advancing community media. To

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date, the MDDA has contributed towards this inquiry by aiding debate and research such as this on the impact of commercialism upon the mandate of community media.

However, most debates and studies on this issue are notable for their evaluations of the impact of advertisements on community press. Such studies typically measure the size of advertisements in newspapers and conclude that, because there is more advertising space than there is editorial content, then commercial newspapers are only serving the interests of advertisers as opposed to those of the community.

Thus, the MDDA in particular cannot readily embrace the idea of commercial press for communities, as it is foreign to the tradition and in opposition with current definitions of community media. The MDDA Act of 2002 even defines community media as "any media project that is owned and controlled by a community where any financial surplus generated is reinvested in the media project".

The MDDA approach is grassroots based; its mandate is to assist localities, especially previously disadvantaged ones, to run their own community media projects. As such, it is tempting for the body to quarantine, instead of harnessing, the idea of commercialism in its bid to strengthen community media in South Africa.

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1.1. The case study: commercial community newspapers in the township of Alexandra

This section will describe the two newspapers under analysis as well as provide an insight into the history and present circumstances of the community of Alexandra, paying special attention on the rise of the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) – a government funded development project that is tasked with renewing the disadvantaged township into a modern, functional and economically active entity.

1.1.1. The two newspapers

This research focuses on two different commercial community newspapers that are published in Alexandra, a township north of Johannesburg, whose population is

mainly low income and unemployed black people. The two newspapers are *Alex News*, published by Caxton and CTP Publishers and Printers Limited, generally referred to as Caxton; and *City Vision*, published by Media24, a subsidiary of Naspers.

In Johannesburg, where this study is based, the two giant publishers publish a variety of neighbourhood-based publications for almost all the suburbs. Caxton, one of the largest commercial printers in South Africa, launched a series of local newspapers that are known as '*Urban News*' series in 2005. Each of these newspapers is named after a target suburb, for example *Alex News* for the township of Alexandra, referred to as Alex by locals; *Diepkloof Urban News* and *Protea Urban News* for the suburbs of Diepkloof and Protea respectively, which are sections of South Africa's legendary township of Soweto. *Alex News* is published once a week and distributed every Tuesday at various commuter points and market places across the township. From its website, Caxton's community newspapers' mission statement reads: *"We aim to be the primary, most read provider of local information, advertising and news in each of the towns and neighbourhoods we serve, to produce newspapers our readers identify with because they reflect what matters to them and their communities. In addition we aim to grow in size and profitability each year in accordance with the Holding Company's requirements."*

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Media24, like Caxton, also owns and publishes suburb-based newspapers around the country. *City Vision Alexandra* is one edition of its group of community titles known as *City Vision Gauteng*. As with Caxton, these are free local newspapers published once a week and distributed every Wednesday in Alexandra and Kathorus and every Thursday in Soweto, Eastrand, Westrand and Johannesburg Central at various commuter points and market places. On its website, Media24 Newspapers claims its community newspapers' circulation amounts to about 1, 3 million a week. The newspapers are produced at printing plants in seven cities and distributed countrywide via various group distribution channels. Apart from newspapers, Media24 publishes magazines and books. It also does digital media, printing and logistics.

1.1.2. The community: Alexandra Township and Alexandra Renewal Project

To understand the tension around commercialism and community media in South Africa, this study closely looked at the coverage of an important story for the citizens of the township of Alexandra. This story is important because it is a flagship community development project designed to uplift Alexandra from the chaos and ineptitude that it succumbed to during apartheid. Known as the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), the project is implemented in line with the broader national urban renewal scheme headed by the South African government's Department of Housing.

In addition to other disadvantages created by the apartheid system, Alexandra lost its local municipal administrator in April 1986 after protests halted the progress of the 'Garden City', a master plan to transform its physical landscape. As a result, the township became severely disorganised and overcrowded. In year 2000 more than 350 000 people were living in Alexandra on 800 hectares of land. That same year informal shelters or shack dwellings counted above 34 000 and this situation caused havoc on the land – informal dwellings were built across roads, underneath heavy-duty power lines and on top of plumping channels. The lighting, plumbing and refuse collection services were subsequently stressed until burst sewers, litter and lack of space resulted in disease outbreaks and electricity or fire accidents. This lack of proper planning also meant that police were unable to trace criminals, thus a high crime rate reputation that still daunts the image of the township to date.

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It is against this background that Alexandra fell into the South African government's Integrated Sustainable Rural Development and Urban Renewal Programme announced by the then President Thabo Mbeki in his State of the Nation Address to Parliament on the 9th of February 2001. ARP's main aims are 'to create integrated and functional settlements and to rehabilitate dysfunctional urban areas with economic and social development.' ARP seeks to achieve the following:

- *"Sustainability, reducing levels of unemployment;*
- *creating a healthy and clean living environment;*
- *providing urban services at an affordable and sustainable level;*
- *reducing levels of crime and violence;*

- *upgrading existing housing environments;*
- *creating additional affordable housing opportunities; and*
- *De-densification of households to appropriate land".*

ARP is implemented by a trusted team of project administrators, headed by a director and project managers, who report to the Housing Department. An apolitical civil organisation called the Alexandra Development Forum was created to represent the people of Alexandra and it assumes a role as an overseer of the project for the ordinary community members. ADF describes itself as an apolitical organisation that represents 95 percent of the citizens of Alexandra, oversees ARP and holds meetings with the general public once a month to report back on the progress of ARP. A youth wing of ADF, the Alexandra Development Youth Form (ADYF) was also created to work closely with ADF and ARP specifically to represent the interests of Alexandra's young people.

ARP is a critical case study because it is a huge government project being implemented by a group of chosen elites who might or might not abuse their power at the expense of ordinary and sometimes semi-literate community members. When the then President Thabo Mbeki launched ARP in 2001, the project was fed with an initial budget of R1, 3-billion. The aim of the project was 'to radically improve the physical, social and economic environment of Alexandra' (ARP website).

As such, apart from being an important story for the township of Alexandra because it seeks to provide residents of Alexandra with a dignified life style - from houses to toilets *inter alia* – the project also involves a huge sum of money intended for the equal benefit of a community in a country with low literacy levels - particularly among the middle aged people residing in poor townships. Furthermore, the country is still battling to find its feet to preserve a young and ambitious democracy, a process that is being repeatedly hampered by, as in any other African country, a generation of community leaders and politicians with steep corruption propensity.

In addition, urban renewal projects such as ARP are widely accused of abuse and corruption all over the world. The destruction of communities and neighbourhoods,

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relocation of people, and the use of compulsory purchase as a legal instrument to reclaim private property or pieces of land for development projects draws criticism from residents and human rights organisations who believe that gentrifying slums profiteer the rich and disadvantage the poor and the powerless who are usually forced away.

With the majority of Alexandra citizens being semi-educated and still loyal to liberation era politicians, the possibility of abuse of power demands a vehement watchdog culture from the media. Media could play different important roles in community development projects such as ARP. It could serve as a communication bridge between the community and the project management; a watchdog to see if the community interests are attended to by the community leaders; a watchdog to see that the project is well-managed; as well as a platform for community views, and for dialogue and debate amongst members of the community around the project to strengthen social equality.

Community media seems most suitable for this job considering that mainstream media, which is largely elitist and more interested in bigger national and governance issues that concern middle class people and big businesses, could simply underestimate the importance of Alexandra's project and could probably forget about it a few days after it is launched only to cover it when there is a huge scandal. Such coverage would usually either be too late to help the community cause or too alienated to address community views and needs.

Some of the obvious community needs could be the opportunity to voice their concerns and opinions through the newspapers. As such the study will look for community voices within the coverage. Community voices could be defined as those that come from the ordinary men and women as well as their community leaders. As argued by White et al. (1994), real community media has to include not only the elite of the community but also the ordinary members. As such, it is important to see the extent to which the two newspapers involve the ordinary citizens of Alexandra in their coverage of ARP.

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In a nutshell, the centrality of ARP to Alexandra's well being as well as its diversity and massive scale provides this study with a good example of a controversial government funded project that can be used to explore and reflect the extent to which community media could promote transparency as well as exposing corruption, abuse and uneven treatment of poor citizens, thereby safeguarding equality and human rights, hence democracy.

Bearing in mind this background, this study attempts to answer the broad question of whether or not commercial community newspapers, parallel to their mandate of accumulating advertising revenue, can cater for the grassroots needs of the community of Alexandra, reflecting on their coverage of ARP - an important story of the township.

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1.2. Research Questions

a. How do the two commercial community newspapers in Alexandra report on the ARP? What do they report about ARP and to what extent do they critically examine the ARP?

b. Is there any community involvement reflected in the coverage? To what extent does the coverage reflect the views of community members and community organisations about the ARP other than the ARP itself?

c. What does this reflect about the role of these newspapers and the balance they strike between commercial and community interests?

1.3. Conclusion

This introductory chapter has discussed commercial community press and how it is a contested phenomenon in South Africa. The chapter has also described the two commercial community newspapers under study, the community of Alexandra, ARP and the two civic organisations that are actively involved in the day-to-day activities of ARP – ADF and ADYF, and how community media is important for the citizens both as a communication platform and a watchdog.

A supposition on ways in which community media can help the community of Alexandra with regards to clarity and equality within the township's development project was also included in the chapter. The chapter concludes by spelling out the questions that this research attempts to answer after highlighting reasons why those questions must be answered.

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Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2. Introduction

This study aims to examine the role of commercial community newspapers, by critically analysing their content as well as opinions about their role from both the community and representatives of the publishers.

In order to reach an understanding of the concept of community media and commercial community media in South Africa, this chapter looks at the various definitions and normative roles of community media since its conception locally and internationally.

The concept of community media is the main theoretical framework for this study. It enables this study to trace and note how the non-commercial grassroots community media initiatives differ from other kinds of community media in terms of definitions, characteristics and roles. A discussion on the role of media in a participatory democracy and its importance to previously disadvantaged communities is also included as a way of trying to explore issues of community access to mediums.

The chapter also discusses the critical political economy of the media as a subordinate theoretical approach for this study. One of the things highlighted by media critical political economy is the ownership and financing of media and the impact this has on its role, content and watchdog function. This theory is important to this study since commercial and/or corporate ownership of community media has led to questions as to whether it can still serve a community. This becomes more important when one discovers that publishers boast about how community press' localised content is a new hook for consumers and a success for advertisers.

2.1. The concept of community media

'Community' is defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary as the people living in one particular area or people who are considered as a unit because of their common interests, background or nationality.

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Although significant efforts to examine the concept of community media emerged in the work of the Chicago School in the 1920s in which they were focused on the investigation of the role of the press in shaping identity, it is more recent works that guide this study.

The World Association of Community Radio Broadcasters (AMARC) defines community media as an experience that is:

"Independent, community-driven and civil society based, have a particular role to play in enabling access and participation for all to information and communications, especially the poorest and most marginalized communities".

In academic circles, community media remains a contested concept in many ways but most of these clashes stem from how it is defined by particular countries, global regions, academics and ideologies.

Recent work on community media in South Africa can be found in Hadland and Thorne (2004). The authors illustrated how community media in the country is mainly based on the geographical locality. The two authors explain:

"For (scholar) Louw, the problematic term 'community' has tended to become problematic in South Africa… community should refer to people in a particular local area who share similar problems and interests as a collectivity. In getting together to solve their joint problems, a community is created," (2004:12).

As such, in South Africa, the definition of community media seems to be tied to people in a particular geographic location.

The South African Broadcasting Policy Task Team of 1998 defined community media as a project *"for the community, by the community, through the community"*, (Hadland &Thorne: 2004:13). This would mean that community media projects have to serve the community and be staffed, managed, controlled and owned by the community.

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The South African National Community Media Forum coined a more elaborate description of community media. The forum defines community media in the following manner:

- *"It must be owned and controlled by the community, through its representatives;*
- *it must be non-profit;*
- *it must be accessible to the community it serves;*
- *the community must either be a geographic one or a community of interest; and*
- *it must service disadvantaged communities"*, (Hadland & Thorne, 2004: 16).

This third tier of media known as 'community media' is intended to address the gap left by a largely elitist commercial mainstream media, serving those who hold economic and political power, and a few media serving the interests of less advantaged communities of South Africa.

Thus, community media in South Africa has a specific mandate to serve and be accessible to the largely excluded disadvantaged communities. To achieve that mandate, it is believed that community media need to be controlled and staffed by the community, through representatives; and that it must not operate on a profit basis. These characteristics are emphasized to insure the independence of media initiatives from the state and the economically powerful that can subsequently interfere with the editorial at the expense of community needs.

Unlike in South Africa, in other African countries, the notion of community media is not only based on ownership and non-profit characteristics. In West Africa for instance, the success of community media is highlighted by its ability to help the community rather than its commercial orientation and ownership and control structures. Myers (2000:91) writes about how some of the 77 commercial and government-supported community radio stations are running successfully in Mali:

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"However, in West Africa, particularly Mali, there are numerous examples of community-type stations existing on a commercial basis… In Mauritania and Benin, for example, there are a number of new, successful community-oriented radio stations owned and operated by the government for the community."

Myers made a similar observation about community media projects that are financially supported by international non-governmental organisations like Oxfam International. Her conclusion suggests that the key aspects to consider when defining successful community media initiatives is whether they really advance the grassroots person by giving that person access and a voice rather than to rely only on their financial and ownership structures.

The notion of community media seems to evolve with changing socio-political and economic environments. According to Johnson (1991), in South Africa community media was once an alternative avenue of communication to execute precise political functions that were challenging the state controlled media of the apartheid regime. Johnson explained that the existence of community media during those days was only justified if it fulfilled a role within the resistance movement in South Africa. A decade later, community media is mandated to serve disadvantaged communities (Hadland & Thorne, 2004).

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Other scholars believe that community media cannot be defined in totality. Downing et al. (2001), assert that community media is radical media, which they define as generally small-scale media that convey a different view to media monopolies. The authors insisted that because the concept of 'the community' is loaded with many meanings, any form of media associated to this concept needs "*anchoring by definition and critique to make them in any way useful"* (Downing et al. 2001: 38).

In a nutshell, Downing et al.'s conceptualisation of alternative media holds that they are political as well as resistance tools. The authors suggest that communities should use media to challenge the state on issues that concern their well-being. However, since the authors indicated that the concept of community media has multiple meanings that need anchoring, it is an opportunity for this research not to limit community media to resistance and political tools, as communities might have other

needs than politics. One such need can simply be a platform to express views of ordinary people living in a closed and overshadowed community such as Alexandra. It is crucial to note that such views can derive from any issues that affect local people or the country as a whole.

Another way of extending community media from the confines of serving the disadvantaged, politics and resistance is to adopt Atton's (2002) version that it is alternative media. He contends that alternative media can be best described in how people with common interests gather and construct their stories. Atton portrays these people's stories as a collection of what is not normally considered as news in the mainstream media:

"In a media culture that appears less and less interested in in-depth investigative reporting, alternative media provide information about interpretations of the world which we might not otherwise see, and information about the world that we simply will not find anywhere else. Alternative publications are at the bottom more interested in free flow of ideas than in profit," Atton (2002: 11-12).

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It is interesting that Atton's argument emphasizes free flow of ideas but does not completely rule out operating on a profit basis although he stressed that profit should not be the motivation for the publication. Atton provided a solid overview of the roles of alternative media. He adopted the conclusions of the Royal Commission on the Press (1997), that:

- *An alternative publication deals with the opinions of small minorities;*
- *it expresses attitudes hostile to widely-held beliefs;*
- *and it espouses views or deals with subjects not given regular coverage by publications generally available at newsagents,* Atton (2002: 13).

Atton's further stipulation of the ideal publisher follows that:

- *the publisher has to be non-commercial, demonstrating that a basic concern for ideas, not the concern for profit, is the motivation for publication;*

- *the subject matter of their publications should focus on social responsibility,* Atton (2002: 13).

It is important to take note of Atton's point that alternative media is about creating news for those groups which are usually excluded from mainstream media because they do not have the social status to appear in or influence the making of news. He proposes a creation of news that promotes social responsibility. Social responsibility in this case means the involvement of the social actors in the communicative process. This creation, he suggests, should entail making news where the excluded groups appear in the news as 'key actors' or making news that is relevant or identify with their situation. However, the question then becomes: can this happen in commercial community press?

By mentioning that community members need to be 'key actors' in the making of news, Atton's argument also raised another important aspect for this study - community participation in community media. However, Atton did not clarify adequately the meaning of 'key actors' in the making of news. This raises another question: does being key actors means controlling the editorial and finance or does it occur through getting access to express views and opinions without necessarily running the medium?

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Thus far, another scholar, Gumicio-Dagron (1999) referred to community media as participatory communication for social change. His account of this kind of media traces the development of community radio in Latin America where it was used as a mouthpiece of the Bolivian mine workers during the 1940s. Gumicio-Dagron commented the establishment of some of these radio stations, where mine workers donated a part of their salaries to enable a medium that would oppose the monopoly of state media as well as to have a voice of their own.

Shifting his attention from Latin America, Gumico-Dagron also showed how social struggles of the 1960s and 1970s saw the birth and multiplication of independent and community-based radio stations in European countries like Italy and France. He then realised that a central aspect in the Latin American, French and Italian experiences is that these media were a response to dissatisfaction with the mainstream media. An

important aspect to note, according to Gumicio-Dagron (1999:14), is the way with which these community media experiences "*have served their constituency on a daily basis, without much noise, mostly open to people's ideas and voices…with content that is appropriate to local language, culture and needs"*.

It is of paramount importance to note that during these early experiences of community media, funding was mainly based on donations from the community as highlighted in the case of the Bolivian miners, which according to Gumicio-Dagron (1999) was the same issue with poor Latin American farmers. However, with the birth of aid organisations, more recent community media are receiving funding from donor organisations. And with the spread of democracy, community media initiatives receive funding from governments. According to Gumicio-Dagron (1999), the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) provided training and equipment for four radio stations in Haiti. In Burkina Faso, Gumicio-Dagron also links the creation of six radio stations to the then Information Minister, Thomas Sankara, well before he became the president of that country.

Although the Haiti and Burkina Faso examples of community media projects could not boast of total community ownership, as opposed to the Bolivian miners who funded their own radio stations, donor funding allowed them more or less the same ownership and freedom. What is not clear is whether such control and freedom can be enjoyed by government-funded projects. According to Myers (2000), community media has four crucial features namely ownership by community, access by community, participation by community and non-commercial or non-state dependent.

In South Africa, *Bush Radio,* is a good example of community media in terms of Gumicio-Dagron's concept of participatory communication for social change - a politically driven project that had been initiated by a community of interest (anti-apartheid community) that was mainly donor-funded. Although it was donor funded, the station was not for commercial purposes and it served its community and allowed them a voice as well as participation, hence control (Gumicio-Dagron, 2004).

Cited in Hadland & Thorne (2004), South African media scholar Guy Burger argued that community control is important but should not be seen as fundamental for

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community media. Although this argument poses as a radical shift from the principles set by the South African National Community Media Forum, it is sound in that it comprehends that insisting the presence of community control might limit the growth of community media. Moreover, the issue of non-community control and profit making are the aspects that bar commercial community press from the traditional norm of community media. This, despite the fact that commercial publishers own close to 200 community titles in South Africa (AIP 2006), poses a deadlock in defining what community media is in South Africa.

To see if a for-profit, commercially owned entity can serve a community, this study tests a definition of community media that respects the aspect of helping localities by allowing community participation, rather than the one that is bound by community ownership and the non-profit motive. The term community here refers to a group of people living in one geographic area such as the township of Alexandra. Although there might be different classes who make different sub-communities in Alexandra, this study will only classify community organisations and individual residents of Alexandra as the *'community'*.

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2.2. Community participation in community media

The concept of community participation forms an important arm of the theory of community media. In Gumicio-Dagron's words (2003:3), *"without community participation, the communication experience becomes an island amid human universe in which it operates''*.

Gumicio-Dagron further argued that the purpose of community media is warranted in the bond created with its audience and in the process of community participation. His notion of involving the community in all phases of the communication process is also reflected in White et al. (1994), who argued that real participation has to include not only the elite of the community but also the ordinary members.

According to White et al. (1994), participatory communication has a purpose far much larger than mass communication of information but it serves at least as a tool of social transformation. White herself argued that participation is the process in which a

person sees himself or herself as a unique individual and at the same time as a member of a community. It is viewed, as a form of self-realisation of which if it is denied the result is similar to a deformed identity and suppression of growth and potential to build the community.

In simple terms, participation empowers the individual and the community by being in control of their situation. White et al. asserts that individuals know their community better than the publishers and for them to empower themselves they need to be at the forefront of sharing information and raising issues that concern them. The authors described this process as 'conscientisation' and they emphasized its centrality in the concept of participation.

Eight years prior to White et al. (1994)'s argument of the conscientisation process, Midgley et al. (1986) explored the concept of participation as a tool for building community integrity and responsibility. According to Midgely et al. (1986: 3), *"participation creates a sense of community which gives meaning to human existence and fosters integration"*. The authors added that participation *"strengthens the capacities of individuals and communities to mobilize and help themselves*". Arguably most important is the argument by these authors that participation allows the identification of 'felt needs'.

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It is important to note, as it directly relates to the story of community development in Alexandra, that community participation is closely related to a sense of common ownership, since one of its goals is to *"ensure that the benefits of development are equitably distributed"* (Midgely et al: 3).

The challenge is whether community participation is possible in media initiatives that are commercially owned, where there are no direct material benefits to the community. The question that this realisation brings up is whether community participation in community media is only possible when the participants gain something materially from the medium or is it enough to participate only by way of expressing views and opinions that could safeguard and probably ensure that the benefits of a community development project are enjoyed equally across community members.

2.3. What is wrong with profit making?

Although Gumicio-Dagron (2003) noted that most community media initiatives that have no commercial support collapse due to economic suffocation, there are reasons why community media initiatives powered by commercial publishers are viewed as problematic.

Gumicio-Dagron noted that economic sustainability in community media does not mean that they always serve the community. He asserted that:

"If an experience is sustainable in economic terms… it doesn't guarantee that it fulfils the functions of service to its audience and of strengthening community voices", Gumicio-Dagron (2003:3).

In line with this perception, Howley (2005:8) argued, *"media privatisation is a threat to participatory democracy at local, national, regional and international levels"*.

Howley further explained that: *"The profit motive that drives corporate media diminishes the wider political culture as well. Treating the public primarily as consumers – rather than as citizens with a stake in social, economic, and cultural policy decisions …"* (2005:23-24).

Howley's explanation agrees with McChesney (1998:5) who describes how the print media had become almost a retail shop in its definition of, and nature of business.

"The newspaper industry became organized in chains and vastly less competitive as largest newspapers were able to bury their rivals. This concentration was assisted by advertising…as the preferred form of non-price competition for large firms in oligopolistic markets."

Both Howley's and McChesney's aforementioned views fit well in community media trends in South Africa. As they seek markets in newly established suburbs and redeveloped business centres in townships, commercial community newspapers do not hide their deliberate commercial motive. For example, in a speech delivered while

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launching Caxton's *Urban News* community newspaper series in Soweto in 2005, Gill Randall, then Joint Managing Director of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau is reported to have said that:

"Soweto is expanding economically and socially at a fantastic rate with the imminent opening of Protea's shopping mall and Diepkloof's Mall soon afterward. All signs point to the fact that Soweto is the newest upcoming hub of development in Gauteng, and bringing localised community papers targeted to Soweto was the next logical step for us", (Bizcommunity, 2005).

In simple terms, Randall explained that bringing community newspapers to Soweto is most logical to Caxton's business. It should be noted that there is no reference of its being good for the community. And, according to Kevin Keogh, then managing editor of Caxton's *Urban News* newspapers, it seems these newspapers are providing advertisers a market while baiting the audience through use of local content. Keogh said:

"For national advertisers, this will ultimately provide critical mass coverage, while simultaneously providing each newspaper a local flavour which will be reinforced by judicious advertising and focused editorial specific to that community, catering to the needs of advertisers and readers alike," (Bizcommunity, 2005).

This particular interest and reference to advertising above, as well as the absence of community ownership, is the major reason why there is debate over the ability of these publishers to equally balance commercialism with fulfilling the functions of service to communities.

Since private ownership and profit orientation of commercial community press form a crucial basis for the aforementioned debate on the ability of newspapers to balance between commercial and community interests, this study uses critical political economy of the media to analyse the extent to which the ownership and financing of the two newspapers in question could impact on their content and watchdog function, hence their role in communities.

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According to McChesney (1998), political economy of the media is concerned with how ownership, advertising and government policies affect media form and content. Gandy (1992), asserts that political economy opposes and a critiques the conventional. As such, political economy criticises the notion of the capitalist marketplace, as concentration and conglomeration restrict true competition and diversity.

Political economists make normative goals and values explicit; this study assumes that in a democratic society, the media ought to inform the citizenry for purposes of self-government, serve as a watchdog on government and the economically powerful, and provide diversity of viewpoints. Political economy examines how democracy as a political system is undermined by capitalism as an economic system.

McChesney (1997: 65) argued that *"the relationship between capitalism to democracy is a rocky one,"* since capitalism nurture, benefits, and sustains a small wealthy class and permits this class *"to have inordinate power over political and economic decision-making to the detriment of the balance of society."* At the same time, capitalism *"encourages a culture that places a premium on commercial values and downplays communitarian ideas"*

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Drawing from McChesney, it is therefore most likely that commercial community media serves the interests of those who make it become profitable. In McChesney's argument, the role of advertisement in media and concentration of corporate media ownership that is ever increasing poses a big threat to the watchdog role of the media, which would otherwise promote communitarian views.

Campbell (2004:70) also raises the same argument, saying:
"The operation of the media for profit by acquisition-minded owners, it is argued, actually narrows rather than increases the diversity of voices that have access to the news media by leading to concentration of ownership."

Campbell believes that privately owned newspapers compromise the role of the press. He says in privately owned newspapers, the management has the possibility to always get the coverage that they want through 'gentle persuasion' and 'polite suggestions'.

Campbell concludes his argument by referring to Chomsky who argues that the hiring of 'ideologically compatible' employees can insure the replication of the views of management in the news. The issue of hiring ideologically compatible reporters is important to this study because commercial community newspapers are not forced to hire journalists resident in the locale. And even if they do so, they are still the employers and hence enjoy control over the employee. The same argument is echoed in McChesney (1997: 8) who contends that it is a myth *"that professionalism in journalism will protect the public interest from private media control"*.

Chomsky (1989) argued that commercial media reflects the perspectives and interests of those who support it financially, a situation that forces editors and journalists to prioritise the interests of the owners just as the owners prioritise the interests of the advertisers or financiers.

"Many other factors induce the media to conform to the requirements of the state-corporate nexus. To confront power is costly and difficult; high standards of evidence and argument are imposed, and critical analysis is naturally not welcomed by those in power who are in a position to react rigorously and to determine the array of rewards and punishment" (Chomsky: 1989: 8-9).

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Just like Chomsky in the quotation above, McChesney (1997) noted how commercial value and advertisement-driven media can inhibit the concepts of politically partisan content and professional journalism as a result of the gentle persuasion tactics of media owners in their bid to reflect the interests of advertisers, business and powerful social forces.

"Moreover, journalism requires institutional support of some kind, and it reflects the conscious decisions of editors and reporters, not to mention those that hire and fire them", McChesney, (1997: 9).

These views show that privately owned media can easily pursue profit-making goals and ignore the needs of a community. In a nutshell, it is evident that in line with the theory of critical political economy of the media, several scholars agree that

commercially driven media serves its financiers more than the audience who are usually viewed as consumers or customers.

With regards to the concentration of media ownership and its threat to the media's watchdog role, critiquing unfair competition for market share by corporate media in the United States, McChesney (1997:22) noted how *"... reigning oligopolistic markets are dominated by a handful firms".* With the end result being that *"... this is a thoroughly commercial system with severe limitations for our politics and culture… where much of the world's entertainment and journalism will be provided by a handful enormous firms…"* (1997:23).

Pursuing the same line of argument in South Africa, Hadland & Thorne (2004) noted an over-concentration of local media in urban areas at the expense of rural communities and that in some areas more than one community media project exists and competes for limited resources without any signs of co-operation. As an example, the authors cited two publishers, also being researched in this study; Caxton and Media24 that had to go through the Competition Tribunal of South Africa, to resolve heated competition for community press titles in urban areas. In a statement that shows that the two publishers are dominant media firms, the Commission mentioned that:

"In previous dealings between the two, Caxton and Media 24 had agreed not to compete for the same geographic markets. The Commission fears that the same will happen in respect of the community newspaper market." (Competition Tribunal of South Africa, Case No: 102/lmDec04).

Although this research argues that there is a possibility that commercial community newspapers could play an important role in communities, the fact that giant commercial media publishers like Caxton and Media24 are competing for community press titles put in doubt their capability to balance between business and community interests. As such this study analyses their content as well as opinions of both the community and the publishers to understand the role that they are playing in helping communities.

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However, in terms of over-concentration, it is important to note that the multiplicity in commercial community press could not always mean market segmentation and competition for consumers. As Golding and Mudrock (2000) would argue, the presence of a variety of community newspapers could be beneficial and fulfilling, considering that communities are not homogeneous. In reality people can live in the same geographical community but having limited commonalities (Lorimer, 1994). As such, where one newspaper fails to serve a section of a community, the other will possibly manage to do so. Lorimer (1994) argues that in this age, media sources need to be multiple because both cultural identity and information environment is changing. He asserts that:

"*This multiplicity of information sets and communicational processes leads, in social life, to nations made up of a variety of individuals from a host of different backgrounds each of whom, in terms of everyday life, has a multifaceted cultural identity*", (1994:282).

The same argument is also reflected in Bennetts (2004)'s study of the ownership structure in South African print media industry. Bennetts acknowledged that the neoclassical economic doctrine hold that the more a media organization becomes larger, the more it is able to offer diversity in its products hence the growth of pluralism. In this essence, one can appreciate the ability of huge media houses such as Caxton and Media24 to offer a diversity of publications in different geographical locations in South Africa.

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2.4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed different ideologies underpinning community media. It has also motivated for a definition of community media that is based on the role a publication plays to help a community as compared to one that is bound by community ownership and the non-profit motive. The chapter also highlighted the concerns about the fitness of commercial community press to serve communities when they are likely to be operating in a media political economy model. It is feared that commercial media tend to deviate from pursuing the watchdog role where it goes

against advertisers or financiers; hence the need to critically examine the coverage of ARP by the two newspapers in question.

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CHAPTER 3: Methodology

3. Overview

This study's objective is to reflect on the role of commercial community newspapers in Alexandra's community development project, the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), with particular reference to the media's watchdog role in a democracy. In order to achieve this objective, this study uses multiple methods of data collection, sometimes referred to as methodological triangulation.

Defined by Jick (1983), methodological triangulation is a combination of various data collection methods which leads to a complete account where all the blind spots are illuminated by each successive method/data source.

Firstly, the study was designed as a case study focused on the coverage of the ARP by two newspapers. By limiting the analysis to the coverage of only one story, that of a critical development project, ARP, as opposed to that of the entire community of Alexandra, the study is likely to explore the story of ARP more extensively since it is smaller and therefore easy to analyse. This choice is likely to produce richer findings. As Yin (2002) would argue, instead of using vast samples, case study methods allow for an in-depth, longitudinal examination of a single case that is smaller and easy to analyse comprehensively.

Secondly, thematic content analysis was carried out to understand the main thematic concerns covered in the articles. The third method employed is in-depth interviewing of the ARP officials, main civic organisations in Alexandra that work closely with ARP as well the editors of the two newspapers. These interviews were conducted to get an idea of the opinions of these main stakeholders on the coverage of the ARP.

The effectiveness of these methods is emphasised by Prior (2003) who explains that the mixture of document data and human actors in answering research questions allowed the reflection of issues that not one of the methods would achieve.

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Some methodology reviewers have argued that methodological triangulation in social science assume and falsely predict an idea of completeness that can never be achieved because of the incoherent nature of the world, and simply called it multiple data collection method (Massey, A. and Walford, G. (Eds), 1999).

However, triangulation in this study is important not because it exhausts all the possible ways of acquiring data, but as it strengthens the viability of results by combining thematic content analysis with interviews, to acquire information on small case study of the ARP within the community of Alexandra. By using multiple information sources such as interviews and documents to gather data about a single and small case in point like the organization ARP instead of the greater Alexandra Township, case studies reinforce the reach and depth of the process, and enable the gathering of concrete data, which enhance the validity of the study, (see Yin, 2003).

Because data collection was intensely focused on a single organisation, detecting consistency and inconsistency between data gathered from human actors through interviews and that from documents through thematic content analysis was easier and of paramount value to this study. In addition, the strength of the method is that it enabled for the gathering findings that could not have come out of content analysis or interviews alone.

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3.1. Content Analysis

3.1.1. Method of collection

Since both commercial community newspapers could not be found on internet based archives, my initial task was to locate and collect articles from *Alex News* and *City Vision* newspapers. Before setting out to collect newspaper issues or to photocopy copies from the respective libraries of these newspapers, I had to come up with the collection criteria. This meant the period from which to draw the newspaper issues as well as a way with which to select individual articles.

Articles were drawn over a period of one year, from November 2005 to November 2006. This choice is very logical provided that ARP invites the media to its monthly

media briefings where it reports on the progress of the project. The argument being that, over a period of 12 months, newspapers would have attended 12 of ARP's meetings. This should mean at least 12 opportunities to write stories about the ARP.

With regard to the selection of individual articles about ARP, no sampling method was applied, as there was no guarantee that all issues of the newspapers will be available.

I physically visited the libraries of both Media 24 and Caxton to gather the articles. At Media 24, I managed to get 36 issues of *City Vision* out of 48 issues over one year (4 issues a month multiplied by 12 months). At Caxton I managed to get 23 issues of *Alex News* out of 48 issues over one year. Although the librarians said they had thrown away other newspaper issues due to space shortage, it did not follow that only the oldest issues were missing, as no pattern could be observed of the missing issues.

The articles that were used for analysis were selected using referential units. This means that all articles in the available issues of *Alex News* and *City Vision* from November 2005 to November 2006 referring to the ARP qualified for analysis. The articles were selected one by one, going from the front to the last page looking at headlines and semantic units such as words or sentences that relate to ARP. I did not include pictures, adverts and cartoons in order to confine the research to written articles due to time restrictions.

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3.1.2. Method of Analysis

By using a thematic content analysis the research defined different patterns of purposes, and attitudes of different communicators. Communicators here are not limited to the newspaper editorial but also community members, community orgnisations and officials of the ARP and government departments. Defined by Kripperndoff (1980), content analysis is a research technique for making 'replicable' and 'valid inferences' from data to their context. He asserts that content analysis is empirical, exploratory, and seeks to explain real phenomena and predictive intent as they are 'reflected' in the content.

According to Berelson (1952: 18), content analysis is "often done to reveal the purposes, motives, and other characteristics of the communicators; or to identify the effects of the content upon attention, attitudes, or acts of readers and listeners."

Sifting articles by relevance

The first phase of the analysis was observational. The significance of this part of the analysis is that it was the separation point of usable and non-usable data. I used a method known as referential units. Articles that only mentioned ARP in passing were eliminated without documenting them; and only those that had ARP as a major subject or one of the major subjects were taken for analysis. Articles were sifted by topic as well as by their degree of reference to ARP. Sifting by topic demanded that, for example, in an article with headline **"Shilowa checks on ARP":** (*City Vision* newspape*r*: 30 November, 2006), by looking at the topic, the researcher must be convinced that the ARP is a major subject in the story, although it might not necessarily be the only subject of that story. In this case, because the article heading convinced the researcher that the then Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa was looking at ARP, even if the article could have been a profile of the Premier, it had references to ARP.

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Articles were also sifted using the degree of reference to ARP. The degree of reference is concerned with the frequency and depth of reference the article has to ARP. For example, an article with headline "**Ekukhanyiseni primary maybe open by August"** (*City Vision* newspaper: 08 February 2006) cannot be categorised as concerning ARP by looking at its topic or headline. Instead, I had to look at the article for the inscribe 'ARP' and note how many times it appears. To understand the depth of this reference to ARP in this article, I had to read through the article to understand that ARP was referred to as a development project which had spend R12-million to build a new primary school to replace an old one which was a hazard to children's health. After gaining this detail, I would then consider the article to have a high degree of reference to ARP. Since this article would not have communicated the same message had it been written without mentioning ARP, therefore, I considered it as dependent on, and stemming from ARP's activities. After sifting all related articles, using the processes described above, articles were grouped into themes.

Theme definition

Theme definition of articles was conceptualised from the headline, the story intro as well as the main body. Where a headline suggested that ARP is doing well, for example, "ARP bears fruits**"** – then such an article was provisionally put under the theme of ***excellence***. The theme is deemed excellent because it communicates positively about ARP and it hints at the success of the project.

Where an article indicates admin duties, for example, "Shilowa checks on ARP" – then such an article was provisionally put under the ***administrative*** theme. This article is deemed administrative because Shilowa's visit to the ARP is logically in the public interest if he is represented in his capacity as the Gauteng Premier, hence political leader, administrator and overseer of the ARP, which is a government development project for Alexandra.

In articles where community members decry ARP actions, such articles were provisionally put under the ***complaints*** theme, for example "Trim our grounds please!"

Themes were also defined in line with voices available in the article. The three predictable voices are journalist, ARP official and community members. Voices were not looked at from only one angle – that of whether certain voices are present or absent - but also to reflect how active they are and whether or not they are the ones who ignite the story and drive it. Stories with neither the community member nor the ARP official's voices or opinions were provisionally classified under the ***General/Informational*** theme.

The ***critique*** theme was provisionally allocated to articles critical of the ARP but not necessarily complaints.

Finally, after reading the whole article the researcher would then decide whether to keep it under the provisional theme group or to move it into another category, either of the five mentioned above.

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The crucial role that this phase of the analysis played is that it allowed for the gathering of distinct themes of what is reported by the commercial community newspapers about ARP. By looking at these different themes one could already picture the relationship between ARP and the community of Alexandra during this period of study.

Semantic Analysis

After grouping articles into themes, the analysis was advanced by use of semantic analysis. Semantic analysis refers to the confining of complex sentences or paragraphs into prepositional units. Prepositional units are a way of delineating these complex units into a certain structure. The process through which this is done is known as assertions analysis. According to Kripperndoff (1980), assertions analysis provides the incidence with which certain objects are characterized in a particular way. He explained that assertions analysis uses inferences such as '**what'** is said and **'who'** is saying it. For example, if an article is about a housing project, assertions analysis will reveal exactly 'who' is saying 'what' about houses. This will show the different voices articulated in the articles. It was at this stage where the analysis allowed the study to explore community participation in the coverage of the ARP by checking 'who' was saying 'what' in the reportage.

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The analysis as a whole

The analysis did not follow any statistical approach because this study was tailored to Blummer's school of thought that argue that social science researchers need not to rely on computational research methods and data analysis since 'case studies, interviews, and life history may be valuable because they reveal generalizations which are not statistical', (Hammersley, 1989; 116). Hammersley also presents Blummer's argument that answers to theoretical problems of social psychology cannot be drawn using studies that emphasize on aggregate. Hammersley further explained that Blummer believed the neglect of what he called 'the creative character of human interactions and misunderstanding of the dynamics of social life and treating them as well defined variables in fixed relationships regardless of context' is what happens when social studies are computerised.

The expected results from the analysis were to find out what is being reported (themes) and through whose voices (participation) are these issues carried in the newspaper reports. The strengths of the analysis is that it allowed for the identification of the major themes in different articles, as well as the key actors in shaping those themes. This combination is likely to shed light on the role of the commercial community newspapers in the community of Alexandra.

However, as valuable as content analysis can be, it can be limited to cases where the function of the documents (newspapers) is known, deriving into an aspect known as informal analysis. Nonetheless, content analysis proved to be the most logical method to find out what newspapers reported about with regards to ARP and thus it was unavoidable.

3.2. Interviews

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews with the ARP director and project manager, to find out their personal opinions, as ARP administrators, about the coverage of ARP by these two commercial community newspapers.

Interviews were also held with representatives of two community organisations in Alexandra, namely Alexandra Development Forum (ADF) and Alexandra Youth Development Forum (AYDF), to find out the community's views of ARP's coverage by the commercial community newspapers. ADF is an apolitical organisation that represents 95 percent of the citizens of Alexandra, oversees the progress of the ARP and reports to the community on a monthly basis. AYDF is the youth faction of ADF.

Although there are other community based organisations in Alexandra apart from ADF and ADYF, I chose to interview these because the two organizations were formed precisely to monitor ARP and to carry on the development once ARP is over. The ADF is representative as it represents 95 percent of Alexandra residents across political party lines. The ADYF is representative in a special way in that it stands for young people of Alexandra, making sure that ARP creates opportunities for young people as well.

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The other main civic organisations in Alexandra include the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO), the Alexandra Vukuzenzele Crisis Committee (AVCC) and the Alexandra Concerned Residents (ACR). These are chiefly protest organisations taking up community struggles in Alexandra mainly over housing issues. However, although these organisations might have opinions and concerns about ARP's coverage by the two commercial community newspapers, they are not necessarily representative of the population of Alexandra, as well as comprehensively informed about ARP's activities in a way that would allow them to offer informed views. Put in other words, the AVCC or ACR maybe well informed about the corruption or slow delivery when it comes to the housing allocation but that does not mean that they can offer better views about the coverage that ARP receives from the two newspapers. Instead, ADF and ADYF because of their mandates, are entitled to have all round information about ARP's activities and consequently, they are able to detect when a newspaper report is skewed or true, and their knowledge is not only limited to housing projects.

Furthermore, in the interest of time and resources, I could not interview all civic organizations in Alexandra because ARP itself and the two publishers had to be interviewed to understand the relationship that exist between them.

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3.2.1. Interview questions framework

ARP interview questions included and developed from the following:

- What is ARP's relationship with the media?
- What role do the media have in Alexandra with regards to ARP?
- Is ARP satisfied with the content that the newspapers cover about the project?
- How do the media access ARP information?

ADF and **AYDF** interview questions included and developed from the following:

- Is the coverage of ARP by the two community newspapers reflective of the trajectory of the project?
- Are the newspapers accessible – do the organizations and ordinary community members to access the newspapers?

- Are there are enough community voices in the coverage of ARP in these newspapers? If not what can be done to ensure that there are more community voices in the reportage?

Newspaper editors' interview questions included and developed from the following:

- What they consider as news for Alexandra?
- Who are their main news sources?
- How often do they write about ARP?
- Who writes the articles?
- Apart from ARP officials whom else do they interview?

3.3. Limitations to the Methodology

The limitations of this methodology arose from the fact that not all newspaper issues were secured from the publishers' libraries. However, the researcher managed to get reasonable amounts of articles to carry out an analysis. Another setback was the unavailability of newspaper editors to meet the researcher for a face-to-face interview, which would have allowed the use of a recorder and non-verbal communication. However, the researcher managed to telephonically interview *Alex News* editor Sipho Sisho, and Dulile Sowaga, *City Vision* assistant editor.

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CHAPTER 4: Findings and Analysis

4. Introduction

This study aims to examine the role of commercially-owned community newspapers, herein referred to as 'commercial community newspapers', by critically analysing their content as well as opinions about their role from both the community and the publishers themselves.

The first two sections (**4.1** and **4.2**) of this chapter carry outlines and analyses of the content analysis data findings. This will be done through presentations of themes and issues that are raised in articles concerning ARP and the community of Alexandra. Under each theme category, summaries of articles that fall within that group, including quotations, where applicable, will be provided.

The analysis will be intertwined with the data presentation. Usually, though not necessarily, the analysis part of the data begins by explaining why the article is deemed helpful or not helpful for the community of Alexandra. The analysis may also appear in form of comparisons of data from different articles or interviews responses or all of these data pieces. The analysis will also extend to the identification of various voices that are carried in these articles thereby allowing exploring the contribution by community members to the discussion about ARP in the two newspapers.

The third section (**4.3**) of this chapter presents and analyses the interviews findings. Interviews data findings are presented as summaries of interview responses that are supported by quotations. A brief discussion in which major issues are stressed will form the basis of the analysis. The analysis may also appear within the body of the interview summary in form of comparisons with other interview summaries or newspaper articles or all of these data pieces. Irrelevant information provided by interviewees has been left out without acknowledgment.

Wits ETD

4.1. Content Analysis Findings and Analysis: *City Vision* newspaper

4.1.1. The theme of Complaints

Article 1: *'Meeting over sports fields in Alex Shelved"* (13 December, 2005).

The theme of the article is *complaints*. According to the article, the Alexandra Football Association (AFA), a community organisation, is not happy about ARP's failure to attend a crucial meeting. There seems to be tension between the community organisation AFA and the development project ARP.

Thus, the article begins:

"*The Alexandra Football Association (AFA) and the Alexandra Renewal Programme could not meet last week over thorny issues of unavailability of sports fields in the township*".

The article reveals how delegates from ARP failed to turn up for a meeting with AFA at the latter's offices. It also mentioned that a receptionist at ARP had informed both the newspaper and AFA that ARP officials were unable to attend the meeting because they were also attending another meeting. However, the article noted that AFA claimed ARP always fails to attend such meetings and does not communicate in good time.

This article played an important and positive role for the community of Alexandra by exposing the friction between these two community organisations, which are supposed to be uplifting each other for the benefit of the community. By breaking the silence for both the citizens and the organisations involved, the article has made a huge stride in upholding discussion and transparency within the community development project of Alexandra, ARP.

Through this article, the newspaper played an important role of exposing conflict between the two organisations that are supposed to work together for the betterment of the community of Alexandra.

Wits ETD

Article 2: *'Trim our grounds please!'* (17 February, 2006)

The theme is *complaints*. The same community organisation in Article 1 above, the Alexandra Football Association (AFA), levels fresh complaints against ARP for not cutting grass in soccer fields. This occurred despite AFA's repeated communication of the problem to ARP. A community member and owner of a local football club, Alex Sheffield Football Club, was quoted as saying,

"We really do not know what AFA is doing at the moment about the fields. At the end of the day most players from our teams leave and play in Balfour and we cry foul".

In this article, community voices are echoed through AFA and the Alex Sheffield Football Club's complaints. Again, this article exposes the friction that exists between ARP and other community organisations. In Article 1 above, *'Meeting over sports fields in Alex shelved'*, published two months before this article, it is mentioned that sports fields in Alexandra were not available for use by AFA because of the bad relationship between AFA and ARP. In this article ARP has been exposed as the less willing part, the one that does not answer to letters sent by AFA. This is viewed as a problem because the community of Alexandra is losing soccer players to rival teams.

This article therefore can be considered as a follow up to the Article 1, and thus, it scores a point on watchdog journalism for the newspaper. It can be said that by being able to report two different stories, which revolve around and reflect the same problem, the newspaper is serving the interest of the community of Alexandra, whose soccer players are happy to be lured away by better-equipped rival teams and avoid poor facilities at home.

Article 3: '*Sub-contractors cry foul'* (8 March, 2006)

The theme of the article is *complaints*, as it reveals dissatisfied construction workers from Alexandra, unhappy about the payments that they get from big main-contractors. Sub-contractors and general workers from Alexandra are quoted as saying,

Wits ETD

"*They said if we could not accept what they are giving us, they would get cheap labour elsewhere*".

This revelation opposes ARP's policy that seeks to empower local people economically through job creation. In other words local people are supposed to work in their own developmental projects in order to gain new skills and income. However, the ARP indicated in the article that they could not intervene in a labour dispute between their tender holder (the main contractor) and the local people/beneficiaries (the community of Alexandra).

The article carries the voices of the community through the workers' complaints. As such the article scores points in exposing the plight of underpaid workers as well community participation in the coverage. It can therefore be regarded as helpful for the community of Alexandra in its fight for better wages and ownership of its own development programme.

Article 4: *'Shakes' laments state of football in Alexandra'* (23 March, 2006)

The theme is *complaints*. In this article, community member and former football star known as Shakes, complains about the lack of sporting facilities and how it hampers his will to develop soccer in Alexandra. Shakes blames the ARP for not speeding up the development of sporting facilities, adding that the situation was killing sports in Alexandra:

"*We do not have a team that we can be proud of. One does not actually know as to who runs soccer here…*"

Although Shakes is a former soccer star, therefore not a typical ordinary citizen of Alexandra, his voice is representative of the football community of Alexandra. As a result, the article brought into the public space a direct complaint and reflection of the opinions of the community of Alexandra. By reporting on the concerns of the community, the newspaper is saving the interests of the football community of Alexandra, which is losing its players to better-equipped rival teams.

Wits ETD

Article 5: *'Axed housing scam official regrets his actions'* (11 August, 2006)

The theme is *complaints*. The article carries a complaint from a former ARP employee, Jankie Mathlala, who is also resident in Alexandra. The article is sourced from the complainant himself, who was fired by ARP, together with other four officials, namely, George Mgoboli, Truly Mbatha, Kenneth Shai and Sydney Zondo. According to the report, the officials were engaged in corrupt activities by allocating themselves houses in part of the greater Alexandra known as Far East Bank Extension 7. The complainant argues that it is not fair for ARP to strip him of his job even if he admitted his improper actions.

"I mentioned during the hearing that I regretted my actions and asked for leniency but that was not to be. We accepted our guilt but were still fired", the paper quoted Mathlala.

The management of ARP is reported as having said that the five's dismissal was due to their corrupt activities and that ARP could not take any blame for their own mistakes.

"Their dismissal would send a strong signal that authorities would not tolerate corruption", ARP director Julian Baskin told the newspaper.

This is a well-balanced article since it sourced quotes from both the complainant and ARP officials. However, the views of the ordinary citizens who were being defrauded by the corrupt officials were not included. Nonetheless, it can be said that the paper served the community by publishing an issue that shows the action taken by ARP on corrupt officials. The article also allowed a community member, Mathlala, to air his views about ARP even if he was fired because of his dishonesty.

4.1.2. The theme of Excellence

Article 6: *'Ekukhanyiseni primary maybe open by August'* (8 Feb, 2006)

Wits ETD

The theme of the article is *excellence* as it is an informational piece about the success of ARP. The article celebrates ARP for spending R12-million to build a new primary school to replace one that was a hazard to human health. According to the report,

"*The school was last year demolished after it was found that the building structures used when the school was built contained asbestos, which is bad for people's health*".

The article quoted ARP Project manager Darlene Louw as saying,

"We have listened to a national call on eliminating structures that are not good for the health of the children".

There is no community voice in the article. The article would have gained more currency had it included the opinions or comments of the parents whose children were attending at that school. However, apart from being an informational piece, the article might serve as a moral boost for the community who now realise that their children are treated with respect and care.

Article 7: *'M2 hostel gets a facelift'* (10 May, 2006)

The theme of this article is *excellence* as it is a praise piece on how ARP managed to refurbish a dilapidating hostel. The article's intro reads:

"*Within a few months the M2 Men's Hostel should have a brand new face, thanks to the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), the City of Johannesburg and the provincial government for revamping the township's derelict housing infrastructure*"

The hostel is equipped with a theatre, costing R4, 2-million. The report mentioned that apart from the theatre, costs for the second phase of the project are estimated to reach about R23-million. The building contractor doing the work stressed that local sub-contractors dominated the construction, an arrangement that would leave some of the money within the community.

Wits ETD

"We have hired mostly skilled locals and offered training in construction work to those with no skills at all", George Botha of Xaba Civics Construction Company was quoted in the report.

The article was sourced from the construction company, and it did not include the views of hostel residents and non-hostel residents of Alexandra. The article is not critical enough to reflect people's views after such large sums of money are used in hostel theatres and other refurbishments when people are still living in shacks. For instance, R23-million is only the cost of a second phase of this hostel which houses 286 bachelor units, but the article did not question the logic behind spending such an amount at the expense of cheaper RDP-type houses.

By failing to invoke opinions from ordinary community members, the article is reduced from a watchdog to playing a public relations role for ARP.

Article 8: *'Forum now has office'* (8, July 2006)

The theme is *excellence*. The article details how a community organisation, the Alexandra Development Youth Forum (ADYF), which has been operating without an office since 2002 has been assisted with office space by ARP in 2006. According to the report, the ADYF's efforts to share offices with the senior organisation, the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF), had been fruitless. Now that ARP had solved the problem, it will oversee the ADYF's activities, budget as well as supporting the youth organisation's projects.

The story is only sourced from ADYF. No input comes from the ARP or the ADF to highlight why the ADYF had stayed for four years without an office. However, the article is valuable because it highlighted some of the problems that the ARP has managed to solve for the people of Alexandra. It also exposed the bad blood between ADF and its youth faction ADYF. Instead of monitoring ARP and working together for the betterment of the lives of the people of Alexandra as they pledged to do, the two related organisations resort to feuding.

Article 9: *'Lifeline for Alex contractors'* (15 September, 2006)

Wits ETD

The theme of the article is *excellence* as it details how local contractors and residents of Alexandra are taking over jobs from external and established contractors. The article reports that big contractors such as MS Developers were the initial bidders in Alex Renewal Project but now smaller companies from Alexandra were taking over. Contract manager for MS Developers, Hennie du Plessis is reported as saying that Alex locals are getting more involved in the business.

"*We have sub-contracted to locals to build the houses. We address the issue of skills shortages by providing practical training in the construction business to the locals*," Du Plessis was quoted as saying.

ARP construction cluster coordinator, Hutchison Mashalane, was quoted: *"This has changed and their presence [presence of locals] in the project is felt as a result of work being given to them."*

Joyce Kekan of Alexandra who rose through the ranks to become a roof inspector, under Du Plessis' mentoring, is quoted as saying, "*Through this project, I contribute directly in the upliftment of my community*".

The article is balanced as it managed to source views from ARP, building contractors as well as the locals who are becoming successful and in control of the building project. It therefore could inspire locals to work hard and take part in the development of their community. As such, it can be said that the article is helpful for the community of Alexandra by showcasing positive results of local people's hard work and promoting economic activity.

Article 10: *'ARP nabs deal'* (1 November, 2006)

The theme is *excellence*. The article is about how ARP is forming a partnership with an American-based company, Weblessons PTY (Ltd), to develop online educational products for Alexandra's youths. In the report, ARP project manager Darlene Louw confirmed that Weblessons offered employment to two residents of Alexandra who will be developing projects for Alex with the supervision of the ARP board.

Wits ETD

The article is valuable and beneficial for the community as it informs the community about information technology developments that would empower young people in Alexandra. It does not however provide enough information to empower or directly help community members to learn more about the development. The article is more of ARP's press release than a community newspaper report. Reports like this one shows that the newspaper performs poorly in educational reporting.

Article 11: *'Alex Renewal Project bears fruits'* (23 November, 2005)

The theme is *excellence*. The article is about how ARP is successful in implementing its goals. The report says ARP has delivered a large part of its mandate in various aspects namely, housing, roads, pedestrian bridges, recreational facilities, health, and job creation among other things. The main subject is ARP. Information such as figures and project details suggest that ARP was the sole source. No community voices are echoed.

The lack of comments by the community makes the report inadequate. There is nothing wrong with an informational piece, which can be used by the community to respond where details are wrong. However, it is not guaranteed that everyone who reads the article will be able to notice issues, especially with the absence of an alert community media-monitoring organ. The paper reflects poor journalism by reproducing official information without inserting an analysis. This reduces the newspaper to playing a public relations role for ARP as opposed to a watchdog for the community.

Wits ETD

4.1.3. Administrative themes

Article 12: '*New plan to alleviate shortage of housing in Alexandra kicks off*' (19 April, 2006).

The theme of the article is *administrative* as the article is informative on how the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) has introduced a new dimension to solving problems encountered in its housing project. This article details ARP's perceived solution to reduce land shortage, which was slowing housing delivery in Alexandra. Part of the solution will be through adding two-roomed cottages in the back yards of

the RDP (Reconstruction and Development Programme) houses. Families already occupy these houses. The article reported that ARP believes that adding two extra rooms in the back yard of existing RDP houses will bring income to the original house owners. The intro of the article reads:

"*The Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) has come up with a plan to offer two rooms-to-let in the yards of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) house owners in the township"*.
The article also quoted ARP's project director, Julian Baskin, as saying,

"*Alex residents will have a choice of having two more rooms built in the same yard as their new RDP house*".

This article carries the voice of an ARP official who is happy to elaborate the project's breakthrough into solving land shortages. However, the voices of the house owners/community members who will benefit or be disadvantaged by the decision are not present in the article. Instead, it is the ARP official who raises the concern that the success of the initiative lies in the hands of the residents of the existing RDP houses – the residents have to choose if they want to accommodate strangers in their backyards. Despite that hint, the reporter still did not see it useful to include the views of the ordinary house owners.

RDP houses are 36 square metres in size and they are built on about 80 square metres of land. Adding extra two rooms will counter the ARP's de-densification initiative, one of the core aims of the project. However, the headline of the article together with the intro and the statement by Baskin suggest that the initiative has been approved already.

The main weakness of this article is that it does not consider that comments from RDP house owners might highlight contrary opinions. This on its own shows that ARP limits community involvement and decision-making in most of its plans, as argued by Sinwell (2005). Sinwell observed that, even if a decision by the ARP will end up affecting the ordinary man and woman on the street of Alexandra, those

Wits ETD

people are unanimously ignored while the management and the society's elites, who usually reside outside Alexandra, decide for them.
However, the article cannot be totally dismissed as it managed to inform the average reader of ARP's plans; while to the enlightened reader, its contradictions and flaws. The average reader will be informed of ARP's plan to introduce two roomed cottages and might not see the downside of the initiative. On the other, the critical reader will realise the ARP's inconsistence since adding two rooms at the back of an RDP-type house would reverse the project's de-densification programme.

Article 13: *'Business Place to set up shop in Alexandra'* (7 June 2006)

The theme of this article is *administrative*. The article explains how the ARP is setting up a trade centre to help grow business in Alexandra. The R23-million initiative targets women and youths of Alexandra.

"*This development will assist people to start their own businesses as well as improve their operating efficiencies*", the report quoted ARP director, Julian Baskin.

Sourced from project officials only, the article surprisingly fails to reflect the kinds of business opportunities that can be run or the criteria with which people will be selected apart from being women and youths. It however could serve the community as an information source for progressive women and youths who would then follow up the finer details of the project with the ARP officials.

Article 14: *'Bridging the gaps' (26 October, 2006)*

The theme is *administrative* as the article reflects the progress in the construction of pedestrian bridges in Alexandra. The particular bridge under discussion in this article is the one that links Alexandra with East Bank. The article's main source is official, project manager, Darlene Louw. She is reported as having said that,

"Most learners use these bridges to and from school and we may add another one in the future".

Wits ETD

The article is purely informational and serves to inform the greater community of the newly finished bridge linking Alexandra with East Bank.

Article 15: *'Shilowa checks on ARP'* (30 November, 2006)

The theme is *administrative* as the article is an informative piece of a tour of ARP by government representative, the then Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa. The article simply reported what Shilowa had to say about his tour of ARP, typically quoting him as follows:

"As you may be wondering, the aim of the visit is to see to what extent the ARP has gone with its task. Just to see the progress and problems it faces".

The main subjects and voices are Shilowa and ARP officials. Where community reference by these officials occurs, it only encouraged community cooperation in the development.

"*The problems of Alexandra cannot be left to government alone. Various organs of the community will have to be involved,"* Shilowa said, according to the report.

It seems the newspaper is reflecting exactly on what ARP and Shilowa only are saying. It is important for the newspaper to provide information for the community of Alexandra; however, this article is what one would expect of ARP's public relations publication rather than an independent newspaper. The article would have gained more weight had it carried a few views of ordinary community members on the progress of ARP at the same time of Shilowa's visit.

4.2. Content Analysis Findings and Analysis: *Alex News* Newspaper

4.2.1. The theme of Complaints

Article 1: '*Dispute clouds new houses'* (9 February, 2006)

Wits ETD

The theme of the article is *complaints*. This article reports on the complaints of the citizens of Alexandra who are employed as sub-contractors in various building projects directed by the ARP. These local workers feel that the payments that they get from the main-contractors are too small. The report quoted a member of the Greater Alexandra Business Women Consortium, Fikile Zulu, also a sub-contractor, as saying,

"We are told to build a 36 square metres [RDP type house] in two days, but they [main contractors] fail to address the issue of our salaries and to supply sufficient materials. This has prompted workers to down tools".

To address this problem, according to the report,
"Zulu has called on the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF), Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP), the City of Joburg's region 7, and other role players to intervene and resolve the workers' concerns".

In response, after engaging with ARP, Linda Memela of the ADF is reported as having said that:

"Due to the urgency in delivery, the [main] contractor employed several sub-contractors to beef up the workforce. However, the plan backfired as some of them were inexperienced".

According to the report, Memela also said the salaries issue was confidential although he would see to it that it was resolved. Memela's main issue was rather to worry about quality control, than looking into the sub-contractor's complaints.

The article exposed problems within the ARP's housing projects and the effectiveness or ineffectiveness with which such problems are resolved. Such an article is playing a role in shaping the overall outcome of the project since it reveals community concerns as well as the responses of the management to those concerns. Thus, such an article can be considered empowering and helpful for the community. The article's presentation of ADF's Memela as more worried about the final appearance of the project than addressing the complaints of the residents he represents is an important

Wits ETD

one as it paints a clear picture of the plight of the ordinary people of Alexandra due to lack of official representation within the ARP's management.

One of ARP's aims is the economic empowerment of the residents of Alexandra. If the project cannot ensure that the sub-contractors are paid accordingly, how can it empower the people of Alexandra economically? The article portrays both ARP and ADF as not serious in their pledge to uplift the people of Alexandra socially and economically.

Article 2: *'Residents demand speedy development'* (12 October, 2006)

The article's theme is *complaints*. Alexandra residents raise complaints against ARP's failure to monitor projects. Despite completed projects that saw, at this stage, 250 families allocated RDP houses in Alexandra's Extension 7 suburb and another 108 families moving from the M2 Hostel to 98 newly constructed flats, residents are reported as unsatisfied by the general progress of the progress.

"*They [residents] said many projects were left incomplete, including Mandela Yard, which is allegedly being used by criminals who gamble and prey on residents*," the newspaper reported.

A community organization, Alexandra Development Forum (ADF), which sits on ARP board and is responsible for informing and reporting back to residents on ARP's development, is projected as biased towards ARP and to be covering up for ARP. The report says that residents claim that,

"*There is a gap between what the ADF reports and the actual state of development*".

The report says that residents present at a meeting which was held during the Member of the Executive Community (MEC) for housing Nomvula Mokonyane's visit to Alexandra in response to corruption allegations at the new housing units of Extension 7 suburb in which five officers were fired, claimed that,

Wits ETD

"*Building [of houses] has halted and funds diverted to other projects which have been given higher priority".*

The corruption allegations that the MEC was responding to involved five ARP officials who were fired after it was found that they were selling or allocating houses to themselves.

In response to residents' complaints, ADF chairman, Benito Lekalakala who was at that meeting is quoted as having said,

"*Paying lip service and pointing fingers would not improve the situation*".

To show the clash between Alexandra residents and the two organizations - ARP and ADF, the report also mentioned that,

"*Although both ADF and ARP reported that the newly constructed Ekukanyiseni Primary School was only waiting for the official handover from the department of Education, the school does not have a sewerage system and is not ready to be opened, they [residents] said*".

Wits ETD

This article presents a well-balanced story that gives a strong voice of residents as well as enough room for officials to explain their own side of the story. The article leaves the reader with enough information to understand the situation and even conclude. To a large extent, the article is critical, and it reflects the tension in the community.

Such an article is helpful for the community of Alexandra as it exposes things that residents regard as flaws of the project. As such the article might be putting pressure on both ARP and ADF to insure that development progresses in a way expected by the beneficiaries. Thus, the article plays a watchdog role for the community of Alexandra.

Article 3: *'Squatters stand their ground'* (16 March, 2006)

The theme of the article is *complaints*. The article reports on the squatters in Alexandra who are resisting being moved from a piece of land they are occupying in order to pave the way for a building development. The paper reported that the residents did not welcome the move because they were not offered alternative shelter.

The article quoted ARP's director Julian Baskin as saying that,

"All stakeholders need to ensure the relocation is done humanely and that the alternative accommodation is not far from the environment the squatters are used to".

According to the report, Baskin was responding to questions posed by Pretoria Supreme Court Judge, Emberhard Bertelsmann, in which Ritamor and Tellav Investments, the company that was hired by ARP to run the development, referred enquiries to the government department of Housing and ARP.

The complainant, Chairman of Wynberg Concerned Residents (WCR), Ellen Chauke is reported to have raised an important concern for the squatters, that like all residents on the housing waiting list, they deserved respect and integrity.

"Attempts to engage with government to resolve this crisis have come to nothing. We believe justice will be on our side," Chauke told the paper.

The article was sourced diversely, from the ARP, the developers, and the affected community. The paper gave a voice to the residents/squatters who are resisting forced removals. By putting the concerns of squatters into the public sphere, the newspaper played an outstandingly helpful role for the most disadvantaged of the community of Alexandra. This article exposed the inhumane treatment of squatters by developers such as ARP. By so doing, through this article, the newspaper helped the voiceless community on its fight against government and ARP.

4.2.2. The theme of Excellence

Article 4: *'ARP steamrolls development'* (14 September, 2006)

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The theme of this here is *excellence* as the article is showcasing the positive progress that ARP is making. ARP Project Manager, Darlene Louw is quoted as having said that,

"Nothing will distract our focus to provide affordable housing and strong economy for the people of Alex".

The article went ahead to mention projects that are finished as well as those that are planned for the future.

Although the report mentions that some of the residents of Alexandra complain that ARP is not delivering on its promises; it does not provide quotes of individual residents' views whatsoever. The article further downplayed residents' complaints on slow housing delivery by mentioning that:

"*How ARP contended their mandate was not only housing delivery, but shaping Alex as a model city with socio-economic opportunities for all*".

This statement is supported with the quotation from ARP manager, Darlene Louw, above as well as a list of 15 other projects in this article, apart from housing, that ARP endeavors to complete. It can be argued that homeless community members who still live in shacks would prefer having their own RDP type houses to having a "world-class skateboarding facility" or an "International Athletics Ground accredited by International All Athletics Federation (IAAF)," constructed in Alexandra.

As such it can be said that the article is not very helpful for the community of Alexandra since it lacks the critique that is crucially needed in any reportage that seek to promote the needs of a disadvantaged community.

4.2.3. Administrative themes

Article 5: *'Revival of Alex on track: Project leaders say there is light at the end of the tunnel.* (11 May, 2006)

Wits ETD

The theme of the article is *administrative*. The article details ARP's promise to residents that it will finish all scheduled projects before the end of ARP's life span that ends in 2008.

The intro of the article reads: *"Members of the Alexandra Renewal project (ARP) have vowed to provide more houses before their seven-year term ends in 2008"*.

A member of the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF), Linda Memela, responsible for updating residents about the progress of ARP was quoted as saying,

"Also to be addressed is the slow rate at which the K2006 housing development is going. Although plans and engineering reports, including the budget, have been submitted, there has been no feedback from the provincial government".

The article also reported that ARP director, Julian Baskin, admitted there were problems hindering the progress.

The article also listed what it called 'Problems facing Baskin [ARP director] and company', at that time. These include the construction of the Vasco da Gama bridge, which is delaying relocation of residents to a new suburb, and also that the relocation of Setwetla informal settlement residents had been dragged for six months.

The article is helpful for the community in that it illustrated problems that are facing ARP as well as the plans to solve the problems before the end of the project. It also did give the views of the worried residents, who do not want a situation where ARP is going to stop operating without completing all the projects despite a huge budget.

However, that the newspaper report did not critique issues such as the importance of giving priority to basic shelter needs like houses as opposed to high quality and internationally recognised sporting venues, poses serious questions about the watchdog role of this newspaper.

Wits ETD

4.2.4. Critique themes

Article 6: *"City blamed for housing corruption and delays"* (26 October, 2006)

The theme is *critique*. This article is about how the Johannesburg local government is pressurized by the opposition political party Democratic Alliance (DA) to answer on allegations of corruption that resulted in five of ARP officials suspended. Many people see the DA as the most vocal and one of the political parties that do not hesitate to criticize the ruling African National Congress (ANC).
The report quoted DA spokesperson for the local government's housing department in the city of Johannesburg, councilor Manny de Freitas, as saying:

"Since the ARP's inception, allegations of corruption and misadministration have been rife. The project is nowhere near to being on schedule".
ARP director Julian Baskin, according to the report retorted that:

"The organisation was stamping corruption and fraud in ARP, hence many of the suspected officials had been suspended, pending further investigations".

An ANC councilor for Ward 109 of Alexandra, Justice Ngalonkulu is also reportedly said that,

"All liaison officers implicated in allegations of corruption had been suspended and had subsequently resigned". The paper went ahead to say that councilor Ngalonkulu hinted, *"There were still corrupt officials who continued to rip off desperate people in need of houses".*

As a result, an independent audit of beneficiaries was called for, reported the paper.

The article is a critical piece capable of informing residents of the action being taken by opposition political parties, in this case the DA, as well as the City Council and ARP with regards to allegations of corruption in which five ARP officials are implicated. The article managed to air the critical view of the DA and it went ahead to allow the response from ARP officials as well as the ruling ANC government

WitsETD

representative. It is critical in that, although using different expressions, both councilors Ngalonkulu of ANC and Councilor Manny de Freitas are not satisfied by ARP progress. The DA, according to Councilor De Freitas, sees the whole project as a failure while ANC says, apart from the busted five corrupt officials, there are still more corrupt officials hidden in ARP, according to Councilor Nkalonkulu.

4.2.5. Informational/General themes

Article 7: '*Solution in sight*' (27 July, 2006)
The theme of the article is *informational/general*. The article is about how the media, *Alex News* in particular, brought to ARP's attention the case of a family living in dilapidated building and how ARP took due action.

"The power of the media has once again been demonstrated," bragged the paper in its intro of the story.

The paper reported that, *"Alex News published the story of the Qushe family 'Suffer the children', which highlighted the abject poverty in which the family's children lived"*.

The article also quoted a member of the Alexandra Police Station's Victim Support Unit and Kidz Clinic, Elizabeth Mokoena, who explained how the family had been moved.

"The move comes after consultation with officials from Alexandra Renewal Project," Mokoena told the paper.

The report also mentioned that, *"residents [of Alexandra] have complained about the area, saying it is a haven for criminals"*.

The area was described in the report as *"the filthy bus terminus between 3rd and 4th avenues"*.

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The report also reveals that *Alex News* actually brought the police as well as ARP officials to visit the filthy bus terminus.

The article is a clear example of how a community newspaper can help ordinary and disadvantaged community members such as the Qushe family. The article is also balanced in its sourcing as it includes various organizations of the community of Alexandra – the South African Police Service (SAPS), the ARP and the residents. Apart from writing a story that saw a destitute family receive accommodation, the story also raised the residents' concern about the danger posed by the dilapidated buildings that have become criminal hubs.

4. 3 Interviews

4.3.1. Interview with ARP director, Julian Baskin

Describing ARP's relationship with *Alex News and City Vision*, ARP director, Julian Baskin said that the newspapers were not playing the role that he would have them play, which is to facilitate a two-way communication channel between the ARP and the community.

"One of the big problems that the ARP always has was of communicating to the population through newspapers and marketing companies, when in point of fact, development to be successful has to be a negotiated and constant process of dialogue with stakeholders because information comes in all sorts of different ways and the analysis of the same event is so varied. And newspapers give you none of that," said Baskin in a statement.

Baskin's biggest concern is the question of having dialogue with all key stakeholders. He however did not see the two community newspapers as capable of promoting such dialogue.

"And it is only through dialogue that you begin to have an understanding, as opposed to a judgment. Newspapers tend to put out a judgment, either it is bad or it is good. Development is neither those things, it is a more complicated thing," Baskin added.

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Baskin would rather get an arrangement where the media could provide that role, providing facts and figures to feed into a constructive and informed dialogue. He lamented how journalists are lazy, and how they always want to write stories about events based on information that they get over the phone without visiting the actual sites. He linked this laziness to the 'superficial understanding' with which journalists cover his project.

"If the media were to really play their role it would be helpful. But it is a thin line between being damaging and being helpful. Misinformation is damaging. Good information is helpful. But good information does not just fall out of the sky, you got to find it, you got to speak to the different stakeholders, you got to develop an understanding - which they do not," said Baskin.

Baskin finds the community press lacking developmental goals in their reporting. He described the sector's journalism as shallow and bound to scandals of the ARP rather than on analysis of situations and their impact on the community of Alexandra.

"If you are saying to me community newspapers have a role in providing an analysis of the project then I would say yes, but if you say having a useful role in providing stories about the project then I will say no. Because the story keep on changing but the analysis remains the same. For example, Alex as prime location: It means people are not going to have gardens, it means they are going to have to live in flats, it means different responsibilities that people have to make… and that is an analysis, that is not going to change. It is an analysis and a journalist can give the people his opinion - will the flats work, will they turn to slums. To me that provide the framework that people need to understand the project," said Baskin.

Baskin thinks that print media is not the suitable medium for community media. His argument is mainly bound to the language issue, saying that many people in Alexandra are not English speakers. Baskin also thinks radio is the best medium because it would broadcast in African languages. He also indicated that radio is most suitable for carrying an ongoing story such as a development project.

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"The issue for me is I am not sure whether print media is necessarily the best media. I think radio is the best medium because radio can carry an ongoing story, radio can keep you abreast with events in a way that newspapers cannot. So I think newspapers could be better for analytical stuff whereas the story can unfold in a far better way on the radio," said Baskin.

Baskin is wrong in wanting the newspapers to be used by ARP as a communication tool. He however corrects himself saying that newspapers need to give an analysis. The lack of analysis is evident in most articles in the content analysis section of this study. Articles without an analysis simply fall into Baskin's first model, that of information channels that do not say whether certain aspects are good or bad for the community.

Although Baskin may be correct in saying that radio would be the most suitable medium for Alexandra since it would broadcast in African languages which are very limited in newspapers, he is however wrong in saying that newspapers cannot cover an ongoing story such as that of ARP. In the content analysis section there are articles that are evidently follow-up articles, for example the dispute between the Alexandra Football Association (AFA) and ARP, showing that newspapers are in fact suitable for covering ongoing stories.

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4.3.2. Interview with the ARP project manager, Darlene Louw

Unlike director, Julian Baskin, project manager Darlene Louw thinks the ARP has a relatively good relationship with the two community newspapers. Further to that, Louw believes that *City Vision*, and not *Alex News*, provides the community with better coverage on ARP issues in terms of impartiality.

"If there is a contentious issue, for example, in the community, City Vision will not just print the one side of the story; they always come to us and say: the community has told us the following regarding the project, what is your comment? Alex News will do it occasionally but they do tend to be one-sided than City Vision," said Louw.

Louw said ARP has managed to change the manner in which the community press reported about the project from not only looking for the pitfalls of the project, but also looking at the good stories - what ARP has achieved as a project.

"Once a month we brief all the media, we call them in. It is a proactive approach towards reporting about the project, than saying we will wait for news to come up and then we will respond to it", said Louw.

From a community member's perspective, like Baskin, Louw believes the problem with both newspapers is that they are written in English, with only little provision being made for any African language.

"A lot of people in Alex cannot necessarily read. So your news reporting is not accessible for anybody who cannot read English, and anybody who cannot read. If I cannot read I can look at pictures and I must get somebody to read for me. I am saying they [community newspapers] should have some articles, some events or some part of the paper and not just the comic stuff but also the serious stuff as well, and put that on a level where everybody can understand. To me that's already a barrier," said Louw.

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With regards to communicating with the media, Louw said the ARP has got a very open policy towards the media. She said ARP organises monthly media forums to which the media, ADF and Alexandra's councilors are invited.

"We would give a report on the project to the media, the media would then be free to ask any questions that they want to ask, and whoever we believe is the best person to respond to that particular question would respond", said Louw.

With regard to the role that the media is playing in Alexandra, Louw finds the press misleading in many cases.

"We are not preventing anybody from writing on things that are not positive because to us the more opinions we receive about the project, the better we can make the project, but as long as negative criticism is based on facts. For example, the case of

community liaison corruption was not disputed, we said that if that were the case we would investigate it and take the necessary action, which we did – their services were terminated. We invite people to say watch out on this. But they should not make hollow allegations. If an allegation is not sound, we will challenge it in the media," said Louw.

While Louw made a valid point about the importance of impartiality in reporting, she seems to be hostile towards *Alex News* because of its unapologetic stance on ARP coverage. It is important to note that, according to Louw's observations, Al*ex News* is portrayed as biased in favour of the community because it is prepared to air the views of the community without fear of being challenged by ARP. This portrayal leaves the newspaper as a publication representing the community, hence an ally of the community.

Furthermore, Louw's testimony of how the media helped in busting the corrupt housing officials is evidence of the watchdog role being played by the two newspapers in the community of Alexandra with regards to ARP affairs.

As such, from Baskin and Louw's accounts, it can be deduced that the ARP wants the community media that take it easy on the ARP management. The ARP management is clearly worried about the possibility of having some journalist writing about them, with or without their side of the story. This threat posed by the presence of the two newspapers, and particularly by *Alex News*, in Alexandra works in favour of the community because ARP officials are forced to operate in certain ways that will make sure that the organisation is not caught off-guard. To that end, the two newspapers can be described as playing a helpful role for the community of Alexandra as far as the ARP is concerned.

4.3.3. Interview with the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF) manager, Judith Xumalo

Asked about the relationship between ARP and the two community newspapers, Judith Xumalo, manager of the Alexandra Development Forum (ADF) responded by

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saying that both newspapers report exactly what is happening in the ARP and that they do so constructively.

"They do not hide the wrongs if there are any; they project incidences as we move along with the development", said Xumalo.

Xumalo's major concern is that of delayed reports, where the newspapers *"would today publish stories that occurred three months ago thereby keeping us in a delayed mode"*.

With regards to accessibility issues, Xumalo think the newspapers allow not only public leaders but also ordinary people's voices into the coverage, though limited, through letters to the editor and voice box sections of the newspaper.

"As such I think the people are given enough chance to be able to use the media to express their views concerning the project", said Xumalo.

She also added that the ADF, as a civic organization, is planning to activate a media wing of its social cluster that would look around issues of efficiency and credibility of the community media in Alexandra.

As leader of a community organisation, Xumalo's account of community media's coverage of ARP is important not only because it highlighted the helpful role that the newspapers are playing, but also because she presents a neutral opinion. The ARP might feel that it is their duty to discredit the media for the bad publicity it has caused them while the media might also feel that they need to defend themselves; ADF has no particular reason to be biased.

Also arguable is the fact that Xumalo's argument presents a community that has gained trust and faith in its local newspapers. This satisfaction might translate into boosted community esteem and a sense of belonging that could encourage people to come forward with stories to the newspapers thereby creating a strong defense mechanism for a community that has seen decades of exclusion from the mainstream media. To that end, the newspapers could be said to be helping the community of

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Alexandra to gain its pride and dignity as well as realising the power vested in voicing their concerns in the media.

4.3.4. Interview with Vincent Mothabela, treasurer of the Alexandra Development Youth Forum (ADYF)

Vincent Mothabela, treasurer of the Alexandra Development Youth Forum (ADYF) thinks that commercial community newspapers are playing a helpful role for the community. His main problem with the community press is that it is not proactive in its news gathering process. He discredits commercial community newspapers in Alexandra for their lack of interest and passion that would drive them to take part in journalism that is more investigative and developmental.

"It is only when something goes wrong that the media, wanting an opinion, come to the community. They never come to you and say they want to interview you or to get an understanding of issues in the community. There has to be a march in [the road] Marlboro, or when there is an occasion. For example, in the case of KwaBhekilanga School, it is the community that called the press that there is a situation here and this is our view about what is happening at the school. So it is not them coming and asking what is your view or how do you want to participate in our next publication," said Mothabela.

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He found it unacceptable that by June 2007, the newspapers had not covered a summary of ARP's undertakings during the previous financial year. He also noted how the commercial community newspapers limit contribution by community members.

"You cannot contribute in these community newspapers if it is not your newspaper, you cannot have a column as youth, because they are commercial newspapers. Furthermore, they are only looking for mistakes and they only cover the issue of housing," said Mothabela.

In conclusion Mothabela said that commercial community press, *Alex News* in particular, has lost the sense of serving the community.

"When Alex News started that was the angle that they came from. That as Alex residents, we want to take ownership of stories that are told in Alex – the people who pitched the idea were all Alexandrians, but now there has been the change of ownership. They have diverted from the objective," said Mothabela.

Although Mothabela maintains that the newspapers play a helping role for the community, the most significant point in his opinion is how he noted several aspects that are compromising the newspapers to serve the community even further. ARP's Julian Baskin also raises the issue of lack of investigative and proactive reporting that Mothabela laments. Another aspect bemoaned by Mothabela is that of untimely reporting that ADF manager, Judith Xumalo also raised.

To come back to the importance of the newspapers in the community, the fact that Mothabela feels that the youth have to write a regular column in these newspapers is critical as it mark the beginning of a drive by the community to demand certain influence with publications in their area. This bid to own part of the editorial shows that the youth of Alexandra have realised that these newspapers are a strong platform for them to air their views in challenging each other as well as the ARP and government. The ADYF's awareness of the value connected to having more stake in the editorial of the newspapers also reveals the powerful position that the newspapers have assumed in the community of Alexandra.

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4.3.5. Interview with *Alex News* editor, Sipho Sisho

Of the role of *Alex News* in Alexandra and ARP, Sipho Sisho, editor of *Alex News*, plainly put it as that of a watchdog.

"We are watchdogs. We are a voice of the community. We cannot coerce to advertise. The problem is that some people or organisations want us to be their mouth-piece."

Sisho stressed that if *Alex News* should take sides, then it feels more inclined to the community because it is for the community.

Asked about their news gathering process, Sisho said it is a matter of company policy to get both sides of the story. He denied claims by ARP Project Manager Darlene Louw that, despite inviting all media to monthly meetings, *Alex News* is biased in favour of the community.

"They do not invite us. They have never invited me. I call them when there is information that I want. I struggle, but I have done my level best to Include ARP's side although they are sometimes difficult to hold – they send you from pillar to post, and that is a problem."

Sisho also dismissed ARP director, Julian Baskin's, concern that journalists do not want to visit sites, relying only on phone calls which lead them to write 'superficial stories'. Sisho said there were so many ways to gather news, and telephoning is one method of newsgathering.

Asked about the extent to which *Alex News* encourages community voices in its coverage, Sisho said the community in Alexandra has its own leaders, and through organisations such as ADF and political parties, which the newspaper ask for comments, community involvement is therefore present. He also said that on occasions the paper engage with ordinary people through part of the paper that is called voice boxes – small sections of the newspaper that is dedicated to comments from different people.

It is of importance to note that *Alex News* does not have a very good working relationship with ARP. The fact that Sisho finds it difficult to get information from the project might reflect ARP's resentment of the newspaper's reporting approach. And that approach might be crucial for a newspaper that regards itself a watchdog for the community of Alexandra. It is also important to note that the newspaper claims to be more inclined to people of Alexandra than to any organisations in the community.

4.3.6. Interview with *City Vision* assistant editor, Dulile Sowaga

Dulile Sowaga, *City Vision* assistant editor believes that his newspaper's working relationship with ARP is good and that it is based on the newspaper's liaison with the

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government department of housing that oversees ARP. He added that their role in covering the department of housing and ARP's activities is that of evaluators.
"We consistently cover issues regarding ARP. After a certain period of time in the project we need to report back the positives and the negatives. It is an evaluation of the project. We are guided by the ANC's slogan 'Making a better life for all'. We therefore cover all development issues in the country, and of all the national issues, housing is one of the well known and old", Sowaga explained.

Asked about what the newspaper regards as news in Alexandra, Sowaga said that *City Vision* aims to get the voices or opinions of the community and then go to the officials to clarify.

"We are proactive; we do not wait for something to happen. We ask questions. When government officials do not hear anything they rest and eventually sleep, but when they begin hearing the media knocking on their door they begin pulling their socks up".

Asked about the accessibility of information at ARP, Sowaga said that the newspaper does get information from ARP, but he echoed *Alex News'* Sipho Sisho concerns, that it is difficult to get information from ARP.

"We do get information when we want it but I do not think they are doing enough in availing themselves to the media".

As such, Sowaga said that the newspaper sometimes uses its own confidential sources from ARP itself as well as outside the organisation.

The fact that the newspaper assumes the role of an evaluator of housing and other development projects is important as it shows that the community of Alexandra has a regulator closely following the ARP trajectory and putting it into the public sphere. It is also encouraging that the newspaper portrays government as an institution that needs to be pushed and put under pressure for it to deliver to the people. This approach might mean that ARP officials are kept in check and on course in delivering development to the Alexandra community.

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CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

5. Introduction

This study sought to explore the impact of commercialism on community newspapers in the township of Alexandra. The commission of this study was motivated by concerns over the ability of commercial community newspapers to serve the interests of communities while pursuing their commercial interests. In the interest of objectivity, the study assumed that if Alexandra's two commercial community newspapers report on the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP) – an important story for the community, regardless of the level of their analysis as well as editorial choice, then they might be already working towards fulfilling their community functions since the ARP is vital to Alexandra's post-apartheid revival.

In order to understand the kind service provided by these two commercial community newspapers to the community, the study included a content analysis of their coverage of the Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP). The study also gathered insight and opinions concerning that coverage from community organisations, ARP leaders and representatives of the newspaper publishers in order to gain, from different angles, a comprehensive understanding of the role that these commercial newspapers were playing in Alexandra.

This chapter concludes the study by compressing data on various issues that the research explored, namely, the nature of coverage of ARP by the two commercial community newspapers; community participation in that coverage; the role of commercial community newspapers in Alexandra as well as ways to develop that role; and finally, the balance that the two commercial community newspapers are striking between commercial and community interests.

5.1. The coverage of Alexandra Renewal Project (ARP)

Both *Alex News* and *City Vision*'s reportage of ARP covered issues which can be categorised into distinct themes, namely, *complaints*, *excellence*, *administrative*, *critique* and *informational*.

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Articles under the *complaints* theme gave the people of Alexandra a platform to publicly raise their complaints against ARP on various concerns. For example, the case of squatters who resisted to be moved away from a piece of land that had been earmarked for a housing project because no temporary shelter had been provided, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.1, Article 3: *'Squatters stand their ground'*.

Articles under the *excellence* theme allowed ARP management to publicly share the successes as well as to reassure the people on problematic areas of development project. For example, see Chapter 4, section 4.1.2, Article 6: *'Ekukhanyiseni primary maybe open by August'*.

Articles under the *administrative* theme publicised ARP's administration procedures; for example, see Chapter 4, section 4.1.3, Article 15: *'Shilowa checks on ARP'*. Through this article, residents could read about how ARP managers are answerable to the government and what the then Gauteng Premier Mbhazima Shilowa thinks of ARP's progress.

Articles under *informational* themes provided the community with information that cannot be attributed to members' direct complaints or ARP's administrative activities. For example, there is a story in which *Alex News* advised ARP and the South African Police Service (SAPS) of a homeless family living in a dilapidated building, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.5, Article 7: '*Solution in sight*'.

Articles under the theme of *critique* provided an appraisal of the ARP. For example, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.4, Article 6: *"City blamed for housing corruption and delays"*.

Interview responses from newspaper representatives portrayed the two commercial community newspapers as playing an important role in Alexandra. *Alex News* editor, Sipho Sisho, said his newspaper is a watchdog for the community of Alexandra. Dulile Sowaga, assistant editor of *City Vision* said his newspaper is there to evaluate ARP on behalf of the people of Alexandra. On several occasions, content analysis findings reflects that the two newspapers raised issues of dissatisfaction by residents as well as other problematic issues of ARP such as poor slow delivery of houses. In

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that regard, the newspapers representatives' view of their roles as watchdogs and evaluators seem to hold water.

The Alexandra Development Forum manager, Judith Xumalo, said both newspapers were impartial as they reported the bad and the good about ARP. ADF's youth wing, Alexandra Youth Development Forum's Vincent Mothabela said the newspapers were doing a good job in giving the people of Alexandra a platform in the media world. He however believes that the newspapers were not playing their role to the fullest. He finds them strong in sensationalism but lacking in developmental journalism.

According to Murthy (2001), developmental journalism focuses on conditions in developing nations and ways to improve them. Developmental journalism looks at proposed government projects to improve conditions in the country, and analyses whether or not they will be effective. Journalists practicing developmental journalism may come up with proposed solutions and actions in an article, suggesting ways in which they might work best. Usually, developmental journalism encourages a cooperative effort between citizens of the nation and the outside world.

ARP director Julian Baskin, and manager Darlene Louw believe that the two newspapers could be more helpful if they restrain from judgemental reporting as well as poor journalism practice which leads to superficial stories. While Baskin sees radio rather than newspapers as a suitable medium for the community of Alexandra, Louw thinks that newspapers would work better if they introduced vernacular languages rather than sticking to English as the main language in their coverage.

To a greater extent, the coverage of ARP by these two commercial community newspapers highlighted their ability to play a helping role for the community of Alexandra because the issues that they cover, for example, community discontent and corrupt officials are crucial in safeguarding the community development project.

However, the reportage falls short on critically examining ARP. Most of the articles carry superficial content on certain issues without elaborating. For example, the article *'Squatters stand their ground'*, see Chapter 4, section 4.2.1, Article 3, is not critically examined. With regards to this article, while hitting at developers who abuse

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their power is commendable, considering the low literacy levels in South Africa's townships and informal settlements, journalists might need to caution community members on behavior that could delay development projects.

5.2. Community involvement in the coverage

Community involvement in the media coverage of ARP is present through the opinions of community members and community organisations. However, this involvement is limited to articles under the theme of *complaints*. All articles under this theme reflect community voices. For example, see Chapter 4, section 4.1.1, Article 4: *'Shakes' laments state of football in Alexandra'*. Articles under this theme reflect that the two newspapers are carrying the voices of the people of Alexandra in an effort to help them express their dissatisfaction.

However, community involvement in the coverage by both newspapers is very low. Alexandra Development Youth Forum (ADYF) treasurer, Mothabela, lamented that ordinary community members' contribution in these commercial community newspapers is very limited because they are commercially owned. He criticised the newspapers for denying ADYF an editorial column for youth. Mothabela's appeal becomes more important if one considers that the community is its own best reporter. White et al. (1994) argued that individuals know their community better than the publishers and for them to empower themselves they need to be at the forefront of sharing information and raising issues that concern them. Lack of access to the media suppresses the youth of Alexandra's ability to 'identify their felt needs', as argued by Midgely et al (1986).

Although both newspapers have sections dedicated to promote community participation and dialogue such as 'Letters to the Editor' and 'Voice Boxes', none of these sections discussed the ARP during the period under analysis in this study. As such, since this study only sought reference to the ARP, the 'Letters to the Editor' and 'Voice Boxes' could not be used to show community participation in the newspapers' coverage of ARP.

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5.3. What does this reflect about the role of these newspapers?

The most striking role that both *Alex News* and *City Vision* play in the community of Alexandra, with regards to the ARP, is of providing the citizens with a platform to publicly raise their complaints and dissatisfactions. As highlighted in Chapter Four, the theme of complaints is carried in many articles that were published by both newspapers over a period of 12 months. The fact that the two commercial community newspapers provided an avenue for community members to express their dissatisfaction with the progress of and decisions made for their community by ARP can be said to be a helpful role.

In addition, by simply providing information about the development project and raising concerns that are of importance to ordinary people, the newspapers are playing a helping role for the community of Alexandra. Articles under *excellence* and *administrative* themes in the findings and analysis indicate how the two commercial community newspapers play a role as sources of information about ARP for the people of Alexandra.

It can be argued that it is beneficial for the community of Alexandra to get information about the progress of their development project on a weekly basis from the two commercial community newspapers. Furthermore, it is also beneficial for the community of Alexandra to have journalists asking ARP about the progress of the project on a regular basis. This could ensure that ARP and government officials keep on track because they are aware of a third force that is constantly watching out loopholes in the project.

Finally, the fact that the two newspapers are commercially run becomes less important when one considers that the only alternative source of information about ARP for Alexandra residents would have been the ARP's bi-monthly newsletter. Such an in-house publication could be misleading when it comes to sensitive information and issues of error. As such it would be pointless for the community of Alexandra to overshadow the role of these newspapers only because they operate commercially.

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5.4. Room to sharpen that role

This study also finds that there is room for the two commercial community newspapers to strengthen their helping role in the community of Alexandra. In line with ARP director, Julian Baskin's suggestion, this report finds that the reporting on ARP by the two newspapers is limited mainly to citizens' complaints, exposing scandals and celebrating ARP.

There is very little effort given to constructive and educational analysis in the coverage. Atton (2002) argued that the subject matter of community media should focus on social responsibility. Gumicio-Dagron (2003:3) explained that social responsibility in community media is achieved if an experience 'fulfills the functions of service to its audience and of strengthening community voices'. In that light, by writing articles without an analysis or an educational angle, it is distinguished that the two commercial community newspapers provide a half-baked service and thus do not fulfill their role in serving the community of Alexandra. As such, *Alex News* and *City Vision*'s coverage of ARP lacks an important facet of community media, which is to educate ordinary community members in order to influence constructive opinions or dialogue amongst citizens.

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The lack of developmental reporting and the inclination towards sensationalism might leave the less-educated citizens without much gain or understanding of most issues. ADYF treasurer, Vincent Mothabela, as well as ARP director, Julian Baskin, advocate for journalism that provides the framework that people need to understand the development project.

Developmental journalism reporters must be able to write stories that help citizens to overcome their problems. For instance, mentioning that 'squatters stand their ground', in a story about squatters who refuse relocations to pave way for development is not enough for people who might not understand the legislation. Such articles must be treated with caution as in some instances; ill-informed revolts by citizens, in this case squatters, could end up slowing down the progress of development projects. Coincidentally, Alexandra has a record of devastating protests during development

projects. Back in 1986, protests halted construction of the 'Garden City' – a project which was meant to improve the township's physical appearance.

When dealing with such sensitive cases, it is essential for editors to practice responsible reporting by, for instance, ensuring that articles on squatters provide enough background and educative material for residents to gain an understanding of basic human rights, the legal system and even the pitfalls of violent demonstrations that delay and even hinder development.

To achieve responsible reporting, commercial community newspapers need to revise their approach to news production. Both *Alex News* and *City Vision*, as Howley (2005) noted of community media initiatives, gather and produce news in the same way as any other mainstream newspaper. Such reportage in many cases is meant for fairly educated people who would understand and analyse issues, not for media that must promote communitarian ideas and development. If news production is targeted at a particular readership within Alexandra, the cause of community media is therefore defeated. Coverage of Alexandra needs to assume that everyone in the community is disadvantaged to the extent that articles are tailored to provide more than enough background information on issues.

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This observation goes in line with Nancy Fraser's (1993) argument based on Jurgen Habermas' ideology of the bourgeoisie public sphere. Habermas noted the presence of multiple publics and argues that in stratified societies where relations are structured on the basis of dominance and subordination, equal participation in the public debate and deliberation is not possible. To come back to Fraser, reportage that is meant for the middle class who can read between the lines stratifies communities thereby defeating the cause of community media.

Therefore, the two commercial community newspapers covering Alexandra need to create content that is accessible, understandable and educative on the assumption that the average reader is poorly educated. It might be worth it to explain sensitive issues in vernacular languages. The aim of such an effort would be to get every member of the community to understand issues concerning their community despite their social status. Such reportage would assist citizens to understand things that may harm them

sometimes even in their rightness, for instance the story of revolting squatters lacks even the basic advice or stressing the importance of seeking legal assistance to ensure that they get humane alternative accommodation as well as staging peaceful marches.

Apart from the style of writing, another drawback for the two newspapers is the use of English as the main language of communication. As ARP project manager Darlene Louw suggested, the use of local languages could increase the understanding and popularity of these newspapers as well as encourage lay people to participate in the making of news through written opinions. Newspaper representatives deny this view, saying that they have to cater for a variety of nationalities including Congolese, Malawians, Mozambicans, Nigerians, and Zimbabweans, among others, who live in Alexandra. However, with regards to the coverage of ARP, which is not intended for foreign nationals, this report finds that the use of vernacular languages would benefit local people that cannot read or understand English.

5.5. The balance that *City Vision* and *Alex News* strike between commercial and community interests

From their coverage of ARP, the balance that *Alex News* and *City Vision* are striking between commercial and community interests reflects that they cover stories specifically for Alexandra, and that they produce content that could not have been carried, in that detail and frequency, by any other mainstream commercial newspaper in South Africa.

This study agrees with Howley (2005) who laments the difficulty of taking community media on a separate journey that is not influenced by commercialism. For the two commercial community newspapers in question, the dictates of economic sustainability demands that they operate in a commercial fashion. Faced with this situation, one has to be adaptive in order to delineate commercial community press without prejudice. In that regard, although the two commercial community newspapers are obviously covering a specific neighbourhood to secure advertisers that are interested that area, that does not stop them from serving the community in certain ways. In this case they are the only newspapers published in Alexandra. In addition, they even reported on residents complaints against ARP.

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These two commercial community newspapers may be viewed in line with part of Atton's (2002) definition of alternative media: 'that which advocate for views or deals with subjects not given regular coverage by mainstream publications'. In that case, *Alex News* and *City Vision*, despite their commercial orientation, could be regarded alternative media for the community of Alexandra because they tell stories that primarily concern Alexandra, and probably stories that could only attract attention in Alexandra.

A fuller version of Atton's description of alternative media proposes that alternative media should not be profit-orientated. This research differs with that proposal. Probably this is because the study's content analysis reflected that profit-orientated commercial community newspapers could still cover issues that will otherwise be excluded in the mainstream media regardless of their importance for the community of Alexandra. In Hadland and Thorne (2004) media scholar in South Africa, Guy Burger, argued that community control is important but should not be seen as a fundamental for community media. This argument comprehends that insisting the presence of community control might be prejudicial to the potential of commercial community newspapers to serve communities. According to *Alex News* editor, Sipho Sisho, in many cases, these two commercial community newspapers reported stories of corruption and irregularities within the ARP before the mainstream media.

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To emphasize the popularity and centrality of the two commercial community newspapers, it should be noted that without *Alex News* and *City Vision*, not all of the stories used in this study would have been told in the media since there is not a community owned newspaper in Alexandra.

As such, one is faced with some kind of localised mainstream media whose other role, apart from selling adverts, according to editorial personnel, is to be a watchdog for a specific community, in order to safeguard national democracy. In this essence, commercial community newspapers reflect the same philosophy employed or claimed by mainstream media in South Africa: being the watchdogs of the country's democracy. This research argues that it is in that philosophy where these two commercial community newspapers in question strike their balance between their commercial and community interests.

Thus, this research considers commercial community press as media that defines its audience according to neighbourhoods or interest groups; one that creates news specifically for those neighbourhoods or groups, usually excluded from mainstream media because they cannot influence the making of news due to different reasons, which may vary from being poor, to living in a disadvantaged township where not everything is important for mainstream newspapers, among other things.

As such, this report agrees with Myers (2000) who, as cited in the literature review chapter of this study, notes how some of the 77 community radio stations are running successfully in Mali despite their commercial, non-governmental and government support.

This study therefore advocates for the same proposal as Myers, that the key aspects to consider when rating community media initiatives should be whether they really advance the grassroots person by telling relevant and otherwise untold stories, rather than financial motives and ownership structures.

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5.6. Conclusion

Commercial community newspapers have a great potential of becoming South Africa's community media of choice because the two newspapers studied in this report indicated that they can provide citizens of Alexandra with a platform to publicly raise their complaints as well as informing them about the progress of their development project. The two commercial community newspapers play an important role as an independent and proactive communication bridge between the community and the project management, and a watchdog protecting community interests.

However, both newspapers display a lack of developmental drive that is needed to achieve comprehensive communitarian reporting. The newspapers follow a reporting approach that is typical of mainstream media that is meant for average and above average readers and fail to realise that covering Alexandra means writing for the less average reader who needs educational and developmental support to grapple with most issues.

However despite the lack of analysis and developmental reporting as well as limited community access, commercial community newspapers in Alexandra, with regards to ARP, are beneficial for the citizens as they provide information that the people of Alexandra would never get from the mainstream media.

5.7. Limitations to the study

The study, according to design, did not get opinions from ordinary citizens of Alexandra. A wider pool of opinions would have made the study stronger, especially in aspects such as language barriers and the community's relationship with the newspapers in terms of accessibility and identifying with the publications as Alexandrians. However, the information used cannot be taken for granted as it comes from representative organisations and individuals.

5.8. Suggestions

Further research is needed into how the MDDA can foster some kind of a media-monitoring entity that focuses on commercial community newspapers. Such an entity would enable the body to map out a working relationship that can see community members getting more involved in commercial community press as journalists, community editors or news agencies. For example, to strengthen community involvement, the MDDA could negotiate with publishers for a community page or even a column to be used by community representatives for editorials that they feel are important for the community.

The MDDA might also need to find out ways to lobby for the use of vernacular language to promote the accessibility of newspapers to people who cannot read or understand English. Both the language gap issue and the need for more community involvement as discussed above might need pushing for legislative and regulatory reforms in order to advance the cause of community media.

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Websites

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AMARC website: http://www.amarc.org

Caxton and CTP Group website: http://www.caxton.co.za

MDDA website: http://www.mdda.org.za

Media24 website: http://www.media24.com