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The 'special interest' and 'geographic' models of community radio: a study of the effectiveness of the two models in meeting the needs of the community

Murkens, Romie

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ABSTRACT

After a decade of operating on the fringe of society as an alternative media tool for political and social change, community radio in South Africa finally came into legality with the passing of the Independent Broadcasting Authority Act of 1993. It was founded on two models: the community of interest and the geographic community model.

This research report draws on two case studies, *Radio Islam* as an example of a special interest 'faith' model, and *Soshanguve Community Radio* as a secular/vernacular 'geographic' model, and seeks to establish: which model offers a more effective community radio station? Social criteria are included as well as principles of participation and good governance as required by the Independent Communications Authority of South Africa (ICASA) which absorbed the IBA legislation in 2000. In addition, this report takes into account those ideals developed in the last sixty years by community media practitioners and activists around the world.

This dissertation uses a combination of public sphere concepts of radio, as well as communication theories that includes participatory democracy, and radio as a tool for social development. It finds that the early arguments against giving the airwaves to community of interest stations, because they served middle-class interests of previously advantaged communities, hold no validity today, fifteen years into community radio broadcasting. Although this report recognizes, that inequitable socio-economic conditions favour the station that has a stronger economic base, each model should be measured in terms of how effectively the communication needs of a community are met and how democratic the structures of governance and participation are in practice.