

AN EXAMINATION OF THE MOBISAM PROJECT AND *GROCOTT'S MAIL*:
TOWARDS MOBILE SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY MONITORING IN
GRAHAMSTOWN

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Abstract

This thesis critically examines the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership, in relation to its value as a model resonating with normative theories on the role of the media in South African democratic society. The MobiSAM project introduces a mobile polling application, designed for citizens to provide real-time, user-generated data on crucial municipal service delivery such as clean water in Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, South Africa. The project has partnered with the local community newspaper, *Grocott's Mail*, to broadcast this data, with the aim to facilitate citizen participation in public problem solving and support local government accountability in service delivery.

Despite pervasive poverty in areas such as the Eastern Cape, mobile penetration in South Africa is near universal. The MobiSAM partnership is an ongoing effort to forge new links between social accountability monitors, new media, traditional media, citizens and local government around public issues in Grahamstown, in line with the development objectives of the post-apartheid South African state.

The overall theoretical framework for this thesis is taken from Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White's *Normative Theories of the Media*, which provides an analysis of four roles of the media in a democratic society, that is: the monitorial, the facilitative, the radical and the collaborative roles. Within each of these roles, the stated journalistic approach is explored, that is investigative journalism, public journalism, radical journalism and development journalism. Public journalism is focused on as having the most resonance with the goals of the MobiSAM partnership.

The chosen research design is a critical realist case study with the selected methods of thematic document analysis and, primarily, in-depth interviews with key project participants. The research goals were to analyse this primary data against the normative theory on the role of the media in a democratic society, and the 'real world' constraints posed by the project's specific political and socioeconomic context. The findings conclude by offering certain recommendations and areas for further research, such as the central importance of a dedicated municipal reporter for covering complex public issues.

This critical realist case study, drawing on qualitative interviews with both the accountability monitors and the media practitioners, interrogates the philosophical understandings on the role of the media in this new project, towards an empirical model for advancing substantive socio-economic change through media in South Africa.

Key words: journalism, community media, local government, new media, media for development, access to information, media and democracy, media studies.

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Abbreviations

AG	Auditor-General
ANC	African National Congress
CR	Critical Realism
CSA	Centre for Social Accountability
DA	Democratic Alliance
DRPEJ	David Rabkin Project for Experiential Journalism
EC	Eastern Cape
GM	<i>Grocott's Mail</i>
Idasa	Institute for Democracy in Africa
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
M4D	Mobile for Development
MM	Municipal Manager
PSAM	Public Social Accountability Monitor
RU	Rhodes University
RU JMS	Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies
SAM	Social Accountability Monitoring
SA	South Africa
SDBIP	Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan

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Introduction

This thesis critically examines the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership, in relation to its value as a model resonating with normative theories of the role of the media in South African democratic society. The MobiSAM project is a pilot study promoting citizen participation in local government processes around basic service delivery in Grahamstown, specifically water provision, through a mobile polling application. This study will examine the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership with local media, particularly *Grocott's Mail* newspaper, in order to interrogate the normative role of the media in this effort to forge links between social accountability monitors, citizens and local government around public issues in Grahamstown, in line with the development objectives of the post-apartheid South African state. The context for this study and the theoretical frameworks are presented in Chapter One and Chapter Two, and the research methodology and methods are outlined in Chapter Three. The research findings and conclusion are discussed in Chapter Four.

Grahamstown is situated in Makana Municipality in Eastern Cape, South Africa, named in the top five of worst-run municipalities in South Africa in recent years, with massive mis-expenditure and poor leadership (Mini 2011a: 1, Mini 2011b: 1, Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1). The challenges faced by the municipality are great, with high unemployment, very low levels of education and despite high levels of social grants, almost 25% of households live below the poverty line (Makana Municipality 2011: 1). The socioeconomic legacy left by apartheid is markedly clear from the enduring spatial segregation post-1994 between the mainly white, affluent suburbs in the west of Grahamstown, and the former African townships and informal settlements in the east that remain largely in poverty and await basic service delivery rollout from the municipality.

The MobiSAM project principally seeks to promote active citizen participation from ordinary Grahamstown citizens who depend on public services provided by Makana Municipality, through the use of a mobile polling application. Despite the poor development indicators in Grahamstown and South Africa, this country has amongst the highest rate of mobile phone penetration in the developing world, near to 100% (International Telecommunication Union 2011: 1). Through the use of a mobile phone platform, it is envisaged that citizens can generate real-time data on the rate and quality of service delivery that strongly impacts on

their daily quality of life. This data can be pooled geographically, and visualised in the local community media, whilst concurrently informing the public of the cycles of local governance and encouraging active participation therein.

The MobiSAM project uses the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology, developed by South Africa's Centre for Social Accountability (CSA) in Grahamstown, which rigorously tracks the phases of the municipal fiscal cycle: the planning and allocation of resources, expenditure and implementation, and finally accountability to oversight. With a successful track record in South Africa and other SADC and East African countries, this approach provides "civic actors a rights-based and evidence-based framework for understanding and participating in government service delivery processes" (Policy Forum 2010, Thinyane and Coulson 2011: 4). It has often drawn in the local community media to ensure the success of its accountability monitoring activities, but this resource has been used in addition to its own processes.

However, this project, with enabling financial resources from the Ford Foundation and a deeply thought through theory of change, has drawn in the media not as an afterthought collaborator but a primary partner, key to the overall success of the project from the outset. In its turn, the local media practitioners, *Grocott's Mail*, have signed on to this pilot project, as they see its objectives aligning with their own imperatives and responsibilities as community journalists.

This thesis is concerned with examining the MobiSAM partnership in relation to current theoretical work on the role of the media. The overall theoretical framework in **Chapter Two** is taken from Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White's book on *Normative Theories of the Media*, which provides an analysis of four roles of the media in a democratic society, that is the monitorial, the facilitative, the radical and the collaborative roles (Christians et al 2009). Within each of these roles, the stated journalistic approach is further explored, that is investigative journalism (Protest et al 1991, Ettema and Glasser 1998, Curran and Gurevitch 1991), public journalism (Katz 1995, Rosen 2006, Haas 2007, Merritt 2010), alternative journalism (Atton and Hamilton 2010) and development journalism (Shah 1996, Musa and Domatob 2007, Shah 2007). Public journalism is focused on as having the most resonance with the goals of the MobiSAM partnership.

However, it is essential to situate this theoretical literature review within the critical realist framework chosen in the methodology. As such, these normative theories need to be balanced against the political economy and sociological critiques within media studies (Murdock 1989, Murdock 1990, Golding and Murdock 1991, Garnham 1995, Curran 2005; and Gans 1980; Keeble 1998, Schudson 2000, McChesney 2004, McCombs 2004, McNair 2001), as well as a strong contextual grounding of the theory within the time and place this project is located. **Chapter One** deals with the political and socioeconomic context in which the MobiSAM project is both embedded and has been created in response to, including debates around the significance of new media in African democracies. **Chapter Two** includes an outline of the changing media environment in South Africa at the national and local community level, as well as a detailed background and institutional history of *Grocott's Mail*.

Goals of the research.

The focus of this study was on the negotiation and forging of the agreement between the MobiSAM project and the local media, that is *Grocott's Mail*. This partnership expresses some powerful ideas and understandings on the role of journalism in South African democratic society.

As discussed in **Chapter Three**, the chosen research design was a critical realist case study that explores the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership and the role of the media within the project, through the selected methods of thematic document analysis and, primarily, in-depth interviews with key project participants (Wimmer and Dominick 1983, Bryman 1984, Bhaskar 1989, Deacon et al 1996, Danermark et al 2002; and Babbie and Mouton 2003, Kelly 2006b, Hartwig 2007, Simons 2009). The aim of this study was to examine, and make explicit through the interviewing process, the underlying normative understandings of the role of the media held by both the accountability monitors and the journalists in forging the links involved in the MobiSAM partnership.

In line with a critical realist framework, this primary data was analysed against the normative theory of the role of the media in a democratic society outlined in Chapter Two, and the constraints posed by the political and socioeconomic context discussed in Chapter One. The research findings are presented in **Chapter Four**, and are arranged thematically. Firstly, in

Section 1, how do the accountability monitoring experts perceive the role of the media in public service accountability? Why do they see the partnership of the local media as key to the success of their project? Secondly, why have the media practitioners signed on to the project, agreeing that its objectives fit within their own imperatives as community reporters in Grahamstown?

Following this, these normative understandings were examined through a critical realist lens, in relation to the everyday context and underlying ‘structures’ of the reality in which the project finds itself. Broadly, these are the possible disconnects between the news processes and political economy of the community media practitioners in providing the kind of reporting envisaged in the MobiSAM partnership, and the structures and processes of local government in the South African context which the project seeks to directly engage with. These findings conclude by offering certain recommendations and areas for further research.

Chapter 1

Social accountability and MobiSAM in the South African context

Introduction

This chapter provides the broad context of this study. The issues discussed in this section were selected for both their importance as necessary historical background to the context in which the MobiSAM partnership is situated, and their significance as recurring themes which appeared in the later data collection process, specifically the interviews. This broad context includes the MobiSAM project's historical and geographical location in the South African, Eastern Cape and Grahamstown context, a description of the shape and size of the MobiSAM project, and its situation within contemporary debates around new media for democratisation in Africa and South Africa.

1. The South African context in brief

South Africa, after a long history of political and economic inequalities and racial oppression, was a country left with a huge development deficit post-apartheid (Chopra et al 2009: 1023). With South Africa's new democratic dispensation, the state's new constitutionalism and commitment to human rights were entrenched in its Bill of Rights (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996).

South Africa's constitution is widely regarded as one of the most progressive in the world, guaranteeing not only civil liberties but also socioeconomic rights (Heller 2009: 129). Section 27 states that the government must ensure that every citizen has access to health care, sufficient food and water, and social security: thus the ideals of human dignity are constitutionally entrenched in the "progressive realisation" of this right through the government's responsibility to provide housing, sanitation and basic services for all with its available resources (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).

1.1 Decentralised local government and service delivery

South Africa, like other post-colonial African countries, has popular elections at both the national and local levels, and a distinct structure of local government (Hartman 2008: 182, Ruiters 2011: 6). The establishment and status of municipalities post-1994 is described in Chapter 7 of the Constitution (1996), as is the constitutional mandate of local government:

- a) to provide democratic and accountable government for local communities;
- b) to ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- c) to promote social and economic development;
- d) to promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- e) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in the matters of local government.

Thus, within South Africa's Constitution (1996), the developmental duties of a municipality are expressly laid out, as is its responsibility to "structure and manage its administration and budgeting and planning processes to give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community".

1.2 Local government service delivery challenges and breakdowns: protest or participation?

It is in local arenas that citizens are made and that the surface area of democratic government needs to be expanded. (Heller 2009: 133)

South Africa's constitution and its rights-based framework are applicable to all, but are of particular importance to advancing the socio-economic needs of the country's poorest and most marginalised citizens. However, reality falls far from these ideals. By standard economic measures, South Africa ranks amongst the most unequal societies in the world. While this is due in part to its historical legacy of extreme racial inequality, the Gini coefficient of today's South Africa continues to regress (Stiglitz 2012: 23, Westaway 2008: 118). After only a few years into the new dispensation, the Freedom of Expression Institute published "tensions over the delivery of social services is one of the primary fault lines of South Africa today" (Hadland and Thorne 2004: 2).

It is obvious that the needs of South Africa's growing population far outpace the rate of delivery, but prominent commentators have largely attributed this to the lack of accountability at the local government level, particularly through the means of public participation (Heller 2009: 126). Public participation is deeply enshrined in the South African

constitutional order, from the highest level of parliamentary procedures to the very architecture of the Constitutional Court (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa 2011: 43, Law-Viljoen 2006: 28). In spite of this, the level of protest in South Africa, including specific action around municipal issues, is conspicuously high, with recent studies claiming that “South Africa really is the protest capital of the world” (Alexander 2012: 1).

Heller argues that even as the formal institutions of South Africa’s constitutional democracy become increasingly consolidated, the ‘effective citizenship’ needed for truly deliberative, participatory democracy on the part of individuals and civil society is becoming increasingly displaced (Heller 2009: 125). In as far as a substantive democracy is built on relationships and ‘associational capabilities’, a democratic *system* and a democratic *society* are not one and the same (Heller 2009: 126). The ‘horizontal’ aspect of this forms the basis of interactions within communities, such as voluntary involvement and deliberation towards a common good (Heller 2009: 130). The ‘vertical’ association aspect focuses on how citizens deal with the State. Heller argues that subordinate groups have limited opportunity for effectively engaging with the South African state, particularly in the case of local government (Heller 2009: 123).

1.3 The ‘education crisis’ in South Africa: limiting possibilities for effective citizen participation in local government processes

The highly unequal history and current complexity of public education in South Africa is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, its end results and the current ‘education crisis’ are salient to the democratic goals and aspiration of both the MobiSAM project and the South African state, as both rely on effective public citizen education. Only about 7% of school-going children in the country can benefit from private schooling (Blaine 2012a: 1, Gules 2012: 1).

Conclusive studies have outlined the “inefficiency” of the South African public schooling system in real terms, that is the input in terms of national expenditure on education provision to the disturbingly low learning outcomes (Meny-Gibert 2012: 1). Around 75% of the country’s schools can be judged “dysfunctional” when assessed against clear and uncontroversial standards (Dyosop 2012: 1). Equal Education, an NGO advocating for the Basic Education Department to set minimum norms and standards on school infrastructure, recently presented a paper stating that 93% of South Africa’s public schools have no libraries,

over 10% have no water supply, 46% still use pit latrines and 913 have no sanitation whatsoever (John 2012b: 1). In South Africa today, 8.7% adults have had no education at all, and functional illiteracy rates remain alarmingly high at 19.1% of South Africans aged 15 years and older (Africa 2012: 1, John 2012a: 1).

This is crucial both for ‘horizontal’ engagement between citizens, and also ‘vertical’ association with the State. The historical legacy of discrimination under apartheid, and the enduring crisis in public education, creates “deep-seated inequalities not only of income and property, but cultural and social capital as well” (Dagnino 1998 in Heller 2009: 131), which disempower citizens to relate with each other and to engage with the state:

Taken together, the vertical problem of state-society relations and the horizontal problem of perverse social inequalities undermine the professional autonomy of citizens, the *sine qua non* of any effective democracy. (Heller 2009: 126)

1.4 Local government service delivery and the absence of effective citizen participation

In a country such as South Africa where social inequalities are deeply entrenched, it has become clear that “subaltern citizens find it difficult to engage effectively with the state, especially on the level of local government” (Heller 2009: 132, Wasserman 2011: 153). Some argue this is evidence of a breakdown between the state and its stakeholders, particularly as the increasingly technocratic and authoritarian character of the South African state undermines the ideals of civic participation and “effective citizenship” (Heller 2009: 125, Robins et al 2008: 1069).

This is particularly true in the realm of critical service delivery to those who need it most, as “formal politics are not universally experienced as making a difference to the daily lived experience of poverty and marginalisation experienced by many Africans” (Wasserman 2011: 153). There has long been a documented feeling by individuals in informal settlements in the Eastern Cape, including Grahamstown, that the “distant and insulated” ANC government has abandoned or forgotten their neighbourhoods, and they live in “internal exile” within the borders of local municipal areas that they do not benefit from (Coetzee 2003: 232, Heller 2009: 137). They are not alone in this sentiment, as many enduringly impoverished constituencies after democracy feel the same due to the lack of real socioeconomic change in

their residential areas and daily lives. Despite the hardships they faced in sharing the struggle for freedom, these people “feel like South Africa has forgotten about them” (Dibetle 2012: 21).

In stark contrast to these lived experiences of poverty and marginalisation within local municipalities, South Africa’s municipal wage bill is amongst the most expensive in the world: overall nearly 12% of national GDP is spent on paying civil servants (Van der Merwe 2012: 1). The growth of salary increases of government employees has outstripped all other categories of state spending in the last four years, and this while protest around poor service delivery rises. Currently, despite the “dismal failure to manage their finances” on the part of South Africa’s municipalities in 2012, their public office bearers were up for a 5.5% salary increase (Donnelly 2012: 1). This means the executive mayor now takes home R1 045 626 every year, and a member of the executive council R798 069, and this excludes the additional perks of subsistence and travel allowance that are kept hidden from the public and are legally disqualified from being taken into account when considering public office bearers’ salaries (Donnelly 2012: 1).

The absence of basic performance monitoring, from the highest to the lowest levels of government office, is an issue that continues to be avoided by political bodies such as the Independent Commission for the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers (Act 92 of 1997).

With

the frustrations of incompetent local municipalities, and a national government that’s over-promising and under-delivering in spectacular fashion, you don’t need a political scientist to tell you South Africa’s become a pressure cooker on a very hot stove. (De Waal 2012: 1)

This section has outlined the broader contextual problems in South Africa that have motivated this research. What is the responsibility and role of the media, in terms of creating space for deliberation, facilitating public problem solving and holding local government accountable for critical service delivery in a democracy? These complex debates remain far from resolution.

2. Grahamstown and Makana municipality

2.1 A brief vignette of the Eastern Cape

Historically, the Eastern Cape (EC) formed part of the British Empire's first colony in South Africa, and is still known as *Koloni* in isiXhosa (Ruiters 2011: 8). The creation of the Eastern Cape Province occurred in 1994 from the much larger Cape Province, and its eastern half contains two former Bantustans, Transkei and Ciskei (Westaway 2012: 116). Due to its long history of colonial land dispossession, the migrant labour system, forced relocations and Bantustan rule, many researchers argue "the newly born EC inherited the poorest population, the most burdens, and the worst structural problems of the country" (Ruiters 2011: 29).

Today, the Eastern Cape is South Africa's third most populous province, with around 6.5 million inhabitants, and the second largest province by size at around 170 000 km² (Africa 2012: 1, Ruiters 2011: 8). The main mother tongue language is isiXhosa, the second most-spoken language in South Africa (City Press 2012a: 1).

The Eastern Cape has the highest formal unemployment rate in the country, at around 57%, but other estimates reach as high as 84% in certain towns and areas (Blaine 2012a: 1, Westaway 2012: 117). Research conducted in the EC showed that only about one quarter of Grade One pupils make it to matric, while the province's matric pass rate can be up to 10% lower than the already poor national average (Hendricks 2011: 255). It is behind only Limpopo province for the lowest average household income per province, and around two thirds of its citizens rely solely on pension grants and subsistence agriculture (City Press 2012b: 1, Ruiters 2011: 12). Due to high poverty levels, the province has the highest percentage of social welfare grant beneficiaries (Westaway 2012: 116, Ruiters 2011: 32).

In the former Ciskei and Transkei, two thirds of rural households do not have access to RDP-standard water provision: nearly half use dam, river or spring water, another 15% walk more than 200m to communal standpipes (Westaway 2012: 18). 25% of houses are not electrified, the lowest percentage in the country (Africa 2012: 1). With the highest infant mortality and the highest percentage of AIDS deaths, people in the Eastern Cape "die sooner, have poorer access to health services and have fewer resources for maintaining health when sick" (Kelly 2011: 202).

Census figures and recent research show that Eastern Cape citizens are “voting with their feet” and migrating to the more prosperous and better managed provinces of Gauteng and the Western Cape, with population inflows close to zero (Blaine 2012b: 1, Gules 2012: 1). This decrease in population may well mean a concomitant decrease in proportion of the national budget allocated to this impoverished province (Berkowitz 2012: 1). This would signal an even greater call for the “efficient, effective and economical” management of publicly allocated funds (Public Finance Management, Act 29 of 1999).

2.2 Grahamstown and Makana Municipality

Grahamstown is a small city situated in the Eastern Cape, with a population of approximately 70 000 people and a total size less than 30km² (Makana 2011: 1). Situated in a valley surrounded by hills, the greater part of town lies in and around the city bowl (Brandt 2006: 56). This area, known as Grahamstown West, was the historically ‘white’ residential area, while the rest of Grahamstown/*iRhini*, extending east over the hills, was the historically ‘black’ township area. A short hike onto the hills to the south provides a birds-eye view of Grahamstown, where the “Manichean” feature of the town is starkly apparent to the naked eye (Fanon 1963: 31). On the western side, leafy suburbs with wide, tarred streets and multi-storey buildings mark the long-established colonial institutions of learning, worship and commercial enterprise. On the eastern side, lies a largely colourless expanse consisting mainly of poorly built government housing schemes, state schools and informal settlements chequered by untarred roads. The historical apartheid spatial segregation still mars the geopolitical landscape of the town today, and is an important reality to understand for any study focused on this locale.

Grahamstown is the seat of Makana Municipality in the Cacadu Municipal District of the Eastern Cape, South Africa, and is arguably a strong pilot location for a project of MobiSAM’s nature and the focus of this study (Mati 2005: 6). The challenges faced by the municipality are great, with high unemployment (67.9%), very low levels of education and despite high levels of social grants, almost 25% of the area’s 16 975 households live below the poverty line (Makana Municipality 2011: 1). Makana has been named in the top five of worst run municipalities in South Africa in recent years by Auditor-General (AG) reports, due to misspending and poor leadership (Mini 2011a: 1, Mini 2011b: 1, Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1).

As described above, the socio-economic legacy left by apartheid is markedly clear from the enduring spatial segregation post-1994 between the mainly white, affluent suburbs in the west of Grahamstown and the former African townships and informal settlements that remain largely in poverty and await basic service delivery rollout from the municipality (see Holleman and Paterson 2002, Lemon 2004). The challenge of breaking this enduring ‘evil troika’ of poverty, inequality and unemployment faced by the country as a whole is frustrated by the lack of infrastructure development at the local level providing the poorest citizens with the basic services they need to survive (Hoffman 2012: 1). Most recently, the AG also found that there is a 22% discrepancy in indicators reported in the Integrated Development Plans (IDP) and the Annual Performance Report (APR), meaning a failure to meet the targets the municipality had set (Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1).

As discussed in *Section 1.2*, these breakdowns can be attributed to the lack of accountability through public participation within the municipality. When Makana Municipality’s conduct and practices are measured against legislation such as the Municipal Finance Management Act (No. 56 of 2003), the lack of internal expenditure control and records is so severe that even the Auditor-General cannot report on the full extent of the mismanagement of the municipality’s finances (Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1). In 2012, the AG could ascertain the municipality was over R20 million in debt. Irregular, unauthorised and wasteful expenditure collectively tallied to over R60 million. Pending lawsuits brought against the municipality had possible liability of an estimated R50 million, and in 2012 both the Municipal Manager and Chief Financial Officer were removed from their posts and legally charged with misconduct (Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1). Clearly, it can be argued that intervention from the citizens directly concerned by these breakdowns is needed for systemic change to take place.

3. MobiSAM: Mobile Social Accountability Monitoring

The MobiSAM project, based in Grahamstown, is conducting a pilot study in response to these challenges. The MobiSAM project principally seeks to promote active participation from ordinary Grahamstown citizens who depend on public services provided by Makana Municipality, through the use of a mobile polling application. It is envisaged that citizens can generate real-time data on the rate and quality of service delivery that strongly impacts on their daily quality of life (Thinyane and Coulson 2012: 5). This data can be pooled geographically, and visualised in the local community media, whilst concurrently informing

the public of the cycle of local governance and encouraging active participation (Thinyane and Coulson 2011: 6).

By holistically investigating the viability of using mobile phones as a tool for social accountability monitoring, the project's intended outcomes are "improved service delivery and accountability in the Makana Municipality through increased citizen engagement in local government processes; and to test the effectiveness of MobiSAM as a mechanism for citizen engagement with local government" (Mobility Research Group 2011: 1).

In terms of South African government structure, the provincial government's most important responsibilities for the previously disadvantaged are education and health, whereas municipal priorities often centre on water and sanitation (Westaway 2012: 117). The state definition of basic access to water is a communal tap within 200m of a dwelling (Kelly 2011: 223). Stats SA (2006) data showed that the EC was the worst-off compared to the national average, with 34.6% of people having no access to piped water in their dwelling or on site (Kelly 2011: 202). Due to this pressing need, as well as the strong implication for direct democratic involvement being most feasible at the local rather than the provincial or national level, access to water is the primary focus of the MobiSAM pilot project in its first phase.

3.1 The Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology

The MobiSAM project uses the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology, developed by South Africa's Centre for Social Accountability (CSA), which rigorously tracks the different phases of the municipal fiscal cycle: the planning and allocation of resources, expenditure and implementation, and finally accountability to oversight (CSA 2011). With a successful track record in South Africa and other SADC and East African countries, this approach provides "civic actors a rights-based and evidence-based framework for understanding and participating in government service delivery processes" (Policy Forum 2010, Thinyane and Coulson 2011: 4).

The SAM methodology project efforts have often drawn in the local community media to ensure the success of its accountability monitoring activities, but this resource has been used in addition to its own processes (see Policy Forum 2009, 2010). However, this project, with enabling financial resources from the Ford Foundation and a more deeply thought-through

plan of action for systemic change, has drawn in the media not as an afterthought collaborator but a primary partner, key to the overall success of the project from the outset. In its turn, the local media practitioners have signed on to this project, as they see its objectives as aligning with their own imperatives as community journalists. This will be dealt with in much greater detail in following chapters.

3.2 How the MobiSAM application works

The Rhodes University Computer Science director of the MobiSAM project team has already fully developed the MobiSAM application and has ownership of it under a private company, Hanamelo Solutions (MobiSAM EULA 2012: 1). The application is very flexible, and has no limit to how many users it can support. Participants in a MobiSAM polls receive immediate results of other people in their areas responses on the same issue they have just voted on, and the menu-driven format allows the use of SMS on the application as well as Internet-enabled mobile phones.



Figure 1: The MobiSAM polling application with SMS interface

The MobiSAM project director's experience in mobile for development (M4D) in deep rural areas in the Eastern Cape has found that almost every household had access to a mobile phone, and that mobile literacy is surprisingly high given primary education levels, which provided the impetus for the MobiSAM project in Grahamstown. The issue of airtime and

data bundle usage, as experienced through the existing online and mobile platforms offerings of *Grocott's Mail*, were of concern for participation and inclusivity (see more detail in *Section 4.2 The political economy of mobile phone usage in South Africa*). The MobiSAM project design has focused on issues of access, together with a number of stakeholders, and worked to minimise this constraint on two fronts.

Firstly, the MobiSAM application can be used very broadly. Part of the project is a study identifying the most common mobile devices used in the polling area, to ensure maximum accessibility. A Masters student in the RU Computer Science Department completed a study of how people currently participate with their mobile phones in the geographical areas of the selected service delivery projects in Grahamstown, and has identified the ten most popular mobile platforms in order to make sure the application is as inclusive as possible for a variety of mobile phones, including the Symbian S40, RIM and Android client (Thinyane and Coulson 2011: 8). It isn't just user-friendly for individuals with Internet-enabled smartphones, but is available in a menu-driven SMS format for the simplest mobile phones. The registration process allows the user to participate in their preferred language: isiXhosa, Afrikaans or English.

The second issue of access is the cost of data and SMS on individual's mobile phones. At the time of writing, MobiSAM had successfully negotiated a zero-rating on data traffic from MTN, and were optimistic about a similar commitment from Cell C and Vodacom, South Africa's top three mobile service providers. They have also budgeted money for communications, with 99-cent SIM cards for people to participate on polls through SMS for free (PD interview 05/06/2012).

3.3 The MobiSAM project time frames and phases

The MobiSAM project entails five distinct phases over three years: a preparation phase, the introduction of MobiSAM into the community, the use of MobiSAM to monitor four selected local service delivery schemes, the facilitation of evidence-based citizen participation in enforcing accountability in delivery, and finally an analysis of MobiSAM's final impact (Thinyane and Coulson 2011: 8). This thesis will be conducted over the initial phase of the project: the preparation phase.

This preparation phase includes the baseline study on the last five years of Makana's service delivery record, situated within a broad comparative study with other South African municipalities to identify common challenges conducted by the SAM expert. This allows a contextual understanding of the common issues that all municipalities are struggling with, in an effort to bring to the project a broader understanding of the structural challenges and constraints of local government that will make future analysis and interaction as informed as possible.

For instance, not one of the Eastern Cape's 45 municipalities received a favourable report from the Auditor-General, and only 5% of all of South Africa's municipalities (13 out of 283) received a clean audit in 2012 (Mngxitama-Diko 2012a: 1, Sosibo 2012: 1). Across the board, three of South Africa's nine provinces, including the EC, are under national administration (Donnelly 2012: 1). As "the poorest, least-resourced and most administratively weak of all the provinces", the 45 EC municipalities face a scale of challenges (such as decade-long backlogs and skills shortages of administrators for spending, financial accounting and service delivery) that are arguably beyond the capacity of being addressed from within a single municipality (Ruiters 2011: 8, 219, 227).

The June to July period sees the budget plan approval phase by the municipal council, where the SAM mentor will analyse the proposals that have been budgeted for in this financial year, looking at the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP). This phase includes the training and mentoring of *Grocott's Mail* staff in becoming acquainted with all the documents and processes necessary for understanding municipal monitoring.

Following this will be the recruitment and training of the MobiSAM community coordinator and the ambassadors for each of the four geographical areas, which work directly with introducing the project and the mobile application to the affected community members. The position of the appointed coordinator is seen as key by the project directors. Currently on a part-time, six-month contract, the directors are optimistic about their choice of coordinator and hope to form a solid partnership that will last for the duration of the three-year pilot study. The coordinator will identify four ambassadors, and work to train and equip them together with the SAM mentor in order to start monitoring next year. The coordinator will

support the four ambassadors, who will encourage people to use the application face-to-face within the selected Grahamstown communities. There is no technical knowledge required of an ambassador, but rather someone proficient with the use of mobile phones that has close links within the community. The example the project directors like to use is the local hairdresser, who can address clientele while they are seated for a short period of time and she has their attention, telling them about the MobiSAM project and how they can register for it right there in their chair.

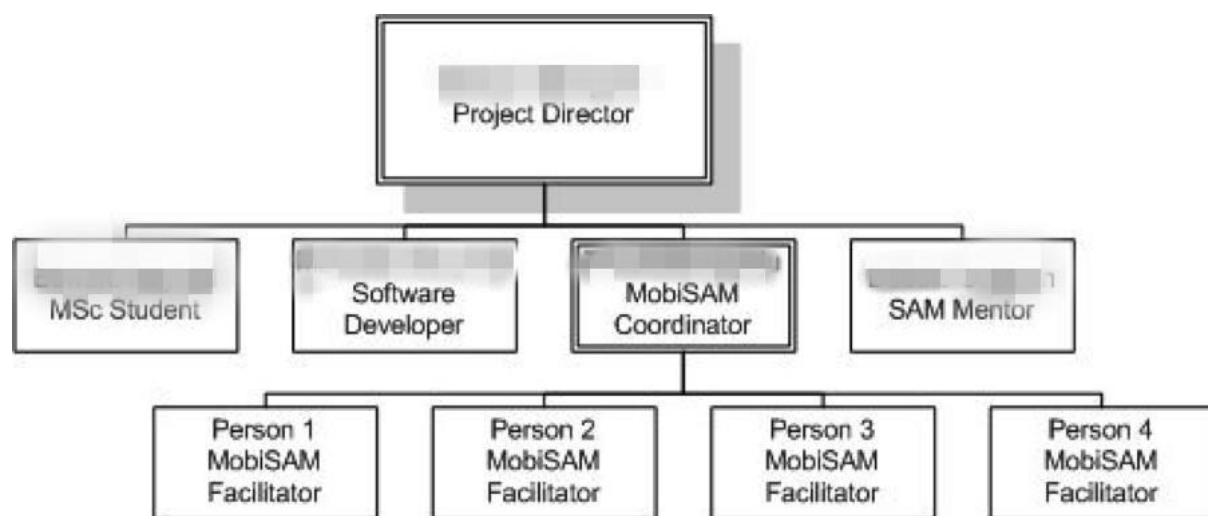


Figure 2: Organogram of the MobiSAM project team (blurring of names added for confidentiality)

The MobiSAM project team intends to present their project to Makana Municipality before its initial start, to fully inform them of the project aims and what projects they will be monitoring, along with Rhodes University and *Grocott's Mail*, and invite their input and collaboration. The MobiSAM project team also draws knowledge from a reference group, a body of advisors from the Rhodes School of Journalism and Media Studies, the Public Social Accountability Monitor (PSAM), the Centre for Social Accountability (CSA) and those with knowledge of municipal processes from the inside.

In conclusion, the MobiSAM project is a pilot of a mobile phone application, asking the research question: can a mobile phone application increase citizen participation in local government processes? They want to improve citizen participation, and they want to improve service delivery through government, because they believe the two are linked. Although there are many factors beyond the project's control, they want to try this intervention where

technology meeting activism, where citizens and Makana can communicate with one another through the MobiSAM channel around service delivery.

4. New media and democracy: the participatory power of the mobile phone in Africa

From the turn of the century, more attention has been paid to the ways in which ICTs are being used by private citizens to engage with the public sector (see Heeks 2000, Layne and Lee 2001). In particular, questions around whether ‘e-government’ can make public governance more accountable have gained increasing prominence (Drüke 2007: 59). The exponential rise in the Internet led to much discussion and perhaps even “utopian visions” about the possible impact of new information technologies on democracy and democratisation on the African continent (Wasserman 2011: 148, see Norris 2001, Papacharissi 2002). This optimism around ICTs was critiqued for both its technological determinism and out-dated ‘modernisation’ development paradigm, and the reality of the widening ‘digital divide’ and continuing inequalities of access in the African context (see Adeya and Cogburn 2001, Oyedemi and Lesame 2005). Today however, global events centred around the mobile phone and its impact on the ease of citizens’ internet access has renewed optimism that new media will continue to “facilitate citizen participation and create social change” in Africa (Wasserman 2011: 146, Ndlela 2009: 217, see also Sen 2010).

Mobile technology and the mobile phone are central to the possibilities between new media and democracy on the African continent in recent years. From 2008, it was established that 3.3 billion people around the world use cellular phones, more than those who watch television (Berger 2009a: 12). The African mobile phone story is particularly dramatic. 20 years ago, there was hardly any mobile telephone network on the continent (with the exceptions of South Africa and Mauritius). Norway had more telephone users than all of sub-Saharan Africa, and the Internet remained a distant thought. But in the mid-1990s, “the mobile phone arrived in Africa, and, in just five years, fast overtook fixed lines in terms of penetration” (Otieno 2009:15). The potential unleashed by this changing ICT landscape in Africa seemed boundless:

Many studies of the development problems in Africa ... and policy documents from organisations such as UNESCO, UNDP and WTO ... all pointed to the potential of ICTs in leapfrogging development in Africa, facilitating economic growth, enhancing lives and empowering citizens. (Ndlela 2009: 217)

It can be reasoned that “the excitement generated by mobile phones seems more justified” as this ICT platform has proven significantly more accessible than its predecessors, such as personal computers and fixed-line telephones (Wasserman 2011: 148). Africans have more mobile phones than landlines, particularly in the many countries on the continent where fixed line infrastructure has shown almost zero growth. These mobile handsets permit the previously unbanked poor to make electronic funds transfers and receive remittances, let farmers and traders to check international and local market prices for their goods, and allow citizens to monitor elections and receive emergency messages on electoral violence (Smith 2009: 2, Wasserman 2011: 148, 154).

To situate the MobiSAM project within these debates and developments, it is important to note that ICTs are becoming increasingly influential in shifting the paradigms of political communication in Southern Africa and elsewhere, by providing new platforms, new possibilities and new spaces “for different forms of political discourses and networking” (Ndlela 2009: 217).

4.1 Mobile phones and citizen participation in the South African context

The potential for ‘e-governance,’ and the use of ICTs by private citizens to engage in governance processes for public services in Africa is becoming increasingly well documented (see Misuraca 2007). Cities such as Cape Town and Johannesburg feature among global comparative studies on the use of ICT deployment in local governance strategies (Van den Berg et al 2006: 56, 83). Specifically, the use of mobile technologies in social impact projects is growing in South Africa. Academic studies that have been conducted on the use of mobile-only Internet use for the urban poor in South Africa, include an SMS emergency system to report xenophobic violence, youth education on HIV/AIDS through the unused space on Please Call Me’s, and a free mobile application aiming to increase female mathematical literacy (Donner et al 2011: 574, Verclas 2008: 1, Ramey 2007: 1, Heatwole 2010: 1).

A statistic often referred to is that the number of African people with access to mobile phones is higher than those with access to clean drinking water (Hutton 2011: 1). South Africa today ranks fifth in the world for mobile data usage, and more citizens use mobile phones than personal computers, television and even radio. SMS text messaging is used by 4.2 times more South Africans than e-mail (Hutton 2011: 1). However, this optimism remains tempered by the contextual critique.

Many African academics warn that it remains crucial to note that despite increased access to mobile phones on the continent, “the reality of widespread poverty, language barriers and cost issues” is a central constraint (Otieno 2009: 21, Mathurine 2011, see also Murdock 1997: 190-191). According to recent census figures, only 35.2% of South African citizens have access to the Internet, whether at home, at school or at work (Africa 2012: 1). It is erroneous to assume that each individual who carries a mobile handset is able to enjoy its full capabilities, due either to cases of functional illiteracy or price constraints.

4.2 The political economy of mobile phone usage in South Africa

These critiques are important to note for the purposes of the MobiSAM project. Firstly, the persistent Digital Divide between the global North and the global South remains a stark reality that cannot be glossed over by cyber optimists. There is more ICT concentration, from telephone line infrastructure upwards, in Western capitals such as Tokyo and Manhattan than across the entire sub-Saharan African landscape (Castells 1998: 94 in Wasserman 2011: 148). In the global North, the standard has rapidly become mobile phones with third-generation (3G) capabilities such as broadband Internet connectivity, multimedia messaging and location awareness, whereas broadly the African market operates on less sophisticated models of phone (Mabweazara 2011b: 4).

Secondly, and more critically, many broad assumptions are made about the ‘democratising’ impact of the mobile phone. The mobile phone revolution cannot be described as ‘truly democratic’ in an unqualified manner. Wasserman (2011: 150) provides a strong argument that “discourses around mobile phones make an interpretive leap from *access figures* to speculation about the *impact* of mobile phones on democracy and development”, without examining context. Mobile phones are not “socially neutral”, and can work to reinforce existing power relations. This is true in the case in many African contexts for two reasons: the price of handsets exclude many possible users, and operating costs prevent the optimum usage of mobile technologies other than “passive” modes of use which involve receiving rather than transmitting information (Etzo and Collender 2010: 666 in Wasserman 2011: 149, Hutton 2011: 1). Despite high penetration in South Africa, the costs of calls and other mobile products remains ‘prohibitively high’. A study providing a political economy critique found that South African informal settlement inhabitants spent more than a quarter of their limited

income buying airtime for their pay-as-you-go mobile phones, even trading off against expenditure of food (Duncan 2009 in Wasserman 2011: 149).

Instead of a determinist model of media transmission translating into direct effects, it is essential to note “the ways in which these technologies are actively contextualised and domesticated by African users” (Wasserman 2011: 150). Domestication is one of the key research themes in mobile communications: the interrogation of what ICTs symbolise to people in relation to their identities. Mabweazara also advocates a critical sociological approach towards the use and impact of new media technologies in Africa, as “embedded in existing social, cultural, political and economic networks” (2011b: 1). Mobile phones seem automatically understood as necessarily “freedom-enhancing” and increasing flexibility and mobility (Sen 2010: 2). However, they may be used less to participate in processes of globalisation, modernisation or political engagement and more to “affirm local family and friendship links” (Wasserman 2011: 155).

The use of mobile phones to enhance or further the aspirations of their user’s social lives (rather than to political or economic ends) is an important focus of media studies (Green and Haddon, 2009: 8), and has been researched in the Grahamstown context. Schoon’s (2011) recent study of the use of mobile phones by young adults in the Hooggenoeg township of Grahamstown asserted the heterogeneous roles of this technology as it is appropriated and incorporated in different cultural contexts. Her inductive study found that mobile handsets were central to reinforcing identity and belonging in terms of race, class and gender. The use of these mobile platforms thus worked to reinforce a community’s social relations (and social hierarchical order), rather than exercising the broader developmental economic or political functions emphasised by cyber optimists. In fact, the pervasive nature of mobile social networking sites can facilitate the strict policing of boundaries, reinforcing existing class, racial and gendered identities and “punishing those that dare to transgress them” (Wasserman 2011: 156). Schoon’s Grahamstown study is a specific illustration of how “social and material circumstances in Africa mitigate against the ‘mobility’ ... promised by mobile phones” (Wasserman 2011: 151).

However, there does exist many concrete instances of political and democratic empowerment through these same ICTs. An important and oft-cited example is the use of mobile phones to monitor electoral political processes, such as the Ushahidi platform, in African countries such

as Kenya, Ghana, Egypt, Sudan, Tanzania and Ethiopia (Smith 2009: 1, Sarrazin 2011: 24). However, the democratic mobilisation of individuals and publics via mobile phone platforms has seen success in “amplifying a brief political campaign or event but less successful in ensuring ‘ongoing and higher levels of accountability’” (Walton and Donner 2009 in Wasserman 2011: 152). In order for a movement towards substantive deepening democracy in Africa, “the surveillance of government also has to happen in between the ‘ritual of elections’ ... through ongoing social movement and civil society campaigns” (Willems 2010b in Wasserman 2011: 152). This gap is an important niche to assert for the MobiSAM project, in terms of its design and its goals, particularly for the potential of mobile phones within ongoing accountability and citizen monitoring outside of electoral cycles.

Conclusion

This chapter provided the broad context of this study, before the theoretical issues and the methodology and methods used for data collection are presented in the following chapters. The issues discussed in this section have been selected for both their importance as necessary historical background to the context in which the MobiSAM partnership is situated, and their significance as recurring themes which appeared in the later data collection process, specifically the interviews. This broad context included the MobiSAM project’s historical and geographical location in the South African, Eastern Cape and Grahamstown context, a description of the shape and size of the MobiSAM project, and situating it within contemporary debates around new media in Africa and South Africa.

Chapter 2

The theory and practice of journalism and social accountability

Introduction

The first chapter has provided the broad context of this study, and the theoretical issues in this area are presented here. This chapter provides the theoretical framework for this study, as well as reviewing the trends and debates within the literature in order to situate my own findings. The key authors in the field of normative media studies and their conclusions are outlined, as well as the specific media and political context in which these theories are situated in this study.

It begins by discussing Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White's influential text *Normative Theories of the Media*, and an outline of their four models is provided. Within each modelled role of the media, the specific journalistic approaches identified as relevant within the MobiSAM case study will be discussed: investigative journalism, public journalism, alternative journalism and development journalism. Particular focus will be given to the philosophy and principles of public journalism, as it will later be argued that this journalistic approach resonates with the MobiSAM project in the most consequential way.

These normative theories of the media will be balanced by a look at the news structures of media practitioners and the constraints they face, an analysis that is informed by the political economy critique of media studies, as well as the sociology of news (Murdock 1989, Murdock 1990, Golding and Murdock 1991, Garnham 1995, Curran 2005; and Gans 1980: Keeble 1998, Schudson 2000, McChesney 2004, McCombs 2004, McNair 2001).

Following this, the specific media and political context in which these normative theories find themselves situated in this study is provided. Most salient is an explanation of current media debates in South Africa, and a description of *Grocott's Mail's* history and continuing evolution serving as a community newspaper on an increasingly mixed media platform. This section concludes by highlighting the specific relationship between local government and

local media in Grahamstown, as important background to the political environment in which the MobiSAM partnership and project aims are situated.

1. Normative theories of the media

The theoretical framework begins with a discussion of Christians, Glasser, McQuail, Nordenstreng and White's work on *The Normative Theories of the Media*. Their book has become foundational in any study addressing the roles of the media in a democratic society internationally, and the same applies to this study on the role of the media in the MobiSAM project in Grahamstown. This is because the mission of their book is to

shed light on fundamental issues concerning the relation between media and society in a way that will assist the diagnosis of problems (that undoubtedly exist) and promote reform (certainly needed) based on clear principles of public communication and democracy. (Christians et al 2009: x)

Their work provides a philosophical analysis, focusing on the subjective realm of media studies, and the “culturally related values held by various actors about the mission of the media” (Christians et al 2009: ix). Rather than an ‘objective’, sociological description of ‘real’ media practices, it focuses on the implicit underlying prescriptive ideals and culturally related values which inform them.

Their work has a critical value as well, as it provides a framework for interrogating the discrepancies between the stated ideals of media practitioners and their actual practices. In this way, these normative theories can be seen as “instruments of emancipation from the status quo” within the media world (Christians et al 2009: ix). Through this practice, they can support media autonomy, self-regulation and provide a basis for serious press criticism.

Their analysis is built upon open models of democracy rather than models of communication, which situates the media within the society in which it operates rather than apart from it (Christians et al 2009: x, 16). At the political level of models of democracy, Christians et al begin with the basic assertion that democracy is popular sovereignty, a form of “governance by the people, for the people, and of the people” and yet is “not only a matter of accountability of rulers to the people but encompasses many other ways people act together to influence their rulers and their own lives” (2009: 25). They outline four descriptive models: liberal-pluralist, elitist-administrative, deliberative civic and popular-direct. For this

study, their definition of civic democracy, which frames a certain understanding of journalism and its social responsibility, is included here.

The third model of civic democracy takes a variety of forms, but can be generalized to the assertion that democracy requires the active involvement of citizens in participating in public discussion and reasoning, formulating public judgment and working together to represent and defend their interests (Christians et al 2009: 28, 101). A civic democracy thus relies on “a civic culture that honours the importance of a robust public life and cultivates the commitment to citizenship needed to sustain it” (2009: 102). This places a significant burden on the role of journalism, a complex discussion that will be dealt with more comprehensively in Section 1.2.1.2 *The principles of public journalism*.

They provide in their analysis the four roles of the media, which will be dealt with in detail. The authors do not make a value judgment in their distinction between the four roles, as within each specific context the democratic ideals of liberty and equality might be best pursued by different types of media, from collaborative through to radical (Christians et al 2009: 19, 128). The four roles are not discrete categories and have considerable overlap, and every national media system, news medium and individual journalist will no doubt draw from more than one normative tradition in a composite or even contradictory way (2009: x, 17).

1.1 The monitorial role

Christians et al (2009: 139) begin with the most broadly accepted and least controversial understanding of what the media’s role within a democratic society should be: the monitorial role. Its starting point is the media’s function of surveillance, not in the sinister sense of control but rather in response to the informational needs of the public. It centres on journalists as purveyors of the ‘news’, and their task of collating, processing and publishing information about recent events, current trends and warnings of future threats (2009: 145).

Professional journalistic ‘objectivity’ and a strict focus on the ‘facts’ are the underpinning ideals in this role; comment, interpretation and opinion pieces may feature but are subordinate to the provision of ‘hard’ news and ‘neutral’ reporting of ‘reality’ (Christians et al 2009: 148). There is a spectrum along which this can be applied, from a passive channelling of information to their audience to a more proactive and aggressive pursuit of fulfilling a

strong ‘watchdog’ role within a democracy (Christians et al 2009: 146, Curran and Gurevitch 1991: 84). This latter objective resonates with the principles of investigative journalism, but polices the perceived boundaries between a monitorial function and partisan ‘advocacy’ on the part of a strictly independent media. This tension is most usefully explored through the approach of investigative journalism, which takes the monitorial role as its point of departure.

1.1.1 Investigative journalism

Mainstream journalistic thought states that the watchdog role is the most important of all press roles, and this overriding social obligation should dictate the form and organisation of the modern media (Curran and Gurevitch 1991: 84). Investigative journalism cries out for social justice, champions the weak, and exposes injustice in all its forms, whether in the public sphere, the realm of business, or in private homes (Protess et al 1991: 14, Ettema and Glasser 1998: 186, Curran and Gurevitch 1991: 86, Berger 2005: 23).

Historically, the work of American ‘muckrakers’ in the last century (such as Ida Tarbell, Lincoln Steffens, Edward Murrow, and finally the Watergate scandal), solidified the practice of investigative, advocacy journalism which sought to educate and even shock the public audience into action for political reform on social issues such as poverty, inequality and corruption (Tarbell 2012: 266, Steffens 2012: 189, Sperber 2012: 220, Protess et al 1991: 6, 3). For this reason, investigative journalism is also known as the “journalism of outrage” or “muckraking” (Protess et al 1991: 6).

A description of the rationale, or the underlying theory of change, of investigative journalism is found in the ‘mobilisation model’ (Protess et al 1991: 15). Investigative journalism has a particular pattern of framing stories, one that provides a narrative of good and evil, in order to provoke a response where sympathy is felt for the ‘victims’ and anger is felt towards the ‘villains’ (Protess et al 1991: 7, 14; Ettema and Glasser 1998: 7, 111, 127). Credible and sufficient evidence is presented to influence public opinion and catalyse citizen demands for reform, in order to pressure government officials and bring about corrective action and change (Protess et al 1991: 15, Ettema and Glasser 1998: 4, 148). By doing this, the investigative journalism project protects the victims and champions the underdogs of unjust power relations, and in this way contributes to “civic betterment” as the “custodians of public conscience” (Protess et al 1991: 14, Ettema and Glasser 1998: 3).

This model relies on strong professional values, and a press system characterized by independence and directed by a clear sense of mission and fulfilling ‘the social obligations of modern media’ (Protess et al 1991: 15). Journalists and media practitioners must be “morally engaged” in questions of right and wrong, and influence public opinion in order to bring about action and change, which stands in contradiction to a puritanical view of objectivity within the monitorial function (Ettema and Glasser 1998: 3, 9).

An important criticism of this ‘neutral’ model of journalism is that it relies fundamentally on the existing nature of a society’s democratic “quality” (Christians et al 2005: 156, Protess et al 1991: 18). The mobilization model is based on the ideal of an informed, active citizenry that effectively exerts its political will on a responsive, accountable government. Once the general public is informed of wrongdoing, they are thus “mobilized [as] a catalyst for change” and will take the necessary further steps for public policy reform (Protess et al 1991: 18). All journalists need to do is to put a ‘spotlight’ on unjust actions that have been hidden, and simply by doing this “watchdog journalism represents the public interests and upholds human rights” (Berger 2005: 23).

However, an apathetic or politically disillusioned public may not respond in the expected way to ‘exposé reporting’ meant to incite public outrage and mobilise for action and reform. Journalists and journalistic reporting in and of itself cannot repair systemic breakdowns or restore institutional order; it relies on legislation and legal processes to bring about the required civic reform (Ettema and Glasser 1998: 4). Within the context of developing democracies in Africa, the lack of accountability is one of the most persistent and pressing issues in need of resolution (Wasserman and De Beer 2005: 45).

1.2 The facilitative role

The social responsibility theory of journalism is the central guiding principle of the second role outlined by Christians et al (2005: 158), the facilitative role. Within a democracy, the press acts as a ‘fourth estate’, necessary for the public to participate in political debate and collective decision-making. Without communication and interaction geared towards shared interests, common goals and active citizenship, the media fails to provide the necessary

conditions for civic democracy and the maximum quality of public life within a society cannot be achieved.

The ideal of promoting ‘deliberative democracy’ is what underpins the facilitative role of the media (Christians 2009: 159). Here, the features of dialogue, pluralism and diversity are the defining characteristics of a democratic society (2009: 170). Thus, the media should promote interactive dialogue and active citizen participation at every stage of the democratic process (2009: 158). In order to ensure this debate upholds democratic pluralism, an environment respectful of diverse views and an open agenda, mindful of alternatives, must be maintained.

Thus, rather than simply passive reporting of what happens, news media should give people a "voice" in the running of their society through an understanding of their own community's concerns. Merely reflecting the institutional political polarity of debate is insufficient: reporting needs to reinforce interactive dialogue by providing the broader context that gives events meaning (Christians et al 2009: 160). Thus, the objective to “foster conscientisation” within the facilitative role entails helping citizens practice their own agency and engage in social transformation (2009: 176). In addition, the media facilitate civil society by their active support and promotion of democratic participation through NGOs (2009: 163). The model of journalism that is placed definitively in the facilitative role by Christians et al is that of public journalism (2009: 126).

1.2.1 Public journalism

1.2.1.1 The historical origins of public journalism

Public journalism was born in the US press reform movement in the 1980s, but its philosophical roots extend back much further. As Pulitzer wrote in his first editorial for *The New York World* in 1883, “[w]hile a newspaper must be independent, it must not be indifferent or neutral on any subject concerning the public interest” (Morris 2012: 182). The Dewey-Lippmann debate in the 1920’s on the normative role of the media in a democratic society was the first theoretical traction gained on the central argument of public journalism: that journalists need to both conceive of and promote their readers as active citizens and not passive spectators of public life (Haas 2007: 6, Petersen 2003: 257, see also Lippmann 1922). Mass communication, and particularly the rise of the daily newspaper, could educate the

public about political problems, create understanding around political actions and consequences, and facilitate involvement and participation in the solutions of these problems (Haas 2007: 7). These philosophical principles experienced a revival decades later, when public journalism was founded in the late 1980s and 1990s (Merritt 2010: 19, see also Rosen 1996, Merritt 1988).

Public journalism arose largely in response to disillusionment with the entrenched professional standards to which journalism was said to aspire, something popular American journalist Jon Katz called “the failed cult of objectivity in journalism” (1995: 165). The old guard of working journalists, who insisted on being detached, ‘impartial’ and setting aside personal or political beliefs, could in actual fact be seen as hostile in the context of modern politics where the desperate underclass of America was crying out for social change (Merritt 2010: 24). He argued it was precisely *because* it was impermissible for journalists to openly make arguments and support them that the public were more suspicious of their agendas in the social system (Katz 1995: 165). This ‘neutrality’ hurt, not helped, their credibility.

The status quo was leading to an ever-wider gap between the news media and their audiences, and of even greater concern for democratic health, between citizens and their governments (Haas 2007: 3). This gap was entrenched within the professionalisation of journalism, and its subsequent routines. For example, the focus on ‘credible’, ‘authoritative’, ‘expert’ sources thus meant that the news media offered solely an elite perspective and agenda that was increasingly disconnected from, and even ignoring, the concerns of ordinary citizens (Gans 1980: 128, Haas 2007: 3).

Public journalism advocates such as Katz cited both the success of new, informal media particularly among the youth at the time and the dwindling popularity and revenue of traditional broadsheet journalism as evidence for their cause (1995: 166). These new and alternative conceptions of journalism needn’t necessarily undermine professional journalistic standards as was previously thought: “journalism can continue to preach reverence for informed opinion – truth based on research, accuracy, and fairness – while allowing writers and reporters to tell us the truth as they see it” (Katz 1995: 167).

Journalists and news services worked to tackle the widespread American distrust of news media head on, in radical ways accessible to a broader readership (see Hazen and Winokur 1995). New ideas around “solution-orientated” journalism focused not only on reporting the news but also on problem solving, community activism, local efforts at mediation and even coalition building. The founders of the *American News Service* called this journalistic project a way of promoting a “living democracy” (Hazen and Winokur 1995: 169).

The idea of public journalism continued to develop and became a principled yet diverse journalistic movement, “a theory in search of a practice”, a debate, an “ongoing experiment”, a “public philosophy” rather than a restrictive model, consciously avoiding strict definition or codification (Merritt 2010: 25, Glasser 1999: 7, Rosen 1999: 22). In summary, the public journalism movement was “rooted in the desire to bring about greater citizen involvement in the news media, in order to build a genuinely democratic public sphere” (Davidson 2010: 35).

1.2.1.2 The principles of public journalism

The ideals of a civic democracy (as discussed in Section 1) place a particular burden on journalism. The facilitative role emphasises promoting active citizenship in a way that ensures inclusivity and pluralism in order to improve the quality of public life (Christians et al 2009: 126). Thus, this normative mission for the press is expressed as

not only in keeping citizens informed but in maintaining a certain quality of public discourse. Journalism in a civic democracy promotes political participation by creating and managing opportunities for public deliberation ... citizens in a civic democracy expect news media to play some role in “making the community work” – a popular refrain of the public journalism movement (Christians et al 2009: 102).

Under the tenets of public journalism, the press should not merely report on and complain about the quality of public life, a form of political journalism that creates increasing cynicism, apathy and alienation. Rather, the focus should be on participation, on engaging their audience as citizens with a stake in public issues and providing substance in their reporting that “treats problems in a manner that highlights the prospects for their resolution” (Christians et al 2009: 102). In short, a possible definition of public journalism is an approach focused on reducing the gaps between journalists and readers, and between citizens and their governments (Haas 2008: 3). Its primary responsibility is stimulating civic commitment, as

well as active participation, in democratic processes; in doing so, public journalism supports “a broader mission of helping public life go well” (Merritt 1995: 113, Rosen 1999: 44).

This study has used the concept of public journalism offered by Haas (2007) as the primary basis of its theoretical framework, although his views are not centrist when it comes to public journalism theory and practice. Conventional public journalism theory favours a “proactive neutrality”, a journalism focused on the processes rather than the outcomes of citizen participation in public problem solving (Glasser 1999: 10, Rosen 1999: 44, see also Merritt 1995). Thus, journalists should never prescribe a solution or favour a specific group of interests (Rosen 1996: 13).

Haas, by contrast, challenges these existing understandings of the public journalist’s role and responsibility. He states that a public journalism approach should be focused not only on the processes but also on the outcomes of citizen participation in finding solutions to public problems: journalists have the responsibility to report on and assess whether citizen interventions have resulted in substantive change (Haas 2007: 45). They should actively be promoting the goal of reducing social inequality, and report on the instances when centres of power (such as local government) continue to marginalise the interests of vulnerable citizens who have a right to be both heard and responded to.

Therefore, this commitment on the part of public journalists to act in the “best public interest” and defend the value of social equality should take precedence over out-dated professional notions of journalistic objectivity when it comes to the poor and oppressed (Haas 2007: 45). As such, the lobbying of relevant government officials and the advocating of alternative solutions to dire social problems are not beyond the scope of journalistic activity. As will be discussed in the Findings chapter, this understanding of public journalism is most applicable to the stated goals and anticipated outcomes of the MobiSAM partnership, and thus forms the basis of this analysis.

1.2.1.3 Public journalism in practice: promoting public problem solving

Public journalism states that news reporting on citizen issues should help the public “act upon, rather than just learn about, its problems” (Rosen 1999: 22). As public journalism editor Buzz Merritt’s (1998) book title states: *Telling the News is Not Enough*. Journalists

should offer “mobilising information”, whether it be organising a forum for political deliberation and action or joining up with a civic association (Lemert 1981 in Haas 2007: 41). They should encourage and inform about the options available for citizens to act in finding solutions.

This comes with certain responsibility. Haas warns public journalists to carefully consider which particular kinds of intervention would be required to address given problems before they promote any public problem solving activity (2007: 43). In fact, encouraging the public “to participate in public discussion in a context where there is little prospect that the conversation will have an impact runs the risk of deepening public cynicism and disaffection” (Iggers 1998: 150 in Haas 2007: 43). Some problems can be resolved by citizens themselves in dialogue and deliberation, but many pressing societal challenges require a collaborative approach between citizens, experts and government officials to be addressed substantively (2007: 44).

Firstly, this means examining whether a problem may be solved by citizens themselves or requires systemic intervention by government officials. And secondly, cognisance must be made of whether the problems that have been identified can be addressed through local channels (Haas 2007: 43). Many problems require intervention from on a provincial, national or even international level. For example, MobiSAM has chosen local municipal projects, rather than the provincial and national issues of education or health care provision that arguably extend beyond the reach and proximity of the local community.

For a problem resolvable within the proximity of the community and local government actors, journalists should encourage direct participation towards a solution. As Haas outlines, there are certain methods of doing this (2007: 43):

1. describing what citizens in other communities have done/are doing to address similar problems
2. creating spaces for deliberation, such as public forums
3. promoting membership of new or existing civic organisations
4. publicising citizens’ applications for resources¹
5. encouraging consultation with experts who have particular knowledge about the problem in question

¹ An example of such a local initiative in Grahamstown is a newsletter entitled ‘The Trading Post’, distributed informally amongst community members, with requests for resources from impoverished local schools as well as offers of goods and services from local individuals and small businesses.

6. maintain an open channel to the participation of government, for a possible ‘collaborative’ rather than an ‘adversarial’ relationship between press and government

On the basis of this understanding around the principles and practice of the media, Haas sees journalism as an “important political institution” in its own right (2007: 45). This claim, of course, requires interrogation and an acknowledgement of the major critiques levelled against public journalism, and the commercial media system more broadly. The constraints of the commercial media system and the institutional pressures and routines of traditional media production are explored in Section 2 of this chapter.

1.3 The radical role

Christians et al (2009: 181) describes the radical role of the media as one that concerns itself with redistributing social power from the privileged minority to the underprivileged majority, and fighting inequality and injustice within a democracy wherever it might arise. Foremost, it asserts absolute equality and freedom for each member of a democratic society. This embodies a fundamental belief in the citizen participation tradition, and a clear emphasis on how to realise it for every individual (2009: 195). In the radical tradition, a truly universal recognition of human rights for all requires an unblinking focus on “the voiceless and disenfranchised ... the marginalised, the poor, and the dispossessed” (2009: 177).

Its main difference from the more events-driven monitorial role is its “systematic and principled engagement according to clearly stated values. The goal is fundamental or radical change in society” (Christians et al 2009: 126). While the monitorial role may implicitly support the status quo in its quest for justice and change through already-existing democratic institutions and processes, the radical journalist rejects any hegemonic power structure which results in injustices and supports alternatives for a new order, one which represents and supports the needs of all. Resistance is a key theme.

Another salient facet of the radical approach is its understanding of the relations between journalists and their audiences: radical media is “more participatory and dialogical than the conventional media – even beyond the level reached by the facilitative role” (Christians et al 2009: 181). Thus this approach is arguably the most democratic within its own journalistic practice, and is best typified by the tradition of alternative journalism.

1.3.1 Alternative journalism

The alternative media sector is both a reaction to and a critique of the dominant, capitalist and elite practices of journalism; not only of the content and commercial organisation and production of mainstream coverage but the very epistemological understanding of news (Atton and Hamilton 2010: 1, 15, 23, 84, 99). Its efforts are centred on redressing the imbalance of power inherent in the mainstream media, and its marginalisation or even discrimination against certain sociocultural groups or movements.

Alternative media is the media of social movements, fringe political organisations, protest groups, dissidents and even fanzines, in an effort to mediatise the interests and views of underrepresented groups in society (Atton and Hamilton 2010: 1, 2). Towards these ideals, alternative media strives to operate autonomous of market pressures and institutional constraints, and almost without exception outside of the profit-objective. Alternative media has an important place in South Africa's recent history and journalistic tradition, which will be discussed further in Section 3.1.1 *The history of community media in Southern Africa and its contemporary role towards development*.

1.4 The collaborative role

In relation to the previous roles, the collaborative role “is unique in that it deals as much with the needs and expectations of the state as the needs and expectations of the press” (Christians et al 2009: 197). This normative role for the media is defined in relation to the state, and as such collaboration actively involves government (at local, national and even international levels) in the mission of the press. Christians et al begins by noting that the very principle of ‘collaboration’ invokes a relationship with the state or other centres of established power that flies in the face of libertarian ideals of a free and fiercely independent press (2009: 196). This approach is viewed as anathema to mainstream US journalism for example, due to its perceived automatic translation into lack of journalistic ‘objectivity’ and autonomy.

However, in practice, the historical significance of the collaborative role in many democratic nations is undeniable. Even contemporary empirical evidence does not allow it to be

downplayed as a “genuinely normative role for journalism” in many established democratic nations (Christians et al 2009: 196). Collaboration, cooperation or participation on the part of the press is an existing ‘obligation’, for various compelling reasons such as ‘patriotic duty’, public safety or national security (2009: 197, 211).

The underpinning communitarian values of the collaborative role denote responsibility as well as freedom, thus journalistic freedom and autonomy is not unlimited: “journalists can question, even challenge, the state, but not to the point where they undermine a government’s basic plans for progress and prosperity” (2009: 201). A limit to constructive criticism and consensus building towards the national agenda is seen as problematic from the perspective of other normative traditions. For example, in comparison with the radical role, the collaborative role can be seen to represent a conservative ideology, with the media acting as agents supporting the system and channels of “legitimate institutions” within a democracy (2009: 182, 195).

Ideally, a partnership between the media and the state should be founded on the basis of mutual trust and a shared understanding of and commitment to the means and ends of a healthy democratic society (Christians et al 2009: 198). In reality, this is difficult to achieve. On the spectrum of possible conditions under which the collaborative role of the media might be performed, it is more likely to be achieved by compliance through coercion, apathy or tradition rather than acceptance of a normative agreement (2009: 199). Thus, the implications of the collaborative role, and the relating field of development journalism, require a nuanced understanding and a carefully negotiated approach.

1.4.1 Development journalism

As stated by Christians et al, the concept of development journalism “stands out as one of the few efforts, by practitioners and academics alike, to transform collaboration into a genuinely normative theory of the press” (2009: 198). It requires that the media position itself in partnership with, rather than isolated from, other institutions in society. The state-press relationship should be premised on the social responsibility to promote the processes of development (2009: 200).

From its origination in the 1960s, development journalism took place in nations classified as ‘developing’ states, and thus referred to the media arrangements and practices within a ‘transitional’ nation-state where both economic and democratic societal institutions are at a nascent stage (Christians et al 2009: 201, 200, Appleyard *et. al.* 2008: 420). It developed sinister connotations within the ‘Third World’ context, as political executives used its rationale to seize mass media to both promote the state ‘development’ agenda, and wield it as a powerful tool of repression (Shah 1996: 143, Abrahamsen 2000: 16). Although not the focus of this study, it is crucial to be mindful of the fact that “the discourse of development is implicated in power relationships” (Abrahamsen 2000: xi, 21). Identities of development can instil a degree of inferiority and passive subjectivity. However, the ‘objects’ of development need not be passive receivers and can contest the activities carried out in the name of development (Abrahamsen 2000: 22).

Today, the debate has evolved. In its contemporary manifestation, a conceptual understanding of development journalism rejects the Western equation of development journalism with government control of media (Musa and Domatob 2007: 316, Shah 1996: 144). It moves emphasis away from historical state-press partnerships that serve solely to promote executive policies and further repression, to highlighting development journalism’s positive role in promoting and strengthening citizen engagement in the processes and programmes of social change (Christians et al 2009: 201). The citizen participation ideal is what underpins the normative model of “emancipatory journalism” within the developmental role of the media (Shah 1996: 143).

Shah defined the concept of development journalism as “independent journalism that provided constructive criticism of government and its agencies, informed readers how the development process was affecting them, and highlighted local self-help projects” (Shah 1996: 143). Crucially, its focus is on articulating rather than suppressing difference and debate within the national project. Thus, the emphasis on the principles of alternative media to represent the marginalised has led to a “more complete and more complex” understanding of development journalism (1996: 145, 162).

Its foundation in the social responsibility theory calls for “comprehensive reporting with a critical edge”: a press that is challenging of all oppressive structures, including both

government and business interests (Shah 1996: 145). In a national context of severe poverty and steep humanitarian challenges, “development journalists have a duty to promote economic progress” (Musa and Domatob 2007: 326). This gives them a variety of complex and at times even contradictory roles; they are all at once ‘truth tellers’, ‘civic advocates’, ‘investigative watchdogs’ and ‘economic boosters and liberators’ in the name of socio-economic development (Musa and Domatob 2007). Shah’s text on ‘*Performance Accountability and Combating Corruption*’ is useful as it describes a radical monitorial approach by imagining an active role for citizens in evaluating service delivery performance, which resonates with the MobiSAM project (Shah 2007: 249, 250).

2. Sociological and political economy critiques of normative media theory

From the 1970s, the strong wave of neo-Marxist sociological and critical political economy approaches came to challenge and shape the academic landscape and understandings of media studies (see Hall 1981, Curran 1986, McQuail 1987, Murdock 1989, Murdock 1990, Golding and Murdock 1991, Garnham 1995, Grossberg 1995, Murdock 1995, Kellner 1995, Kellner 1997, McNair 2001, Babe 2003, Peck 2006). These theorists challenged a purely normative, cultural understanding of the role and function of the media by asserting the significant political and economic forces that underlie mainstream, commercial news production.

Curran states that both the ‘watchdog’ monitorial role and the facilitative role of the media are exaggerated, as investigative and public interest reporting is largely subordinate to other imperatives (2005: 124, 129). Normative models of the media are incomplete while they ignore the shaping factors of market pressures and the specific political and economic interests that underlie them. Primarily, he argues against a naïve belief in the “independence” of the media and their freedom to serve the public interest (Curran 2005: 126). Rather, the political and economic interests of shareholders, advertisers, and therefore the cultural power of the ‘ruling elites’ within a society shape news production to a significant extent. Thus, the critical surveillance function and the “admirable stress on the need for civic information, public participation, robust debate and active self-determination” articulated by normative theories on the role of the media within democratic political contexts can be overstated (Curran 2005: 129).

It is clear that the global context of increasing commercialisation, convergence and corporatisation of news organisations comes with blatant economic realities, driving the cultural industry towards mainstream, conventional and unchallenging content (Curran 1986: 310, Murdock 1990: 7, Golding and Murdock 1991: 75). The increasing commercial pressures on the media in the context of globalisation and media conglomeration has been felt worldwide, and Africa is no different. These sociological and political economy concerns have sparked considerable interest on the part of African media researchers in recent years (see Agaba 2004, Mayiga 2008, Gandari 2010, Kotele 2010, Mare 2010).

McChesney argues that advertisers, rather than citizens, are the guiding ‘customers’ of news production, and this market reality has significant negative externalities for cultural production (2004: 203). In a free market where newspapers have to satisfy the interests of both readers and advertisers in order to survive, it follows that the affluent minority of high-income readers will be the clear target market (Emdon 1998: 206). These market forces result in an “invisible form of censorship” which excludes marginalised and impoverished social groups from participating in cultural production, or even consuming mainstream media products (Curran 2005: 133, Murdock 1989: 40, Murdock 1990: 8, Garnham 1995:65).

On a sociological level, the professional ideologies, norms and traditions of journalism can also constrain “the democratic agenda of news production” (McCombs 2004: 117, McNair 2001: 13, see also Schudson 2000). An important study conducted by Gans (1980: 128) argued that the deadline-driven news environment necessitates that journalists assess and select news sources primarily through the consideration of efficiency, narrowing the range of sources to a hegemonic selection of official spokespeople and experts (see also Keeble 1998: 45). Another identified sociological problem is that journalists may come from a similar social class to their elite sources and prefer them for that reason, or, precipitously come to share the worldview of elites through their repeated and ongoing contact with them (Keeble 1998: 43). It is also true that a higher professional status is afforded to journalists with contact to elite sources, a status not afforded to journalists with focus on and contact with marginalised social groups such as women, children and the oppressed (1998: 45).

However, even from within this political economy critique, there is acknowledgement of countervailing influences that work against the total subordination of privately owned media to a corporate and commercial agenda. In purely pragmatic terms, independent news media need to “maintain audience interest in order to be profitable; they have to sustain public legitimacy in order to avoid societal retribution; and they can be influenced by the professional concerns of their staff” (Curran 2005: 127). Despite valid cynicism towards unbalanced and idealistic claims of the private media sector forming “tribunes of the public”, there is clear scope for counteraction on the part of “an energised civil society, well-developed alternative networks of ideas and news sources, idealistic media staff and radical consumer pressure” (Curran 2005: 134). The idea of the MobiSAM project to both galvanise citizen participation and provide a well-developed network and the resources of in-depth analytic information to a local news house parallels with this idea in an interesting way.

These sections have provided a literature review outlining a normative understanding of media roles, as well as a political economy and sociological critique of the broader media studies landscape. Now, the contextual issues of the political and media environment in which this study is situated will be described.

3. Current media debates in South Africa

Since 1994 and the fall of the apartheid regime, robust debate has heightened over “South Africa’s journalism and the role it is playing in this new democracy” (Harber and Renn 2010: ix). The ruling party’s (ANC) ‘Ready to Govern’ document of 1992 clearly stated the need for diverse, independent and free media, as “democracy demanded citizens had access to the media and to government information” (2010: xi). However, the road to fulfilling these ideals has not been smooth. Writing just over ten years into South Africa’s democracy, Hadland (2005: 13) stated that

... the media are still struggling to understand and fulfil their role in the new dispensation. The state is no longer simply the enemy. Now the media are required to be more nuanced in their responses. They must be watchdog and corruption-buster, but they must also nurture goodwill and support national unity. They must be critical but they must also be constructive. They must reflect mainstream opinion but also work especially hard at giving voice to the voiceless. They must uphold ethical and professional standards while creating a more diverse workforce. These at times conflicting demands have inevitably lead to tensions, frustrations and an environment in which excellence has found it hard to be heard.

Widespread criticism has been levelled at the media from all sides, including from journalists themselves, expressing diverse concerns over the lack of “balance, diversity, independence and ethics in our news media, and more generally a failure to deliver on the promise of media freedom enshrined in our Constitution” (Harber and Renn 2010: ix). The blame for this has been attributed to the ongoing legacy caused by the nature of media houses under apartheid. Journalistic commentators themselves express concern that the previously ‘Eurocentric’ character of mainstream media under white minority rule was “reflecting a world that had little to do with South African realities. A decade of democracy has seen major improvements, but a new and South African paradigm of journalism has still to emerge” (Berger 2005: 19). More pointed accusations have been made, particularly by the ruling party, that the lack of transformation in “white liberal” newsroom culture means that “journalists are stuck in a neo-liberal posture of hostility to government and fail to grasp the kind of journalism required to contribute to a democratic and developmental state” (Emdon 1998: 203, Harber and Renn 2010: xii).

Contemporary debates on press freedom in South Africa also merit an explanation for the context of this study. “In most of Africa, the relationship between state and media has been a fragile and conflicted one” and the tense relationship between government and media in South Africa is no different (Wasserman 2011: 152, Harber and Renn 2010: xv). Debates involving the relationship between the state and the media in the South African developmental context grow increasingly contested, particularly the policing of the distinction between the ‘public interest’ and the ‘national interest’ (Duncan 2003: 16, De Beer and Wasserman 2005a: 45, Wasserman and De Beer 2005b: 194, Lunga 2011: 20, Daniels 2011: 1, Duncan in De Waal 2011: 1, see also Duncan 2009). These debates have concentrated around two proposed legislative responses to these ANC concerns: the Media Tribunal and the Protection of Information Bill.

The proposed Media Tribunal has been an executive response to the perceived insufficiency of the existing self-regulatory institutions (such as the Press Council and Ombudsman, which operate independently of government) to address the critiques levelled at the media by the ANC, particularly its continued “anti-transformation, anti-ANC stance” (ANC Resolutions of 52nd National Conference cited in Harber and Renn 2010: xviii, Daniels 2011: 1). This apparent interference on the part of government put the media on the defensive, particularly

when its loudest advocates within the executive where those who have received bad press due to their alleged abuses of power (Harber and Renn 2010: xix, Vick 2012: 1, Dawes 2012: 1). At a similar moment, another proposed Bill escalated the concerns of the media and civil society on the relationship between government and the independent media.

The right of access to any information held by the state is protected by the Bill of Rights and enshrined in the South African Constitution (1996): a citizen has the right to access any information held by the state, particularly for the protection of their rights. The Promotion of Access to Information Act provides national legislation giving effect to this right Act (2 of 2000). However, recently the proposed Protection of State Information Bill was passed by Parliament, which “massively widened the capacity of all sorts of government and parastatal officials to classify documents as secret even if they ‘may’ threaten the national interest – a scope so wide that it begged abuse” (Harber and Renn 2010: xix, Duncan in De Waal 2011: 1). The Bill still awaits the signature of incumbent President Jacob Zuma at the time of this study’s publication (Evans 2013: 1).

The ongoing public and civil society opposition against this Bill has drawn clear battle lines between the media and the state, and increased tensions and suspicion around the independence of the press to pursue its whistleblowing, investigative and monitorial functions (Daniels 2011: 1). These current events and ongoing debates are important to understand the environment in which journalists continue to navigate the South African media landscape and move further towards refining their role in a democratic, developmental state. The following section discusses community media, its local history and the role it can play in South African society.

3.1 Community media

Community media is a broad and rich field of media studies. Whether it is defined simply through its ownership and operation within small geographical boundaries, or as the “heart and soul of journalism” providing the very “civic glue” which binds communities together, the history and diverse functions of community newspapers and community radio merits further academic interrogation (McLean 2010: 3, Killenberg 2008: 5, 135, Jankowski 1995: 165, Thorne 1998: 211, 215). As Thorne (1998: 216) describes it,

[c]ommunity media is owned and run by and for the community and is participatory, premised on the belief that the airwaves and the printing presses are a public resource and all citizens have the right to freedom of communication and expression. Ordinary people are offered access to media to express their concerns, needs and desires at the local level. Community media thus has a development-orientated focus.

For the purpose of this study, now that the normative theories of media and particularly public journalism have been outlined previously in the chapter, it is necessary to focus on the political economy context through which community media operate. Community media is, in most cases, distinctive through its non-profit motive in comparison with other forms of media, and its independence from corporate ownership.

3.1.1 The history of community media in South Africa and its contemporary role towards development

It is important to note that community media has a specific history in South Africa. At the culmination of the anti-apartheid struggle, the idea of community media was synonymous with the term 'alternative' media (Thorne 1998: 212). It was generally non-commercial and established without profit-motive principals, as it leaned primarily towards advocacy journalism. Under resourced but determined, this alternative media conducted itself courageously in the context of extreme state oppression: over 100 apartheid statutes curtailed the activities of the media (Hadland 2005: 12).

With the dismantling of apartheid and the new democratic dispensation everything changed, and community media's role had to change with it. Community media was ideally placed as a means for the empowerment of local communities and citizens, through its potential as a tool to build a participatory democracy in the process of sustainable development (Thorne 1998: 213). By facilitating the necessary interaction between citizens and the structures of government, it could "encourage transparency and accountability and promote citizen participation in relation to local government in a practical and directly relevant way" (Thorne 1998: 234).

This possibility exists through examining local development issues in "an educational manner that facilitates feedback and monitors the impact on the communities involved", thus allowing citizens to participate "in the process of determining their own development needs

and priorities”, and finally providing the platform for them to lobby support for their own chosen initiatives (Thorne 1998: 234). As articulated by Hadland and Thorne (2004: 2),

Certainly the emergence and deepening of a new democratic era in South Africa with its emphasis on transparency, accountability, accessibility, empowerment and equity is essential to the core principles and basic objectives of the small media sector. The link, too, between sustainable development, empowerment and the small media sector has been demonstrated in country after country.

Key areas of development by both government and NGOs, particularly such as water and housing, “desperately need the community vehicles of local media” but there remains insufficient understanding of “the intrinsic power of participatory media in development, not only as an agency of debate and discussion but also as a tool of information and education” (Emdon 1998: 204). In reality,

the majority of community media organisations have failed to come to grips with their roles in community development and in promoting participatory democracy. They have often not developed sufficient ties with civic structures that would bring them closer to the communities they serve. While committed to creating content for development and empowerment purposes, they also often lack the skills and resources to make any real impact in this respect (Hadland and Thorne 2004: 2).

3.1.2 Addressing the political economy critique: community media and new funding models

It is precisely this need that is at the core of the partnership between MobiSAM and *Grocott's Mail*. Any discussion on community media necessarily leads to the key question of funding and sustainability (Thorne 1998: 211). There will always be a tension between the broader mission of “helping public life go well” for all citizens within a democracy on the one hand, and the commercial incentives for media owners and advertisers to a focus on the demographically wealthy audience, rather than coverage which leads to the goals of broad-based citizen participation within a democratic society (Merritt 1995: 113, Haas 2007: 45, Harber and Renn 2010: xiii).

This challenge calls for dynamic solutions, ideally involving a ‘mixed economy’ approach towards the options of funding community media (Thorne 1998:211). The precedent for this is seen in the funding agencies of the ‘alternative press’ in 1980s South Africa, which offset ordinary market forces through their partnership based on commitment to shared ideals and

struggles (Emdon 1998: 206). Partnerships can be cited as the key to the sustainability of community media in meeting

its developmental objectives in providing information and communication to underserved and often poor communities... An enabling environment must be created that acknowledges the contribution of community media towards a more just and equitable communication order in our country. (Thorne 1998: 228, 226)

The process of building partnerships between various community-based organisations, NGOs, business and local authorities with the aim of creating a shared communication channel is crucial to the success of ... all forms of community media. (Emdon 1998: 205)

The kind of partnerships and resource sharing around development that is envisaged between community media and 'like-minded' local structures such as universities and NGO's (Hadland and Thorne 2004: xiv, xxi), is particularly resonant within the MobiSAM project and the partnership with *Grocott's Mail*.

4. Grocott's Mail

4.1 Background and history of *Grocott's Mail*

In order to understand the nature of the undertaking between MobiSAM and *Grocott's Mail*, it is useful to comprehend the history, composition and character of the paper. A print media institution with a long history, *Grocott's Mail* began in 1870 and survives as the oldest independent newspaper in South Africa² (O'Meara 1995: 46). It was founded by a local family-owned firm and proudly maintained freedom from colonial state interests from its inception, an unusual achievement at that time. However, the coverage and content of the paper was largely said to have been "parochial", covering only the interests of a single constituency of the Grahamstown community, the wealthy white settler class (Dugo 2007: 42).

A considerable shift occurred in the paper's ownership, mission and content in the new millennium. After reaching bankruptcy in 2003, the newspaper was purchased by the Rhodes University School of Journalism and Media Studies (RU JMS). This was "a turning point in the history of *Grocott's Mail* in terms of new ICT infrastructure, the employment of

² As an interesting footnote to its past, the paper's circulation exploded in the time of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) and for a time it upgraded to a daily newspaper in order to satisfy the demand for the latest war reports, with an avid colonial audience as far as London (Dugo 2007: 41).

professional journalists, and more balanced coverage of all residents in Grahamstown” (Dugo 2007: 42).

This change was reflected in the new vision of the paper, in regards to its ownership, structure and content. Rather than a local white family firm, the paper is now run by a board of directors composed of RU JMS academics and independent members of the Grahamstown community. This multicultural board of directors brought with it a very different idea of journalism, one that is both independent and critical (Dugo 2007: 43). A new set of policies, editorial and otherwise, were ratified and the dual goal of the paper is both to serve the community as a community newspaper, and allow RU JMS students to gain experience in the fields of writing, editing, photography and online content (DRPEJ 2003: 1). Its vision and values were enshrined in the formal mission statement of the newspaper, named the David Rabkin³ Project for Experiential Journalism (DRPEJ).

As the new board of directors and editorial team actively began moving away from the existing narrow agenda which “privileged the conservative white community”, the coverage and content of the paper changed dramatically (Dugo 2007: 43). It now strives to provide independent and balanced coverage of all citizens of the Grahamstown community, in both the western suburbs and eastern townships, two vastly different constituencies (Dugo 2007: 38, 45).

Today, the paper is still published bi-weekly in English every Tuesday and Friday, a tradition first started 140 years (Garman 2006: 95, Dugo 2007: 40). Its continuing mandate as a community newspaper is evidenced by its concentrated coverage of a distinct geographical space, and the paper has a “clear local-first emphasis on news, features, sports and advertising” (Thorne 1998: 215, McLean 2010: 3). Its particular Grahamstown context also necessitates a great deal of ‘crime beat reporting’ and municipal governance issues (McLean 2010: 3).

In order to fulfil its new mission statement and provide balanced and in-depth coverage of community issues in Grahamstown, *Grocott’s Mail* has been and is involved in a number of

³ David Rabkin (1948-1985) was a renowned critical journalist who worked underground during the apartheid regime, but was arrested and imprisoned for almost a decade and soon after killed while undergoing military training in Angola (Rabkin 2010: 1). The *Grocott’s Mail* newsroom is named in memory of him.

innovative projects. This speaks both to its values and character as a media house, and its willingness to partner with the new MobiSAM project.

4.2 *Grocott's Mail* as an evolving media organisation in a changing media environment

4.2.1 New media and journalism in Africa

An examination of the MobiSAM partnership resonates with the current literature and debates on the trends within new media and journalism in Africa, an area of much progress and possibility. The undisputed view of the future is that “the Internet will find its way into the African media environment via mobile wireless devices like cell phones”, and media leaders need to prepare for this (Berger 2009a: 7, Duarte 2009: 24, Mabweazara 2011b: 5). This has important implications for conventional or legacy media such as community newspapers.

The advanced features of this new medium include the faster (if not almost instantaneous) broadcasting of information, the increased potential for citizen and participatory journalism, and the enhanced platforms for interactivity and community-building which extends beyond the conventional, traditional media transmission models (Mabweazara 2011b: 4, King 2010: 157, 211, 111, Berger 2009a: 12). These features in turn have important implications for the future of citizen journalism and participatory journalism ideals.

Citizen journalism is a broad term which covers all forms of content generated by citizens, or ‘user-generated journalism’, and is fast becoming increasingly linked to participatory journalism through digital media platforms (Mabweazara 2011b: 5). Mobile phones take key position here, and are leveraged by citizens to contribute to news making. The mass of individuals on the ground with mobile phones now have the ability to capture news in real time, with more immediacy than traditional professional journalistic coverage. This provides a challenge to media power, particularly in instances of state censorship or inadequate coverage of widespread violence, grass roots uprisings and police oppression (Ndlela 2009: 241). This intersects with a radical role of the media.

Another global phenomenon of the increasingly close partnership between new media and journalism is its emphasis on interactivity and community building (King 2010: 111). Academics argue that the “centrality of ‘interactive’ features of online editions of African

newspapers, which allow users to comment, give feedback or even vote on controversial issues”, is proof of the trend that journalists are moving closer to engaging with readers, as envisaged by the facilitative role (Mabweazara 2011b: 5, King 2010: 6). This context frames an understanding of why and how *Grocott’s Mail* has aligned itself with these global and African new media developments, both as will be discussed here and in the form of the MobiSAM project.

4.2.2 *Grocott’s Mail* and ICT interaction

This section describes *Grocott’s Mail* existing ICT interaction and technological capabilities as a newsroom, an important factor in the partnership undertaken by MobiSAM and the media house, and thus merits explanation. Generally speaking, the digital divide between newsroom technologies in Africa and the global North is widening dramatically (Berger 2009b: 48). An analysis conducted soon after the transition of ownership of *Grocott’s Mail*’s in 2003 painted a dismal picture of the bottlenecks within its content management processes, non-functional website and the lack of skilled staff capacity to improve on these identified challenges (Garman 2006: 98). Today however, *Grocott’s Mail* punches well above its weight as a small community newspaper in this regard. Dugo’s comprehensive case study of ICT appropriation in news practices at GM described how “ICT infrastructure at *Grocott’s Mail* is becoming richer and more digital” in recent years, and this trend has continued (2007: 45).

Grocott’s Mail has achieved this by twinning the imperatives of ICT integration and cost management. For one example, the paper began by using open source rather than proprietary software tools on its newsroom workstations (Berger 2009b: 53, Garman 2006: 98). Run by the RU JMS New Media Lab, *Grocott’s Mail* launched a digital edition and website in 2006 (www.grocotts.co.za) which includes a mobi-site for Grahamstown news, events and business specials (Dugmore 2010b: 1). This ICT integration was facilitated by the use of Nika in the newsroom.

Nika is a low-cost software management system (CMS) using open source technology, aimed as an intervention to simplify newsroom processes in order to encourage emerging publications and improve the effectiveness and viability of small-scale newsrooms such as *Grocott’s Mail* (Maher 2006: 113, Berger 2009b: 55). It allows advanced workflow

management, intranet, content repurposing and delivery to multiple platforms (Berger 2009b: 48). Its articulation possibilities include an automated website, email feeds and media convergence on new media platforms such as SMS and 3G technology. In 2008, the articulation began between Grahamstown NOW (the mobile platform), the website and the paper's content: headlines can be sent to cell phones, Twitter or RSS feeds (Dugmore 2010a: 1, Dugmore 2010b: 1). As well as sending out content streams to cell phones, the software allows remote transmission from a journalist's mobile phone in order to receive text, audio and video (Heatwole 2010b: 1).

This has important implications for *Grocott's Mail* interactions with the Grahamstown community. Thus far, the incorporation of this CMS database has also lead to the inclusion of reader comments, citizen journalism submissions and online polls (Heatwole 2010b: 1). Social networking tools, such as the ability to tweet about an online article on Twitter and 'Like' or 'Share' it on Facebook, allows a CMS user such as *Grocott's Mail* to "see what a community of readers is most interested in" (Berger 2009b: 49, Dugmore 2010: 1). It was these capabilities that led to the possibility of incorporating the technology involved in the MobiSAM project into the practices of the newspaper.

4.2.3 *Grocott's Mail* and citizen journalism

Grocott's Mail engaged in an in-depth citizen journalism project entitled *Iindaba Ziyafika* (isiXhosa for 'the news is coming'), funded a Knight Foundation grant that supports journalism skills development projects and innovative approaches to community news sites (Heatwole 2010b: 1, Sarrazin 2011: 20, Lang 2010: 19). Nyathi's (2011) study of this project explored these citizen journalists' practices; Steenveld and Strelitz (2012) have provided a critique of the first phase of *Grocott's Mail's* citizen journalism project. Currently, the newspaper's editorial team has issued a proposal seeking funding to extend this project into the future.

The commitment to this project on the part of *Grocott's Mail* has important implications for its values and understanding of its role as a community newspaper in the context of Grahamstown, and in regards to the MobiSAM project's aims. This is because

[p]ractices such as alternative or citizen journalism, often facilitated by mobile phones, have been seen to hold the promise of bridging these divides between civil society and the state and between citizens and mainstream media. (Steenveld and Strelitz 2010 in Wasserman 2011: 153)

5. Local government and local media

The complex relationship between local media and local government in this particular context is crucial for the success of the envisaged partnership of the MobiSAM project and *Grocott's Mail* around municipal service delivery issues. The Western experience and literature has a theoretical framework formulated around the politician – journalist relationship as one where

Mutually dependent and mutually adaptive but role-regulated actors working in an emergent shared culture, mutually regulating behaviour and controlling the mechanisms for dealing with conflicts and divergent objectives. (Larsson 2002: 22)

However, “[i]n most of Africa, the relationship between state and media has been a fragile and conflicted one” and this seems as true at the local level as the national level (Wasserman 2011: 152). Idasa⁴ commentary notes that overwhelmingly within the communities they worked with around the country, an unhealthy degree of hostility existed between local media and municipal representatives and officials (Davidson 2010: 39).

As examples at the national level, one of the country’s biggest newspapers was faced with noises from government about advertising withdrawal after they printed accusations that the Minister of Health was a thief and a drunkard (Harber and Renn 2010: xvi, Berger 2008: 1). The state-owned national public broadcaster, SABC, withdrew from the National Editors’ Forum (NEF) in retaliation. *Grocott's Mail* faced its own showdown in this regard.

After running a story on an Auditor-General’s report on missing money in the Council (R13.7 million unaccounted for), Makana Municipality withdrew its advertising spend from *Grocott's Mail* newspaper (Berger 2008: 1). The loss of this crucial advertising revenue could easily have killed the newspaper financially, but legal support from MISA and Print Media SA, proving that the municipality had contravened three Constitutional clauses and two municipal laws through its actions, led to an out-of-court settlement in the paper’s favour. The outcome of this battle is commemorated by a facsimile stuck against the wall of the Editor's office in the newsroom: the attorneys' notice stating that in the case of the David Rabkin Project for Experiential Journalism Training (Pty)Ltd/*Grocott's Mail* vs. Makana Municipality), the respondent will place advertising in the newspaper as before and cover all

⁴ Institute for Democracy in Africa

legal costs of the complainant (case number 1066/08, official correspondence dated 4 July 2008).

This big victory from this small paper was lauded as “a clear signal that governments need to think twice before using taxpayer’s money to punish media through manipulative advertising” (Berger 2008: 1). However, and more worryingly, during this time the municipal spokesperson stonewalled *Grocott’s Mail* completely and expressed its continued hostility in other ways beyond the scope of the court case (Ancer 2008: 1).

While knowing this history is necessary to understand the delicate and even tense relationship between local government and local media in South Africa and the Grahamstown context in which MobiSAM is situated, this study focuses on the possible ways forward as articulated by the media practitioners and MobiSAM project directors in the Findings Chapter. This link with the collaborative role is articulated by an interview in the Idasa study (Mati and Levy 2008 in Davidson 2010: 47):

It should be agreed that our coexistence will always be a contentious issue. We need to accept that and try to forge a healthy tension between the two of us [media and municipalities]. Both [must] understand that we have a role to play in the development of our communities.

- Ranyabu Madimetsa, Editor of *Sekhukhune Mail*

Conclusion

In these first two chapters, an explanation of the MobiSAM partnership and an outline of the theoretical issues in this area, as well as the specific media and political context in which this study is situated, have been provided. In the following chapter, an explanation of the methodology and methods I chose to contribute to this theoretical discussion, through an examination of the role of the media in the MobiSAM project, is provided.

Chapter 3

Research methodology and methods

Introduction

The first two chapters have provided the broad context of this study and the theoretical issues in this area, and here the methodology and methods used for data collection will be presented. After articulating the research question and the research goals, this chapter will discuss the methodological perspective that provides the overall framework for this study, and outline the specific methods in the research design. Both the methods and methodology selected for this study will stem from the qualitative approach. The movement towards qualitative research in media studies will be referred to, as will the epistemological foundations of critical realism.

After dealing with the methodological questions that have informed this study, the chosen research design will be discussed. I chose a critical realist case study to explore the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM project, and selected the methods of thematic content analysis and in-depth interviews to provide the data I needed to address my research question.

Origins of the research question

In order to clarify the parameters of the research question pursued in the following research design, it is necessary to reflect on the motivation and rationale of the study (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 103). This research is not simply exploratory; it has a practical objective. It is an undertaking that has been designed mindful of both the implications of this undertaking as a case study and the needs of the MobiSAM project itself.

The MobiSAM partnership is committed not only to their goals of social accountability monitoring, and the realisation of systemic change in a broken public system, but also to a reflexive analysis of their own project. The project directors are in the process of devising an actively thought-through ‘theory of change’ underpinning the methodology of the project; they do not assume that all the new processes envisioned in their project design will

automatically result in transformation. As such, they are receptive to the interrogation of the underlying assumptions around both democratic theory and media theory in their project model. What remains implicit at this stage is the normative role ascribed to the media in the view of both the accountability monitors and the media houses themselves. In either initiating this partnership, or taking this project on board, both parties have innate philosophical conceptions about the role of the media in democracy and local governance accountability. The need for these partners to explicate and understand this important facet of their project is the motivation that informed the goals of my research.

1. The research question

The goal of my research is to examine the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership in order to understand the role of the media within this attempt to create real, systemic change around civic participation and enforcement of accountability in service delivery at the local government level in Grahamstown.

1.1 Research goals

The aim of this study is to examine, and make explicit, the underlying philosophical understandings and normative models of the media of both the accountability monitors and the journalists in forging the links involved in the MobiSAM partnership. More specifically:

- How do the accountability monitoring experts perceive the role of the media in public service accountability? Why do they see the partnership of the local media as key to the success of their project and furthering their aims of citizen participation and local government accountability?
- In their turn, why have the media practitioners signed on to the project, agreeing that its objectives fit within their own imperatives as community reporters in Grahamstown?
- This articulation of their motivations and imperatives (meaning-making) will be critically examined in relation to the everyday context and underlying ‘structures’ of the reality in which the project finds itself. Broadly, these are the possible disconnects between the news processes and political economy of the community media practitioners, and the structures and processes of local government in the South African context.

- The research findings will be given to both parties after its completion, to inform their process and partnership into the future.

2. Epistemological considerations

2.1 The choice between the quantitative and qualitative methodology

In the selection of the appropriate methodology and methods required to address the research question, I chose to use the approach that “the problem under investigation properly dictates the method of investigation” (Trow 1957 in Bryman 1984: 64). When distinguishing between qualitative and quantitative research methodology and methods, the researcher must consider not only the different philosophical understandings of reality and different beliefs about the individual, but also how these approaches will interact with the research question. In crude terms, the choice is often a trade-off between the ‘breadth’ versus the ‘depth’ of research one’s study requires (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 139).

Quantitative study stresses the values of validity, reliability and generalisability (Bryman 1984: 70). However, a major criticism of a quantitative approach within media studies is that it crudely oversimplifies the role of individual agency and difference, and divorces the study of the impact of media from its necessary location within the context of everyday life (Deacon et al 1999: 6, Babbie and Mouton 2001: 272). Qualitative research distinguishes itself from quantitative studies in that it seeks out a ‘thick’ description of the individual actors’ perspectives from an ‘emic’ view (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 270, Bryman 1984: 71). Indeed, leading media academics have asserted the most significant media research over time has been qualitative (Tuchman 1995: 80, Kelly 2006a: 350).

This study is concerned with a situated, context-specific, local and particularistic level of analysis (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 28, Lindloff 1992: 25). It seeks a level of understanding that is dependent on knowing the context, as “the only way to infer the meaning read into more complex social situations” (Lang and Lang 1995: 193).

The aim was that this deeper understanding would contribute both to the success of the project, and serve as a reference for other models of context-specific accountability monitoring/journalism partnerships, to improve democratic participation in public problem solving and the material conditions of South Africans. Thus, the qualitative paradigm has

been selected in order to provide a rich, in-depth, context-specific examination of a single case study, the MobiSAM project.

3. Critical Realism

Contemporary media studies have largely moved away from strict positivist classifications of “what counts and what does not count as legitimate and worthwhile research” (Bryman 1984: 78, Deacon et al 1999: 5, Babbie and Mouton 2001: 22). Today, media researchers have loosely grouped themselves around the two major reactions to positivism: interpretivism and critical realism (Deacon et al 1999: 9). Adherents to critical realism (CR) agree with the interpretive critique of positivism that an aspect of the social world, such as the impact of the media, does not constitute a static unit of analysis or variable, amenable to atomistic study and measurement in the isolation of the laboratory (Bryman 1984: 78, Deacon et al 1999: 6). These dynamics can only be understood within the context of everyday life. Thus, qualitative research is often conducted in ‘the field’, with the surroundings and flow of events as natural and undisturbed as possible and without trying to control or exclude external variables (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 139). However, they extend their argument by stating that qualitative study at the level of everyday actions cannot be properly understood without knowledge of the greater social and cultural *structures* that surround and form them (Deacon et al 1999: 10).

Critical theorists, including the Frankfurt school with exponents such as Habermas, Marcuse, Horkheimer and Adorno, take it as their task to bring these underlying structures that maintain unjust or unequal power structures to light, in order to support informed action that could change them (Alvesson and Sköldberg 2000: 110). A deeper explanation of the ontological and epistemological *Weltanschauung*, understanding of the structure-agency relationship, the role of research, and other tenets of the critical realist approach is beyond the scope of this partial thesis (see Giddens 1976, Giddens 1984, Deacon et al 1999: 10, 12, Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 139, Putnam 1992: 28, Putnam 1995: 21, 56, Danermark et al 2002: 1, 2, 180).

The most well-known proponent of CR, British philosopher Roy Bhaskar, describes its emancipatory interest in knowledge as identifying the “generative mechanisms underlying and producing observable events” in addition to understanding everyday meaning-making

processes, and then articulating the relations between the two (Bhaskar 1989: 2, Danermark et al 2002: 4). By bringing to light the hidden structures underlying everyday social and personal action, the critical realist aims to mobilise social knowledge in eradicating barriers to justice and equity inherent in the rules of social life (Bhaskar 1989: 6).

Writing for the *Dictionary of critical realism*, Hartwig stated “there are few concrete examples of applying Critical Realism to media studies, and media remains undertheorised [sic] from a critical realist point of view” (2007: 293). However, the “high relevance” of CR approaches to the multidisciplinary field of research into the media and its ability to “contribute to deepening our understanding of media, culture and society” is increasingly acknowledged, and CR is being “used by media researchers to rethink methodological strategies and objects of research” (Jensen 2002, Schroder et al 2003 in Hartwig 2007: 293).

This was true in my own research process, as I began with a largely interpretivist project, focusing on the first two research goals. After my immersion in reading around the epistemological considerations of research, I had to revisit my research goals and ask myself new questions in my study of the MobiSAM project. What kind of research do I have to do to embed this project in critical realism? This involves interrogating not only the context, but also the underlying structures in which the project will play out. What are the structures the project will be embedded in, and how does this contribute to the potential success or failure of the project? These came to light in the course of the data collection, and will be discussed in the Findings.

4. Research design

In this section, the overall research design will be discussed. This design was chosen in order to best address the research question, while remaining cognisant of limitations and constraints. Unlike quantitative research, the design of the qualitative study is not always predetermined but *inductive*, evolving and being adjusted as the research progresses (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 140).

As stated, this study is a critical realist attempt to understand the nature and purpose of the role of the media in the MobiSAM, as articulated by both the accountability monitors and the media practitioners themselves. The main investigation will be done around understanding

their underlying assumptions, expectations, motivations and normative theories of the media around this project. I decided on a case study model with a three-stage research process: a) preliminary meetings, b) document analysis and c) qualitative in-depth interviews.

5. MobiSAM as a case study

According to Simons (2009), the case study method of research is an in-depth exploration of a particular project in its ‘real life’ context, using multiple perspectives in the process to preserve its complexity and uniqueness. Such a study is chosen in order to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding of a specific topic, and to possibly “inform policy development, professional practice and civil or community action” (Simons 2009: 21).

An important feature of the case study is that it uses as many sources of data and evidence as possible, in order to thoroughly investigate a single individual, organisation or event (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 150). According to Merriam (1988), case study research is particularistic, descriptive, heuristic and inductive. Its particularistic focus is a useful method for studying practical ‘real life’ problems, and the detailed description provided by the final research result can allow others to understand the phenomenon being studied, and in addition offer “new interpretations, new perspectives, new meaning, and fresh insights” as well as discovering “new relationships” (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 150).

Case studies use a wide spectrum of evidence: documents, interviews, direct observations and other units of analysis can all be incorporated. It is understood that the more data sources there are, more likely the study will be valid (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 150). The limitation of this method is that the time involved and the massive quantities of data produced most often lead to a long waiting period before the results of the research can be shared, and I experienced this in my own study (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 151).

5.1 Preparatory background meetings and document analysis

The case study is not a technique for data collection, but a broader methodological approach that can include a number of different data-gathering methods (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 103, see Berg 2004). The data used in a case study is typically sourced from documents, interviews and observation or participation. This is useful as “most case study researchers recommend using multiple sources of data, thus affording triangulation of the topic under

study” and improving the reliability and validity of the study (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 152).

The “study protocol” of such an endeavour involves the bringing together and consideration of the many obstacles a researcher could encounter when performing a case study on a complex and autonomous project (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 153). I needed to consider the procedures necessary for negotiating access to the organisations, and determining a schedule of data collection.

Due to the nature of the project and the specificity of my research questions, it was necessary to set up background meetings with the participants of the research. This had two purposes: to exchange expectations and negotiate an understanding around my research process, and to collect the background documents that informed this study. During the meetings, I discussed the collaborative nature of my research, and this established a certain ‘rapport’ during the future interviews.

Documents represent a rich data source, and may take the form of letters, memorandums, minutes, agendas, and historical records (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 152). I did not use a precise, quantitative content analysis as the coding of the small number of documents available to me through this precise technique would not be useful to my study, and would “not offer much opportunity to explore texts in order to develop ideas and insights” (Deacon et al 1999: 117). Thus, I did not use a strict method (such as semiotics or critical linguistics), only an exploratory thematic content analysis of the available texts in aid of gaining access to the ‘map’ or ‘big picture’ of the MobiSAM case study this research focuses upon (Deacon et al 1999: 117).

These documents included records such as an organogram of the institutions involved, the signed memorandums of understanding between *Grocott’s Mail* and MobiSAM, the PSAM project history and SAM methodology and all available documentation on *Grocott’s Mail*/David Rabkin Project for Experiential Journalism (see *Bibliography: Primary Sources*). The MobiSAM project proposal itself is a research document with its own literature review, methodology and research aims. This document analysis provided a useful foundation before embarking on interviews. It provided the necessary background and context, as well as

highlighting issues and central themes for exploration within the interviews (Deacon *et. al.* 1999: 272).

5.2 Qualitative interviews

In-depth interviews are a distinctive research technique, in that they typically use small, non-random samples (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 149). They are usually conducted with individuals who have above-average access to information and unique positions, backgrounds or experiences which classify them as ‘opinion leaders’ or ‘decision makers’:

one-on-one interviews are most beneficial as a research tool when the topic explored involves change, novelty, or uniqueness and the people being interviewed play influential or unique roles. (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 268)

For these reasons, I chose qualitative interviews as a well-suited method to engage with the six project directors and media practitioners involved in the MobiSAM-media partnership.

The most obvious advantage of this method is the wealth and depth of detail it allows: in-depth interviews can provide texture and context that cannot be gleaned from broader studies such as surveys (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 271). As a qualitative research method, interviews can be crucial for “generating a rounded account of a particular group or organization. They require minimum guidance from the researcher yet allow considerable latitude for interviewees” (Bryman 1998: 46). In addition, interviews provide the researcher with insights into people’s perspectives, past experiences, description of events, understanding of sensitive or intimate relations and analysis of certain types of discourse. They allow detailed investigation of why the respondent provides a certain answer, allowing data to be generated around their opinions, values, motivations and experiences. Through this method, non-verbal responses on the part of respondents are also observable. They are usually very long, requiring several hours or more than one session. In-depth interviews can be customised; through this method the interviewer has the scope to form questions based on the individual respondent’s previous answers (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 148).

When using interviews as a data collection method, the researcher has a choice to make between structured and unstructured interviews. Structured interviews involve standardised questions in a prescribed order, which means both the interviewer and respondent have little freedom (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 127). They are the most easy to tabulate and analyse, but will most likely fail to reach the ‘depth’ of an unstructured interview. In an unstructured

interview, the interviewer has freedom in asking further questions in order to either advance the discussion or obtain the required information (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 127). This has the advantage of flexibility, and more detailed questions are easy to ask. The main disadvantage of this data collection method is the large amount of detail in the responses of such an interview requires a substantial amount of time to code and analyse.

Using the case study approach, the backbone of my research design will be in-depth, semi-structured qualitative interviews with key participants in the project. Individual in-depth interviews are similar to a ‘conversation’, and thus are particularly suited to seeking insight into a social agent’s perspective on the media (Kelly 2006b: 299, see Mabweazara 2006). Through these interviews, the main investigation will be done around understanding their underlying assumptions, expectations, motivations and normative theories of the media around this project.

5.2.1 Steps of the interviews

1. Selecting a sample

The issue of sampling was not fundamental to my study, due to its context-specific, in-depth, qualitative approach (Tan 1985: 28, Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 149). The interviews were conducted with both the members of the MobiSAM project team and the *Grocott’s Mail* staff, in order to generate rich data on the interviewee’s perspectives of the partnership, and further related topics.

MobiSAM Project Team	
SM	SAM Mentor
MC	MobiSAM Coordinator
PD	Project Director
<i>Grocott’s Mail</i> Media Practitioners	
GM	General Manager
ED	Editor
MR	Former Municipal Reporter (2010 – 2012)

Figure 3: Table of Interview Respondents

The sample consisted of six people: three MobiSAM project team personnel and three media practitioners from *Grocott's Mail*. These were the SAM expert and mentor, the designer of the mobile polling application and MobiSAM project director, the MobiSAM coordinator and the chief editor, general manager, and former municipal reporter for *Grocott's Mail* newspaper.

2. Constructing the questionnaire

These interviews will be semi-structured, with a set schedule of questions and themes to cover set in advance (Kelly 2006b: 298). This is important for comparison with other participants. This schedule required a great deal of thought and reflection, and was an ongoing concern during both my preparatory background reading and my literature review. I wished to remain careful, thoughtful and systematic in my decisions and procedures concerning my methods. For example, my selection of who to speak to, for what length of time and achieving a degree of standardisation in the order, content and emphasis within the questions of the interview schedule were important to the validity of the account presented in this study. Finally, I implemented a pilot process to ensure I was asking useful questions in a clear, unambiguous, non-leading and appropriate way (Kelly 2006b: 299).

3. Conducting the interview

The semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 62 minutes and 184 minutes in summation (from between one to three interviews needed) for each participant to complete their question schedule (mean = 112 minutes), were carried out between June and July 2012. The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full, a process I logged for time at about 45 hours. All these processes were performed by myself as researcher. I asked for constructive feedback on the interview process from the all respondents, which was largely positive. The interview environment was relaxed, respondents felt free to speak and 'not threatened' by my questioning, and the process made them think about issues they otherwise would not have considered (MC interview 23/07/2012 and Thinyane interview 05/06/2012).

4. Data analysis and report writing

The data I collected from the interviews was in the form of field notes, auditory recording and verbatim transcript (Deacon et al 1999: 272). The qualitative nature of interview response

data excludes statistical or numeric analysis, and the researcher discusses the results in terms of general impressions and themes (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 270). I noted that the meanings of responses generated in in-depth interviews are open to interpretation, and a different researcher may come up with other findings (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 149).

The writing up of findings can take several forms. The traditional research study format of a thesis is already a given, but it is important for the researcher to consider the intended audience of the report (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 153). I would like the findings of my study to be disseminated to the respondents within the MobiSAM project themselves, so an executive summary was needed. The dissemination of any social research findings should necessarily be as wide as possible so I needed to remain mindful of that and whether to commit to creating a paper from my thesis.

6. Ethical considerations

I attempted in this study to remain ever cognisant of the fact that “social research of any kind, including researching communications, is a social act” (Deacon *et. al.* 1999: 386). In any research undertaking, there is a strong burden and responsibility on the part of the researcher to be mindful of any and all ethical consequences of their work (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 104). This holds true at every stage of the research process (Ali and Kelly 2004: 116, 127).

The moral reflexivity I committed to engage within this research undertaking is taken from a critical standpoint in terms of epistemology. As “research is an intervention in the social world it is always as much a matter of ethics as of techniques” (Deacon *et al* 1999: 13). I acknowledged the important work of feminist theory in making the inherent power relations involved in research explicit, and sought to let this awareness permeate and inform my personal research practice (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 33, 37). This includes the emphasis that cognisance of the role of power relations should be carried through to “all levels of knowledge production, from *epistemology*, through research relationships, to the dissemination of findings” (Ali and Kelly 2004: 116). This Methodology chapter forms part of this commitment, in disclosing and accurately representing the procedures used to conduct this study and analyse the findings (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 366).

6.1 Consent and confidentiality

Ethical standards are an essential part of a one-on-one, in-depth interview study (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 270). The interviews must be designed and conducted with full consideration of ethical standards, which carries through to the analysis and reporting of the interview results. At the most visible level, this was important for the informed consent of the research subjects (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 367).

When asking participants to allow you as a researcher access to their thoughts and motivations, the utmost level of ethical care must be maintained from the outset. The respondents must be involved in my research only with their full knowledge and consent, free from coercion and aware of the true nature and purpose of the research. As a researcher, I must always be mindful of treating participants fairly and with consideration and respect (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 392).

I undertook to inform them of the purpose of my research, and their full rights as participants, both verbally and in writing (Deacon *et al* 1999: 374). When negotiating consent and securing written permission for the interview process in advance with the participants, I presented them with a written document outlining the nature of the research they are involved in, with a full list of their rights including non-participation, confidentiality where appropriate, and what exactly I would be using the interview material for (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 367). I reminded them verbally at the commencement of the interviews of their rights, and made space for further questions and negotiation, before I began recording (Kelly 2006b: 298). See *Appendix A: Interview Consent Form Example*.

Best practice for research participants is a promise of confidentiality; the researcher never reveals the identities and answers of the individual respondents, but reports their data in an aggregated form (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 366). However, it was not possible to grant the research participants full anonymity in a case study involving a small project team in a small town. While I did not name my respondents, a quick Internet search could easily reveal the identity of any of the project team due to the small geographic locality and specificity of the project. I remained sensitive to this and cognisant of its implications on my research findings (Schroder *et al* 2003: 153 in Mabweazara 2006: NP, Kelly 2006b: 296). This project could conceivably come up against local government officials in different ways,

and the views expressed in the interview responses required sensitivity. As such, I took off-the-record anecdotes and examples very seriously as part of my ethical considerations, and made sure to omit them from the individual interview transcriptions.

6.2 Personal interview guidelines

There are a great deal of considerations when conducting an interview, all of which the researcher needs to maintain cognisance of. As a researcher I committed to maintaining self-reflective about the way relate to interviewees. I attempted to follow Mabweazara's (2006) approach in fostering an open, dialogic relationship when conducting these interviews, encouraging the respondent to speak freely and spontaneously around their understandings and meanings contained within their personal 'lifeworld'. As such, I needed to initiate a positive and open relationship with the subject from our first meeting.

The interview setting

While respondents for in-depth interviews are often invited to a research office or field service location, they can be conducted at a person's place of work or home (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 127). I decided to conduct the interviews in the research participants' own office space in the first instance, as I hoped a comfortable and convenient setting for the interviewee would encourage them to speak freely and provide them licence to voice their perspectives according to their 'expertise' (Kelly 2006b: 297). I did not want to displace the media practitioners onto the university campus in particular, due to existing relations between Grocott's Mail and RU JMS staff.

I needed to experiment and educate myself in how to be familiar with my recording equipment and ensure good sound quality in preparation for the first interview (Kelly 2006b: 299). Other practical concerns like having spare batteries, bringing a cushion to use as a sound surface and ensuring there minimal background noise in the office space were addressed in advance, as well as the real possibility of interruptions, particularly in the news room environment (Kelly 2006b: 298).

In the interview

I began with open-ended questions to put the participant at ease in expressing themselves (Kelly 2006b: 299). I tried to listen much more than speak, yet be assertive in keeping to

topic, asking follow-up questions and voicing my desire to hear more about a subject. I tried to be unhurried, respectful and tolerate silence and thoughtfulness (Kelly 2006b: 299).

During the interviews, I wrote minimally and relied on auditory recording and verbatim transcript (in order not to ‘put off’ the interviewee or break the flow of their thoughts). This will provide a full record of what was discussed, as well as having brief hand-written ‘process notes’ to capture things the voice recorder cannot (Kelly 2006b: 299). I did not think people could sustain a discussion for much longer than an hour comfortably, and I set a pre-negotiated time limit which allowed for continuation of thoughts in the next interview (Kelly, 2006b: 300). In practice however, some respondents preferred to continue with the interview while they were in the flow of questions, so I remained flexible. I also needed to commit to writing up my in-depth ‘process notes’ and observations as soon as possible after each individual interview.

A challenge within the in-depth interview method is that its success is affected in large part by the “interview climate”, and the rapport established between the interviewer and the respondent (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 148). A possible stumbling block might be the willingness of people to engage frankly in an individual interview research context. It will be up to me to maintain positive relations based on trust with all participants, and thus maintain both access as a researcher, and the most productive and constructive rapport possible (Deacon *et al* 1999: 271).

While the direct rapport established in interviews can make it easier to obtain more accurate and detailed responses to certain topics, this in-depth method also presents the added risk of “interviewer bias” (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 149). The respondent may pick up on the tone of voice, non-verbal cues or loaded questions of the interviewer, and this awareness of the interviewer’s attitudes can affect the internal validity of my study in terms of their responses (Tan 1985: 25, Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 367). While I as a researcher could be sensitive to this and strive for maximum validity in regards to my professional conduct and thoroughly scrutinised schedule of questions, face-to-face interviews by default influence the respondent simply by the physical appearance of the interviewer, such as their age, race, sex or dress (Wimmer and Dominick 1983: 129). As I was not asking particularly sensitive questions (such as those around gendered or racialised viewpoints), I did not foresee this to

be a significant problem. However, it was important to remain mindful of these factors as a researcher.

6.3 Publishing the results of this study

A crucial ethical consideration for me in this research undertaking is the dissemination of my findings. From a critical standpoint, the dissemination of research findings should be as wide as possible for transparency, credibility and the progressive rebalancing of knowledge and research hierarchies (Babbie and Mouton 2001: 38). The project leaders and any interested parties should be able to view my research results.

Green reminds media researchers that they are often well placed “to help make connections between media users and producers, and between different sectors of media education” (1995: 231). It is important to publish one’s work in a variety of forms, as “to publish means to make public, which is a normal and necessary feature of a public cultural life” (Green 1995: 231). Finally, a researcher should also readily “disclose the sponsorship of research results when releasing them” so I have clear I am indebted to the *Centre for Economics Journalism in Africa* for sponsoring my Masters research opportunity (Poindexter and McCombs 2000: 367).

7. Limitations of this study and rich ground for further research

The first limitation that this research faced was one of timing. As a researcher, I was engaging with the project in its design phase and studying this particular moment. The empirical data on the project’s results in terms of undertaking an analysis of success, failure, strengths, weaknesses etc. was not yet a possibility. Thus, and in addition to this study being a partial thesis only, it could not be a truly evaluative case study, as it went beyond the scope available to evaluate the perceptions of this project by the local community and local government stakeholders.

Thus, the scope of this project is then ‘media-centric’, in that it focuses on the role of the media in this complex project rather than also on the technological aspect of the polling application, the Makana municipality deep context in which the project situates itself or the

citizens who will be the end users and hopefully the ultimate beneficiaries of this initiative. It should be emphasised that the forthcoming stages of the project provide rich ground for further research and analysis, and that more senior researchers from other disciplines have expressed interest in adding to the conversations around social change elicited by this unique endeavour (see *Chapter 4, Section 6: Areas of Further Research*).

Conclusion

This chapter has articulated the epistemological and methodological grounding for this study and the research design. The qualitative methodological approach was chosen to support the critical realist goals and methods of the research question. The case study was chosen as the framework for the research design, which incorporates the methods of thematic content analysis and in-depth interviews. The epistemological concerns and issues around sampling, validity, ethical considerations and the limitations of the data and analysis were also referred to. Finally, the Findings elicited by this data collection will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Findings

Introduction

This chapter provides the findings of this study from the information elicited from the data collection methods, and informed by knowledge of the context and the theoretical literature reviewed in the previous chapters. The structure of this chapter begins with the preliminary background meetings and document analysis, and then centres on the findings of the primary research method, the in-depth qualitative interviews.

The preliminary background meetings and document analysis

The main purposes of the preliminary background meetings were to negotiate access and to aid in the formulation of the interview schedules, my primary research method. I accessed and studied as many documents as possible from both the MobiSAM project team and the *Grocott's Mail*/David Rabkin Project for Experiential Journalism (DRPEJ), and this provided deep background and an initial understanding of each organisation's values and imperatives. This allowed me to select the broad themes around which my literature review would be based, which in turn informed my interview schedules and the discussions within the interviews themselves.

The themes I identified from the MobiSAM documents were broadly around the dire development and poverty alleviation challenges in South Africa (Thinyane and Coulson 2012, Mogale 2005a, Mogale 2005b, Low et al 2007, Tapscott 2008, Etzo 2010). Decentralisation of government and its value in both direct democracy and the institutional successes of local government, particularly within the developmental context, accounted for a substantial part of the literature (Pycroft 1999, Smoke 2003, Bardhan and Mookherjee 2006, Farrington 2011). The need for citizen participation for accountability in local service delivery processes was central (Kroukamp 1999, Policy Forum 2009, Mubangizi and Gray 2011, McLennan 2007, Booysen 2007), as was innovation and the use of ICTs to achieve this aim (Russell and Bvuma 2001, Papacharissi 2002, Shirazi et al 2010, Mobility Research

Group 2011). Looking at the project as a media researcher, despite its well-thought through and self-reflexive understanding of their aims, a theoretical framework for understanding the role of the media in their project, and their motivation for partnering with *Grocott's Mail*, was absent. This was an important entry point for this research.

The themes identified from the *Grocott's Mail*/DRPEJ documents were around the mission and values of the paper, as well as its practical operations and the challenges of financial sustainability and the quest for ever-improving the content and reach of the paper (Garman and Berger 2003, Berger 2003, DRPEJ 2003). Advertising, subscriptions, sales and donor and sponsor funding are an ongoing concern (Berger et al 2009). Most relevant for the MobiSAM partnership, were the 'Citizen's Voices Promoting Accountability' project proposal documents, and the strategy workshop minutes of the board (DRPEJ 2012, DRPEJTAB 2009a, DRPEJTAB 2009b, DRPEJTAB 2011a, DRPEJTAB 2011b). They show the paper's past and increasing emphasis on accountability, municipal affairs monitoring, citizen involvement and dialogue, and ICT/mobile possibilities.

This deep background provided by these preliminary meetings and document analysis made apparent the broad themes around which my literature review would be based, which in turn informed my interview schedules, and also, the selection of the respondents. While there was a set order of themes and discussion areas, each semi-structured schedule of questions was tailored to the particular respondent's area of expertise or experience, to evoke the most useful insights (see Appendix A).

Results of the in-depth interviews

The findings of the interviews conducted with the six respondents will be discussed here. These respondents are from the MobiSAM project team (PD, SM and MC) and the media practitioners of *Grocott's Mail* (GM, ED and MR). These findings are arranged thematically, broadly corresponding to the arrangement of the literature review section, Chapter 2, as well as the research goals. That is, firstly, how do the accountability monitoring experts perceive the role of the media in public service accountability? Why do they see the partnership of the local media as key to the success of their project? Secondly, why have the media practitioners signed on to the project, agreeing that its objectives fit within their own imperatives as community reporters in Grahamstown? This is discussed in *Section 1*.

Following this, these normative understandings were examined through a critical realist lens, in relation to the everyday context and underlying ‘structures’ of the reality in which the project finds itself. Broadly, these are the possible disconnects between the news processes and political economy of the community media practitioners in providing the kind of reporting envisaged in the MobiSAM partnership, and the structures and processes of local government in the South African context. These are discussed in *Sections 2, 3 and 4*. These findings conclude by offering certain recommendations in *Section 5*. Finally, areas for further research are discussed in *Section 6*.

1. Journalistic responsibility and the role of the media: its function, its importance and its limitations

One of the most interesting, and most complex, questions explored in the interviews was that of the media’s role. All the respondents had much to say on the media’s function, its importance and its limitations. A description of the media’s functions ranged from the traditional, to publish and disseminate information, to more complex aspirations around its place in relationships within a community, and its role within public life. These findings are arranged around the four roles of the media provided by Christians et al (2009): monitorial, facilitative, radical and collaborative.

1.1 Monitorial: A lone watchdog in a small Eastern Cape town

From a traditional or the most broadly accepted theory of the media’s role (Christians et al 2009: 139), GM pointed out a very interesting reality of the ‘media environment’ in this small Eastern Cape community:

I think that *Grocott’s* is a very important part of Grahamstown ... what other channels are there that people can use to find out what’s happening, what the municipality has decided on any given day? ... I think we’ve got a huge responsibility given that we are one of the only channels. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

With this as context, it becomes clear that this study on the role of the media cannot trivialise the importance of the media’s core responsibility “to publish” and “disseminate information” (PD interview 05/06/2012, MR interview 28/07/2012). A good newspaper is one “giving the public *useful* information”, and thus “it’s accurate, it’s credible”, and this underpins its important role, creating “the authority” of a newspaper (SM interview 28/06/2012).

This primary ‘watchdog’ investigative function was uncontroversial among the respondents. The media has a privileged position, a “voice”, “a megaphone for society” that it must use “to expose”, to “name and shame” and create the “public pressure” that echoes investigative journalism’s mobilisation theory of change (ED interview 14/07/2012, PD interview 05/06/2012, SM interview 28/06/2012, see Protess et al 1991). When citizenship, civil society and the democratic process are robust and healthy institutions, the monitorial can be sufficient for redress and change (Curran and Gurevitch 1991: 86, Protess et al 1991: 14, Ettema and Glasser 1998: 186, Berger 2005: 23). But in a context of serious ‘democratic deficit’ (Heller 2009: 123), this journalistic mission was seen as insufficient by the respondents:

It’s good to expose, but we need to go further than just expose, to bring about corrective action. And that’s pursuing a different advocacy strategy. (SM interview 28/06/2012)

In the context of this study in South Africa, and the Eastern Cape, where corruption is rife and the Auditor-General itself provides scathing reports of mismanagement and illegality within the processes of local government and its interaction with its constituents with little repercussions, investigative journalism lacks substantive effect due to a weakness of its supporting institutions (Jenkins 2007: 136). In the further discussion of the respondents’ ideas and emphases on the role of the media, it was clear that “the lack of accountability constitutes a major weakness of today’s democracies and one of the most pressing issues to resolve” (Wasserman and De Beer 2005: 45).

1.2 Facilitative: Promoting public problem-solving within Makana

Social responsibility was a key theme amongst the respondents, as the central guiding principle of the facilitative role of the media. For a functioning democracy, the media is essential for the public to participate in political debate and collective decision-making, the ideal of promoting ‘deliberative democracy’ and solving public problems (Christians 2009: 159). In the interview responses, this facilitative ideal can be divided into two main propositions: facilitating communication and creating dialogue, and having a ‘solution orientation’ in reporting.

The MobiSAM respondents emphasised the role of the media in “facilitating communication. I think that’s the most constructive level, to create that dialogue” (PD interview 05/06/2012). As PD elucidated further,

They are there to expose and to come up with [investigative pieces], and I think that’s really important. But, I see *Grocott’s* role as also about communication between the parties ... just the act of connecting people is good.

The media practitioners shared this emphasis on a platform for dialogue and the sharing of ideas:

“Our job as the media is to not just create a one-sided narrative but to create a sense of dialogue, because I believe that’s what readers want ... I think that it’s got a really important role to play in creating a social dialogue, not just being the mediator of that dialogue, and the determinant of the voice that’s out there to be heard. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

Thus, the media should promote interactive dialogue and active citizen participation at every stage of the democratic process (Christians et al 2009: 158). Without communication and interaction geared towards shared interests, common goals and active citizenship, the media fails to provide the necessary conditions for civic democracy and the maximum quality of public life within a society cannot be achieved. PD highlighted this within the MobiSAM project specifically through the idea of creating a “platform for discussion” between all the role-players, through the communication and feedback loop between citizens seeing the results of their polls published in the paper, creating a continuity through follow-up by the paper and future polls, and communicating the results to Makana and asking for justification (PD interview 05/06/2012).

This social responsibility paradigm came through clearly. MC, as a community activist, described *Grocott’s* role, as the media, to “serve the people” and hopefully to also “help the community and get the community to help them” (MC interview 23/07/2012). A brief way of describing this is public journalism’s active focus on ‘closing the gaps’ in a community: between journalists and readers, and between citizens and their governments (Haas 2008: 3). Its primary responsibility is stimulating civic commitment, as well as active participation, in democratic processes; in doing so, public journalism supports “a broader mission of helping public life go well” (Merritt 1995: 113, Rosen 1999: 44).

Following from this, is the ‘solution orientation’ that came through in the respondent’s descriptions of the media’s role, beyond merely the monitorial or investigative approach:

What good does that do, in exposing? One, we don’t know what the solution is. Two, as the reader, if I was to open the *Grocott’s* and see [a serious public problem]... what am I meant to do about this? (SM interview 04/07/2012)

This leads on to an important concern, which is also articulated within public journalism’s philosophy: that of promoting engagement and not disengagement in the way it mediates community concerns. Hard-hitting investigative journalism, without encouraging participation and resolution of the problem by citizens and stakeholders, not only has no effect, but a negative effect:

that just makes us feel *hopeless* ... doesn’t it just further degrade public *trust* in the municipality, and we further *distance* the public from the municipality? And I don’t go back on exposing being important, it is, but I think the *how* [of reporting] ... [must encourage readers] to *engage* in the processes. (SM interview 04/07/2012)

Public journalism states that news reporting on citizen issues should help the public “act upon, rather than just learn about, its problems” (Rosen 1999: 22). It must be wary of a form of political journalism that “deepen[s] public cynicism and disaffection” and creates increasing “cynicism, apathy and alienation” (Iggers 1998: 150 in Haas 2007: 43). The ‘how’ of reporting should encourage and inform about the options available for citizens to act in finding solutions (Haas 2007: 41). The focus should be on participation, on engaging their audience as citizens with a stake in public issues and providing substance in their reporting that “treats problems in a manner that highlights the prospects for their resolution” (Christians et al 2009: 102).

For this reason, the MobiSAM project has chosen local municipal projects, rather than the provincial and national issues, that arguably extend beyond the reach and proximity of the local community in their day-to-day life. For a problem resolvable within the proximity of the community and local government actors, journalists should encourage direct participation towards a solution (Haas 2007: 43). There are certain methods of doing this in public journalism, which the MobiSAM team spoke to in their responses. For example, creating spaces for deliberation through new media, and encouraging consultation with experts who have particular knowledge about the problem in question through the investigative follow up reporting and the introduction of the problems into the public sphere. Lastly, the MobiSAM team’s emphasis on maintaining an open channel for the participation of government, for a

possible ‘collaborative’ rather than ‘adversarial’ or ‘monitorial’ relationship between press and government, will be dealt with more closely in Section 5.

1.3 Radical: The history of independent media’s political role in South Africa

Interestingly, a radical role for the press was also weaved into the mix of responses to this question, due to South Africa’s recent past of oppression, struggle and political transition. The historical role of independent media in South Africa was strongly political, beyond just dialogue or a facilitative role (Emdon 1998: 204, Thorne 1998: 212, Hadland and Thorne 2004:2, Hadland 2005: 12). GM, drawing from his experience as a young journalist involved in the liberation struggle’s context of the press’s role, provided this description:

I grew up in a tradition where we saw our role as being: organise, mobilise, educate ... and our job was to tell them what the reality is ... we are there to tell the other side of the story... And to create a sense of a possibility of a different future. So it was a partisan understanding of the role of the media. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

This was an interesting contextual perspective within which to situate the responses in this study.

1.4 Developmental: Community media and education

This final normative role for the media is defined in relation to the state (and local government) project in understanding the mission of the press. The responses of the participants in the MobiSAM partnership resonated with development journalism’s positive role in promoting and strengthening citizen engagement in state processes and programmes of social change (Christians et al 2009: 201). The reporting envisaged in the MobiSAM project speaks to Shah’s definition of development journalism, or rather in his redefined term of ‘emancipatory journalism’, as

independent journalism that provide[s] constructive criticism of government and its agencies, inform[s] readers how the development process [i]s affecting them, and highlight[s] local self-help projects (1996: 143).

In a national context of severe poverty and steep humanitarian challenges, “development journalists have a duty to promote economic progress” (Musa and Domatob 2007: 326). All the interview respondents acknowledged “a community newspaper has an important role to play in accountability, particularly in the current context where service delivery is such a big

problem” (GM interview 23/07/2012). There is a greater “urgency” in a town with unemployment upwards on 70% and the subsequent reliance on social service provision (GM interview 23/07/2012). The media’s role in the context of such widespread poverty thus has increased importance: “[b]ecause of the state that Makana municipality is in, I think that there’s a greater imperative for social responsibility here” (ED interview 14/07/2012).

PD made an interesting point on the specific relationship and proximity of community media and communities, as opposed to national media and the nation as a whole, which was agreed with by other respondents in their interviews, particularly the media practitioners (PD interview 05/06/2012). In this contextual reality,

the municipality has such a big role to play, that’s why we have to cover municipal issues very closely. Because, they’re the big guys in town. And what they do affects many people’s lives very directly. So that’s why it’s key, it’s pivotal. (ED interview 14/07/2012)

In relation to this imperative, the role of education was underlined by every one of the interview respondents. This role for the media, within the context of the MobiSAM project and its participants, can therefore not be overemphasised. Coming from apartheid history and background, and the continuing crisis in education, this specific role of the media in such a context stands out (PD interview 05/06/2012, see also *Chapter 1 Section 1.3*).

PD and SM strongly underlined the rights-based advocacy approach of the SAM methodology in their hopes for the media’s contribution to the project. They see it as “education” of citizens, as end-users of government provision, that “*your money*” for your allocated service delivery has been stolen if projects are never completed, without justification:

Do people understand that they pay taxes and are entitled to these services? That the law has stated this must be provided? That council meetings etc. take place, and that there are ways to participate? ... I think in a society that has such huge differences in the population, part of the role of the media should be also to address this. Maybe with citizen education if nothing else, to say ‘what you have is not what you deserve. You deserve more than that. (PD interview 05/06/2012)

In a context of disempowerment due in large part to a failing education system, it is crucial that citizens know their rights, their means and their responsibility to demand justification and oversight when their democratic institutions fail to deliver. This has an interesting parallel with the ‘mobilisation theory’ of investigative journalism, as in municipal reporting

of this nature, as "sometimes victims are collective and anonymous, such as taxpayers or voters victimised by political corruption" (Protest et al 1998: 8). It is thus the duty of facilitative reporting to 'make it personal', in a sense, to encourage citizen participation and engagement in government breakdowns which directly affect them.

ED and GM were in agreement with these developmental, 'educational' values of journalism in their approach to the paper's role in Grahamstown; a good example of this being the election education project they embarked on, with a free edition of the newspaper giving a platform to the different political candidates and voters' options (ED interview 14/07/2012).

Developmental journalism can be very narrow and propagandistic, but on the other hand it's got a massive role to play in education. Our education system is failing pretty dismally at the moment. So, if the media can make a contribution, and there's many, many ways in which it can, then I think it should. But it always needs to be self-reflective and self-critical about how it's doing that and how well it's doing that. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

MC provided an important and interesting personal illustration of the role of the media in South African society in regard to the public schools system deficit that exists. As a child growing up in a black township in the Eastern Cape under apartheid, he could not rely on the local school to 'educate' him about the world he lived in (MC interview 23/07/2012). This is a gap that a national radio station, then called Radio 5, filled during his developmental years. He learnt English by listening to the radio, as his school teachers were not qualified or equipped to teach that subject. All his exposure to the world, from Eastern philosophy to geography, was provided through that medium and not through the school curriculum.

He went further in discussing the media's role in educating people about their rights. As so few people have access to the Constitution, its repeated discussion in the media is the only way members of his community are made aware of their democratic rights. In his words, "it's playing a good role, a big role" in South African society (MC interview 23/07/2012). Without this knowledge, the engagement in public issues expected from citizens in both a collaborative and facilitative understanding of the media would not be possible.

Furthermore, MC made the interesting point that

we need as the community, we need to be educated as to how to take our stories to the media. Because *Grocott's* will know *that* much, and to know more, they would need the community to be involved. Like saying, 'did you know that in Extension 6, this is

happening, do you know that in West Hill, this is happening’?
(MC interview 23/07/2012)

This speaks to the difficulties articulated by both ED and GM in accessing stories from economically marginalised areas of the community, and the barriers these citizens face in taking ownership of the paper, a challenge important to the aims of the MobiSAM project (ED interview 14/07/2012 and GM interview 25/07/2012).

2. A political economy assessment: The challenges of municipal reporting for a small community newspaper in South Africa

2.1 The commercial aspect of community news

Grocott's Mail operates as a commercial press with commercial imperatives, and in South Africa, the financial situation of community newspapers (particularly those operating independently from big media chains) is precarious. Both ED and GM spent a considerable time discussing the various business models available to a community newspaper, with reference to subscriptions, sales, advertising revenue and the difficulty of migrating to online (GM interview 23/07/2012, ED interview 25/07/2012). As the paper's editorial leadership, they are concerned not only with vision and mission, but the sustainability of the paper's operations. Thus, their focus in discussions was not purely conceptual but largely operational.

These challenges stem in large part from the commercial aspect of news, or the necessary imperative to 'sell front pages' (ED interview 25/07/2012). Municipal reporting is not immune from these fiscal concerns.

Both ED and GM offered a very "realistic" and "modest" assessment of the paper's reach and audience (GM interview 23/07/2012). While they have an important role as one of the only news sources for the community, they see their limitations in both the number of newspapers printed for each edition, and the demographic that has the means to purchase the paper. They would both like to see a much higher readership in "the demographic [*Grocott's Mail*] would most like to reach", given their understanding of a newspaper's role and their potential to positively impact the lot of the previously disenfranchised in the community (GM 23/07/2012).

They are engaged in several proactive initiatives to increase a real sense of ownership and value of the paper across a broader cross section of the community, and receive more feedback from readers. As GM (interview 25/07/2012) describes:

Grocott's in terms of its reader engagement and community engagement, I think that's what we aim for. But I don't think we achieve that. I think that we are continually striving to achieve that, and we have many projects and platforms...

... [W]e've got the letters page, we've got the sms section, online we've got the voting [in polls], on Fridays we have the VoxPops. (ED interview 25/07/2012)

A large part of the challenge in advancing these aims of the paper is the lack of staff and journalistic capacity.

2.2 Journalistic capacity at *Grocott's Mail*

The shortage of staff capacity is a large concern for the project, and for the paper's operations more generally. The paper experiences huge turnover, being "largely staffed with an unqualified and highly transient student reporting staff" (Garman 2006: 95, GM interview 23/07/2012, Berger et al 2009). As an intern new to journalism, MR emphasised the challenge of not initially receiving adequate training on story writing, and the expectations around form and style (MR interview 28/07/2012).

However, the editorial team's aim of increasing journalistic capacity at the paper in terms of municipal monitoring and coverage of municipal affairs is clear:

... of the three full time reporters that the paper has, one is sport, one is crime reporting and one is municipal affairs: it's a big part of our portfolio. (ED interview 14/07/2012)

2.3 Constraints of journalistic practice and routines in a small community newspaper

Both ED and GM used the same wording in their acknowledgement that a community newspaper's coverage can be "reactive" (GM interview 23/07/2012, ED interview 29/07/2012). That is to say, articles focusing on ongoing issues can be purely event-driven, such as a protest or a major water pipe bursting. The paper does however provide sustained coverage of council meetings,

... but I think the PSAM methodology, which the MobiSAM project is using, is more rigorous and proactive. I think it's something that community newspapers should be doing. The idea is that it should let you take a litmus test, and take the temperature of a community around service delivery, and how effective it would be. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

This speaks to what ED and GM's original hope was for their citizen journalism programme: to have "people on the ground" picking up on these more subtle stories before the inevitable "explosion" that attracts the paper's attention (GM interview 23/07/2012). The success of that programme was limited, however (Steenveld and Strelitz 2010: 17, see Nyathi 2011). The hope of the paper was that "MobiSAM, and the methodology, and the people they would be putting on the ground would maybe help us address some of those shortcomings" (GM interview 23/07/2012).

SM and PD agreed with this assessment, and asserted that the newspaper needed to be

... more systemic in their coverage of the municipality, if you want to cover it well ... it's *very* easy to take a shotgun or even a machine gun approach to municipality, *fire* away, and you will hit an issue! Open a document and you will find an issue. But what are *the* issues? And that requires someone who understands the wider context and who understands the history, and who understands a little bit about how government processes work. Otherwise what are you doing? (SM interview 04/07/2012)

This is the entry point where the MobiSAM partnership, and the relationship between SAM methodology and municipal reporting, came into being.

3. Enter, the MobiSAM partnership

The MobiSAM partnership is a unique one for several reasons: 1) the marriage of different temporal worlds and different expertise 2) the partnership between the MobiSAM project and *Grocott's Mail* from the beginning and 3) the careful negotiation and adjustment of expectations from both sides.

Different forms of knowledge systems are being brought to bear by the MobiSAM project: the technological Computer Science expertise of the mobile phone application and the monitoring analysis expertise, and the journalistic expertise on the other. One of the interesting aspects of the project is the marriage of different 'temporal universes', in a sense. *Grocott's Mail* works, simplistically speaking, on a bi-weekly basis, with daily diary

meetings, driven by for the most part at short-term and medium-term deadlines. This project is happening seven days a week, all year round. As a practical illustration, the qualitative interviews with the media practitioners had many more interruptions, phone calls, and knocks on the door that needed to be dealt with, which gave a good sense of the different time stress and environment.

The SAM monitors have an in-depth five-year desk-based analysis, and a three year project plan that is independently funded and not as time-sensitive to the same immediacy, leading to thorough, sustained study and monitoring of the local municipality, Makana. Beyond this particular study, the citizens and users of MobiSAM, however, work on a more immediate, day-to-day basis, constantly living with the reality of service delivery failure.

Bringing these different understandings, skill sets and ‘time frames’ together is what makes this project really exciting. Interestingly, the theory of investigative journalism highlights the essential “luxury of time” needed to escape the “reactiveness” of daily journalism, in order to incorporate time-consuming practices and techniques that can potentially have a much wider impact (Ettema and Glasser 1998: 156, Protesse et al 1998: 4).

3.1 MobiSAM and *Grocott’s Mail*: a new kind of partnership?

However, these differences led to difficulties and a long process of reaching a workable understanding between the MobiSAM project team and the GM newspaper. The MobiSAM team spent a long time getting to know the political economy constraints and challenges faced by a small town newspaper, and realised the need to be “so aware of the economic reality of *Grocott’s*, and adjusting expectations to that” as well as “responding sensitively to that reality when it comes to time constraints, or the way in which they can engage with the municipality, or what they can do” (PD interview 05/06/2012, SM interview 28/06/2012). It was a learning curve to try and think in bi-weekly terms when they have a three-year, ongoing project.

SM and PD also initially over-estimated the capacity of *Grocott’s* citizen journalism project to promote the MobiSAM application, and thus brought into their plan a MobiSAM coordinator and MobiSAM ambassadors. In addition, they had to adjust their expectations in terms of the capacity of journalists in terms of their average academic and mathematical

backgrounds, and thus SM's training role in the SAM methodology became increasingly important (PD 05/06/2012).

On their part, the newspaper had its own imperatives, which were three-fold: to become more integrated with "mobi-stuff", to get good, relevant material for the newspaper on stories of concern to their readership, and to use the opportunity the mobile application would provide to facilitate grass roots connections and input:

I thought this MobiSAM project would provide that opportunity to get a broader range of people into our newspaper, to find out what they're really concerned about. It's very hard for me to sit here in my office and know, what is really bothering the people? (ED interview 14/07/2012)

However, it was also difficult for the newspaper's editorial leadership to understand the constraints the MobiSAM project was under (GM interview 25/07/2012 and interview 29/07/2012). Weeks of research being undertaken could go by, without any practical integration in the operations of the newspaper.

A small community newspaper has to be prudent about its resources, and both GM and ED were careful not to commit to something they wouldn't be able to follow through on, particularly due to their shortage of "person power" in terms of staff size and skills (GM interview 23/07/2012). This candid approach on the part of the newspaper could have been interpreted as a discouragement to the initiation of idealistic new projects by outsiders, but to both parties' credit they persevered. A memorandum of understanding between the project and the paper was eight months in the making (see Thinyane and Kromberg 2011).

PD and SM adjusted their expectations of the paper, to a more "realistic" understanding of the constraints and challenges of a bi-weekly community newspaper (SM interview 28/06/2012). On their part, ED and GM opened themselves to a new and fluid experimental partnership when they were not entirely sure how it would fit into the paper's existing operations and constraints:

I think in the end we've had to say, it is a pilot project, and we'll try our best and we'll see what works and what doesn't work and we'll learn through that process. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

It is interesting to note that the MobiSAM project is unique in "the close partnership" they have developed with the newspaper (GM interview 23/07/2012). In their past and existing

initiatives, numerous donors have worked with the paper. Some of them have requested the paper's editorial team to develop its own project proposals and ideas, "but it's not so much a partnership in a substantial way with another organisation, or another part of the university with a very different skill set and set of experiences" (GM interview 23/07/2012). Rather than simply funding the paper or its projects, the idea of MobiSAM is to contribute their existing knowledge of desk-based monitoring and analysis, as well as the citizen-gearred mobile application itself, to share with and support the journalistic work, as well as learning from the experience of the media practitioners themselves and letting it inform their project design. This rich experience suggests a new model for community newspaper partnerships than was hitherto experienced by GM, and could have broader application.

3.2 The relationship between the SAM methodology and municipal reporting training

It's all a bit of a mystery how government works ... It's not something that's taught in schools, though it should be. (SM 28/06/2012)

When the paper's future municipal reporter first started her internship, she described her general knowledge of municipal affairs as follows:

I didn't know that there were even meetings where councillors would sit in with officials and have projects in place, I didn't even know what an IDP was. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

This speaks to the general knowledge of most citizens, and importantly to the kind of training and knowledge a reporter new to municipal affairs would need, something already established many times over in training needs assessment studies (Mati 2005: 10, 12).

Having gone through this process herself, MR described the foreign language one encounters when entering this municipal setting: the acronyms, the financial cycles, the flow of reports, the drawn out processes, the rules of order and resolution within meetings, as well as the complex hierarchies involved. She discussed how the training she received in the Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM) methodology equipped her to understand this complex environment and to do her job as a journalist:

... when I went to the PSAM training, I was blown away. I was like okay, this is what it is all about! I knew that if I had to investigate a Department, I would use their budget, and their speech, to see if they actually are telling the truth, and if they actually have money in place for these projects they say they are going to implement.

It' a nice way to *be* a watchdog, they gave me great tools, so that I can be a better watchdog. So that was fantastic. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

Her experience attending each council meeting gave her insight into not only the complex underlying processes of municipal governance, but the myriad delays involved in resolutions before concrete service delivery projects are planned and budgeted for. It gave her a clear understanding of both the legitimate delays and setbacks encountered in the process, and the less justifiable delays in resolution due to drawn out arguments on minor details. The civic education needed to track and understand these municipal processes, in order to report on them to the public, is thus highly specialised and valuable knowledge capital.

In addition, she emphasised the SAM position that “you need to have documents” in the world of political reporting (MR interview 28/07/2012). In a volatile political environment of secrecy, tip offs, leaks and accusations made against rivals, she always needs to see documented proof to ensure her published stories are accurate and don't damage her personal journalistic credibility or that of the paper. Again, this is highly specialised knowledge.

As SM stated, it is a “specialist” knowledge that is required, in terms of the education, the literacy and the numeracy required, to translate municipal affairs in a way understandable to people, and to be a “bridge builder” and create those links:

But I think if you want to *actually* monitor, if you actually want to report *usefully* and *meaningfully* on the municipality, then you need to *know*. You need to do a bit of reading, you need to do a bit of research, you need to understand how the municipalities work, so that your reporting can get to the real issue. Otherwise you're actually doing more damage than good: you just fill us with despair! (SM interview 04/07/2012)

Interestingly, MR stated that the pressures of her current job at a mainstream daily newspaper in a larger Eastern Cape city provides her almost no time and space to “sit down and analyse”, that is to use the knowledge of SAM tools and training that she has, in her daily journalistic work routine (MR interview 28/07/2012). This is further evidence that the longer term monitoring vision espoused in the MobiSAM partnership, with its accompanying desk-based analysis in particular, is incredibly difficult for a news organisation to achieve on its own without external support such as the MobiSAM partnership.

3.3 Translation and ‘storification’: public journalism in practice

The second part of this journalistic process, not just personally understanding municipal affairs, but reporting on them in a clear, comprehensible and accessible way to an audience of readers from a diverse local community, is in itself a substantial skill (GM interview 23/07/2012, ED interview 14/07/2012).

MR described the challenge of trying to communicate this information to the people who need it most in a practical way: “They’ll be like what are you talking about, what is an IDP? ... Some of these words, we don’t have them in Xhosa” (MR interview 28/07/2012). Language barriers and the complexity of ‘translating’ these processes are not made easier by the need to retain readers’ interest (GM interview 25/07/2012, Christians et al 2009: 153).

This speaks to a significant challenge in forging the MobiSAM partnership: the issue of ‘storification’ of municipal monitoring issues. As SM described the “dry as dust” background research involved such as the lengthy budget, Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and Service Delivery Budget Implementation Plan (SDBIP) documents, this reality raised significant doubts on the part of the news practitioners in terms of content generation from this complex monitoring methodology:

One of the things I had to grapple with quite early on in the discussion, sometimes journalists use this word ‘storify’, the data. And whether our journalists actually have the skills to take [the data] ... and turn that into a story. It needs to be much more nuanced than that if it’s going to be useful [and] ...gripping, gripping. If you think about it, the whole concept of ‘rolling news’, where you’re actually following a story episodically. It’s kind of like a soap really, well what’s the next episode in the water saga? ...That’s what sells newspapers. (GM interview 25/07/2012)

Thus, the translation of these issues to the community in a clear, engaging and understandable way that in turn encourages them to participate in these public issues is central to the success of the MobiSAM project.

4. The political economy assessment continued: South African politics and state-media tensions

There's a lot of politics inside. There's politics everywhere, even in the newsroom.
(MR interview 28/07/2012)

There are additional aspects of political economy constraints involved in a critical realist understanding of the media's environment in this project. Firstly, SM emphasised the need to understand the limitations of what role the media can play in the complex political environment of a developing democracy, particularly that it has no inherent power of enforcement, and stressed the importance of oversight bodies such as courts to "bring about corrective action" (SM interview 28/06/2012).

This is keenly felt at the individual level. As a committed community or municipal reporter, despite a strong desire to help, one can't enforce legislation or personally right wrongs. As a journalist, MR describes how there is a strong compulsion to get personally involved in the problems you are reporting, but:

there are bigger problems that you can't do anything about. But I mean what's my job, my job is just to report and record it, that's it. And just hope that something does happen to change the situation. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

These limitations speak to a very real challenge of the political context the MobiSAM project is situated in. When discussing the SAM methodology, SM emphasised that the problem is so much bigger than just finding the issues. The Auditor-General, in particular, finds absolute evidence of mismanagement and malfeasance, but what are the substantive changes? As MR stated, referring to personal reporting experience, "[i]mplementation, that's the problem" (MR interview 28/07/2012, see Mini 2012b).

Secondly, it was clear from the interviews that a community newspaper is not immune from local and national politics. The editorial position and founding constitution of *Grocott's Mail* declare it "neutral towards political party" in its reporting (DRPEJ 2003, Article 4). But in the South African context, ordinary citizens as well as the state see an underlying alliance with dominant interests in the critical reporting of traditional newspapers (Harber and Renn 2010: ix, Berger 2005: 19, Emdon 1998: 203). Often, it is clear that ANC members view the *Grocott's* as a Democratic Alliance (DA) paper. MR described how she was personally

attacked when she approached a community chairperson in Extension 10 (in relation to a story on the illegal private sale of erfes for future RDP houses), because she came from “white” paper with an agenda that was anti-ANC and only interested in “exploiting black people” (MR interview 28/07/2012).

Part of this challenge on the part of the paper is simply operational, a phenomenon described in the sociology of news literature (Keeble 1998: 45, McCombs 2004: 117, McNair 2001: 13, see Schudson 2000). It is easy to get information and comment for articles from the opposition parties such as the DA, and incredibly difficult to source it from the incumbent ruling party (MR interview 28/07/2012, ED interview 25/07/2012). This leads to the danger of *Grocott’s Mail* being perceived as an opposition-partisan, ‘white’ newspaper, which corrodes the sense of ownership it seeks to create across the demographics of Grahamstown. The acknowledgement of this challenge by the MobiSAM partnership members will be discussed in the following section.

4.1 The relationship between local government and local media: the case of Makana Municipality and *Grocott’s Mail*

When discussing the balance of power and negotiations in the relationship between the municipality and *Grocott’s Mail* as the local newspaper, it soon became clear that it was significantly different from the Western model presented in the literature (see Larsson 2002). Where metaphors are used such a “tango” and a “love-hate relationship” in that context (Larsson 2002: 21), the media practitioner respondents in these interviews described the relations as a “sparring match” or a “cat and mouse game”, and interestingly also echoed the idea of a “love-hate relationship” (GM interview 23/07/2012, MR interview 28/10/2012, ED interview 14/07/2012). This speaks to the nature of the relationship as unbalanced in terms of power relations, and often times adversarial.

As opposed to other democratic contexts where the relationship with the local press is crucial to local politicians and officials, in this context it seems they jealously guard their autonomy with what seems to be little real consequence for their political credibility. Makana Municipality has both its own internal newsletter *Makana News* and website to disseminate information of their choice on their operations, and pays a monthly advertising subscription to *Grocott’s Mail* to put whatever notices they need published in the paper (Mati 2005: 16).

In fact, this advertising subscription is a significant part of the paper's revenue, enough to pay the full complement of salaries (GM interview 23/07/2012).

The editorial position of the paper is that the municipality has full right of reply at any time, and Grahamstown's mayor in fact has an open invitation to publish his own column in the paper, where he has complete freedom to say whatever he likes (ED interview 14/07/2012). If the spokesperson responds angrily to the coverage of the paper, ED publishes these letters to the editor exactly as is, regardless of length. These channels are seldom, if ever, used. MR states that they are infrequently approached by the municipality to collaborate, and only for isolated and rather superficial publicity events, not real public issues or public problems (MR interview 28/07/2012). This situation affords the municipality autonomy in a power relationship that should be more balanced in a democracy.

For example, the interaction between local government and local media as expressed in the holding of press events is highly limited, in contrast to Western contexts where more effort is made to use the PR machinations and the press platforms available (Mati 2005: 14, Larsson 2002: 21). MR stated she could only recall one single event she was invited to during her position as municipal reporter at *Grocott's Mail* (MR interview 14/07/2012). Far from the traditional scepticism and distance by which Western journalists view press events, she was in fact glad to be afforded the opportunity to get information and comment from officials that were never otherwise available, and would need to be chased for days.

As both ED and MR expressed it, the municipal officials know they're "the big guys" (MR interview 28/07/2012, ED interview 14/07/2012). They can ignore you as a municipal reporter for weeks, and still know that when they call you for their own purposes, you'll rush over to their office. Even if you as a reporter know them to lack integrity and be dishonest in the information they give you, when it comes to government officials "you can't say no to any source" (MR interview 28/07/2012).

However, the relationship goes beyond mere indifference to antagonism. This situation is both general, as a contextual characteristic of state-media relations in South Africa (see Emdon 1998: 203, Duncan 2003: 16, Harber and Renn 2010: xii, Wasserman 2011: 152), and specific to this local case. As MR described in her interview,

“They really do have a problem with *Grocott’s*, I think it’s because it’s a media organisation, but I guess that’s the same throughout the country. But I think it’s worse in a small environment, I think it’s worse for *Grocott’s*, because the wound is a bit bigger.” (MR interview 28/07/2012)

This historical rift between *Grocott’s Mail* and the municipality is an interesting case (see Chapter 2 Section 5). SM is familiar with this, and acknowledged that while she wished the paper to be more adversarial, she understood the conflict it caused when they “overstepped a line”, and recognised that the editorial team of the paper had specific knowledge and insight into negotiating these tensions, in light of the long term survival of the paper (SM interview 04/07/2012). MR spoke to this:

But I think they’re constantly walking a very different line where if you shut the door, it’s very hard to access anything at all. And that’s everybody’s challenge who works with government. How critical is too critical, in that it stops you from being able to the work that you need to be able to do. So I do think that’s a role, that’s another, but the communication is really... just getting information out instead of it being lost in that huge building. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

ED noted that Makana officials sometimes react to the paper’s stories by shouting at him when they meet him in the street (ED interview 14/07/2012). MC also attests to this feedback mechanism: “I think the municipality personnel, they read the *Grocott’s*” (MC interview 23/07/2012). He thinks this is crucial to the relationship of the MobiSAM project and the municipality, as they will know “we’re trying to work with them. We’re trying to let them know what the community feels” (MC interview 23/07/2012). He hopes this will go a long way in overcoming the reticence municipal officials have shown in sharing municipal information with the project, as this is a key constraint to the project.

MC described his gentle yet persistent approach to dealing with municipal officials in order to get information, as strategies “to keep friendships” (MC interview 23/07/2012). This is an interesting insight into the difficulty of fostering and maintaining collaborative relationships with municipal officials, rather than creating an adversarial relationship which is a dead-end: “If you try to be polite, things take longer, but you keep the friendship. If you’re hard-core, things happen faster, but then you’re not sure if you get help again” (MC interview 23/07/2012). This important aspect to the project will be discussed further in the next section.

4.2 Problems of access to municipal information: ‘blood from a stone’

You need to be persistent. *You need to be persistent.* (MC interview 23/07/2012)

These unbalanced power relations, and the at times even adversarial nature of the relationship between local government and the community media, creates significant bottlenecks in accessing the type of information necessary to inform the public and report on municipal affairs. Access to public information is not only enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, but a human right guaranteed by Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 9 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, and Article 4 of the Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression in Africa (Apai 2011: 4). In reality, however, the process of trying to access information from the municipality is a formidable challenge, whether it be comment, explanations and justification, or even straightforward documentation that should be publicly available by law, such as the annual budget and IDP (Barberton 2002: 226, 239).

SM, MC and MR described how this process could be incredibly frustrating. It can take weeks and even months to access documents that any member of the public has a right to by law. Municipal officials will delay you indefinitely, give you conflicting information, misdirect you or just ignore you in repeated requests for information. MC formulated a strategy in that he would always have a "Plan B", and use at least two sources of information to verify if the story he was being told is correct (MC interview 23/07/2012).

While they will not give a citizen's request an outright refusal, as they know this is illegal, they will make repeated, empty promises of handing over the document at a future date. Any legitimate request for information requires repeated visits, phone calls, emails, appointments and other follow-up (MC interview 23/07/2012). This is aggravated by the trend within government of increasingly "confidentialising" things, both documents and council meetings (MR interview 28/07/2012 and ED interview 25/07/2012).

This seems to stem from a particular culture within the institutional structures of local government (Kroukamp 1999: 336). Outsiders requesting information from City Hall are viewed with extreme mistrust and even fear. This defensiveness and avoidance seems to be true even from within the inside of the municipality's own communication channels. In MR's experience, the official municipal spokesperson himself would struggle to get the simple information she requested from the official responsible.

You know when you're in government, [they say] "no I can't speak to you, no no, go to the spokesperson!" [fearful voice] And even the spokesperson will dodge you for a bit, it's like a cat and mouse game. So the spokesperson won't want to talk to you because they can't get the information from these officials, the officials are running away from this person! (MR interview 28/07/2012)

She would have to create her own strategies in trying to track the necessary person or document down: "I have to persist, until I get it. There's no other way. They'll see your face until they get tired of it and they'll give you what you need". A humorous moment she related was when the spokesperson eventually said to her "[MR], if you get the answer before me, please let me know [what is happening]" (MR interview 28/07/2012).

The severity of the problem borders on the absurd. Both MC and MR describe how their persistent phone calls, emails and appearance at City Hall in order to try ensure they receive the information service they are requesting, has led to officials reacting with visible fear at seeing them, and even running away from them on the street, as if journalists and social accountability monitors are "vampires" or "blood-sucking monsters" (MC interview 23/07/2012, MR interview 28/07/2012). MC, despite supplying repeated written assurances on the legitimate purposes for his requesting the information (which the municipality should not have asked for and he should not have to provide, by law), was treated with a level of defensiveness that made it seem as if he was "trying to corner them" and directly threatening their jobs (MC interview 23/07/2012).

MR also encountered significant cultural obstacles in obtaining information from municipal officials. As a young person, it is necessary within Xhosa culture to be unfailingly respectful and undemanding towards your elders:

And if they don't want to talk to you, they don't want to talk to you. And if they tell you get out of my office, you get out, you don't say there "no I am a citizen of this municipality, and I have a right. If I need information, you are appointed to this office" blah blah blah, I can't say that! All I can do is say okay and go out, because I don't have that power. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

She found this counterproductive and described it as "not right" that those customs and traditions were brought into operation in a "Western" workplace environment (MR interview 28/07/2012). She did not feel empowered to use the existing legislation and rights-based framework available to every citizen regardless of age, gender, etc. As Heller (2009: 126) describes it,

In the absence of clear and rule-bound procedures of engagement, citizens cannot engage the national or, just as importantly, the local state *qua* citizens, that is, as autonomous bearers of civic and political rights.

These challenges of access were repeatedly emphasised by the members involved in the MobiSAM partnership. SM described it as “our biggest challenge”, the unforeseen impossibility of getting documents from municipality. The lack of communication on the part of the municipality is both unjust and disheartening to the goals of the MobiSAM project, and the goals of democracy more generally. As MR states,

These people that are voted into power, they don’t want to help you, to get information across to the people that voted them into power. It’s so simple, why don’t you want to use that platform? It’s really frustrating. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

The issue of how citizens are supposed to learn about and interact with crucial municipal service information, which directly affects them, is central. If dedicated municipal reporters and expert accountability researchers struggle to access this information, how unattainable must it be for an ordinary citizen? MR gave an anecdote of how furious citizens were that they had learnt about development projects in their own community by reading about it in *Grocott’s Mail*, not through their own elected representatives, who are supposed to be defending their interests within the municipal structure (MR interview 28/07/2012).

It is worth noting that recent American survey studies have shown that the public rates accountability in the form of ‘human connection’ more highly than abstruse accountability measure such as quantitative performance indicators or reports (Johnson et al 2011: 8). This reality bodes exceptionally ill for the depth of democracy within local governance if it is impossible to access anything or anyone within official municipal structures.

4.3 Radio Grahamstown

A full critical realist assessment cannot ignore the reality of the community media landscape in a poor Eastern Cape town. *Grocott’s Mail* strives to be the community’s voice, but do they have the community’s ears? After the newspaper’s transition of ownership, it was widely acknowledged that “the newspaper’s traditional readership comprises mainly of middle-class professionals and university students, [and] many point to the need for it to satisfy all sections of the Grahamstown population”, and this project remains ongoing (Garman 2006: 95). For

this reason, it is important to note the existence, popularity and demographic reach of another medium, Radio Grahamstown.

South African legislation makes provision for non-profit community-owned and run radio stations, and this regulation requires that community radio stations “should broadcast news and current affairs programming which deals with development issues, and promotes an environment conducive to democracy” (Broadcasting Act No.4 of 1999). This has important resonance with the MobiSAM project. However, as a media source, Radio Grahamstown is “on and off” and it is not easy to get to the bottom of their challenges and inconsistency (MC interview 23/07/2012).

Licensed to broadcast since 1997, at present it does not play a monitorial or facilitative role when it comes to local government or community rights, and there is a lack of trained DJs to follow community issues (Mati 2005: 9). The ‘educating’ role has fallen second to entertainment (MC interview 23/07/2012, ED interview 14/07/2012, GM interview 25/07/2012). GM made the interesting point that *Grocott’s Mail* is in fact the only source of information on local affairs in Grahamstown: what little news Radio Grahamstown inconsistently provides, comes from *Grocott’s* newsroom (GM interview 25/07/2012).

However, it’s an incredibly popular medium in the eastern Grahamstown suburbs, where the MobiSAM project is hoping to have the most impact (MC interview 23/07/2012 and ED interview 25/07/2012). There is a simple political economy aspect to this: the relation between material and cultural inequalities and consumption of the media (Golding and Murdock 2000: 77). When discussing the benefits and disadvantages of each medium and its audience reach, MC made the obvious yet crucial point that “[a] newspaper you have to buy. And if you don’t buy or somebody near you doesn’t buy, then you don’t get the information” (MC interview 23/07/2012). However, he emphasised that even in communities where *Grocott’s* is not bought and read, its brand is known and its importance is acknowledged.

Within an increasingly commercial environment, it is important for research to examine the conditions whereby community media can be a democratising tool in terms of access and participation (Jankowski 1995: 173, Green 1995: 217, Berger 2005: 21). The MobiSAM project team attempted to engage with them early on, but the ongoing “power struggles”

made it clear that it will be more fruitful to approach at a later stage of the project rather than with its conception (PD 05/06/2012). They plan to return to the station at a later stage, due to the superior reach and immediacy of the medium. For example, the possibility of phone-ins is also more inclusive and ‘democratising’ for illiterate citizens, and municipal officials can theoretically be interviewed right then and there (PD interview 05/06/2012 and SM 04/07/2012). This will be an interesting development to the project, and worthy of promoting at a later stage.

5. Concluding: The importance of a dedicated municipal reporter

They know that I hold the pen... (MR interview 28/07/2012)

Access and ‘the right to gather news’ has always been a crucial facet of public affairs reporting. A democratic dispensation still in the process of transition and transformation will always entail “new battlegrounds over access” for municipal reporters (Killenberg 2008: 119). Insight and experience around strategies for obtaining information, including access to government meetings, government records, and official comment, is a highly valuable asset of social capital for a community newspaper reporting on municipal affairs.

Covering City Hall and the functions and roles of local government is a considerable challenge for any reporter, and requires training and experience. Knowledge of local government structure, ‘who’s who?’, supporting legislation and budget cycles is merely the groundwork of providing ‘government news for the people’ (Killenberg 2008: 155, 160, 176). Finding the ‘newsworthiness’ of a council meeting, a planning report or a budget is a true skill. Parks’ (2006) aptly titled book on public affairs reporting, *How to Make Important News Interesting*, deals directly with this and is broadly referenced here.

MR emphasises an important point, which is reinforced by the literature on municipal reporting: it is crucial to attend council meetings with your research and questions already prepared (Parks 2006: 100). This is due to the simple fact that that is the easiest, and in some cases the only, way of accessing these officials for comment.

Most of the time it was me trying to get blood from a stone; it was a great advantage that I actually went to these meetings because I knew what was going on. So my question was just a follow-up, what’s happened, what’s going on now? And most of these officials, I knew exactly what they knew, which is a good advantage. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

The discussion in *Section 4.2* outlined the extreme difficulty in accessing municipal documents and comment, however MR outlined how her personal persistence as a municipal reporter to a large extent overcame these challenges. The importance of relationship between the municipal reporter and the municipal officials is clear (Larsson 2010: 21). MR spoke to the importance of “getting to know officials and for them to know you ... it’s about meeting these people, knowing who to talk to, knowing the office”, and how her job truly started with the need to “make a name for myself, a reputation” (MR interview 28/07/2012). The importance of accuracy, trust and familiarity in a municipal reporter is essential: “They know you through your stories” (MR interview 28/07/2012).

Her position allowed her to stand her ground, and create her own place of respect in the view of municipal officials and spokespeople:

It will always be the same thing, they’re trying to do their work, I’m trying to do my work as well. So I think the secret is to be friendly but also remain professional. They can’t push me around. I don’t tell them how to do their job, and they depend on me, and I depend on them as well. That’s just how it is. (MR interview 28/07/2012)

... [T]he way that [municipal reporter - municipality] relationship is handled is a very important thing, a very sensitive thing. That’s why [MR] leaving was such a huge loss, because she had the ability to stand her ground and say her say, but do so in a respectful way, and to get the facts right ... the municipal officials will say she’s hard on us but she’s fair, what she says is generally true, and that’s different to other municipal reporters we’ve worked with in the past. (GM interview 23/07/2012)

At *Grocott’s Mail*, of the three full-time specialized reporters, one is municipal. However, the political economy challenge of attracting a skilled and experienced municipal reporter to a community newspaper is steep, and even if one is in-house trained such as MR, there remains the difficulty of retaining them on a minimal salary. This is one of the problems that the Nika CMS and its data storage system might mitigate against, to avoid:

A new reporter taking over for someone who suddenly left ... [reinventing] the beat almost from scratch because most of the newsroom’s detailed knowledge of the topic and sources went out the door with the reporting staff member. (Berger 2009b: 51)

The position of a dedicated municipal reporter is “a bridge as well, between the media and the government, and also the community as well” (MR interview 28/07/2012). This position is clearly essential to the aims envisaged in the MobiSAM partnership, and its importance cannot be overstated.

6. Areas of further research

As has been evidenced by the critical realist approach in this study, there is vast ground for further research in understanding the complex issues being addressed by the MobiSAM project aims. Studies will be no doubt be ongoing, such as the first *MobiSAM Impact Analysis Report* (see Mika 2013). At present, the most obvious entry points to explore this project further are four-fold: on the side of the Municipality, how the MobiSAM partnership will operate journalistically, the citizen-users of the MobiSAM polling application, and the analysis of MobiSAM's impact.

Firstly, the scope of this study, and the current phase of the project, meant that the relevant municipal officials could not be interviewed for their opinion on the aims, goals and methods of the MobiSAM project, and their relationship with the local media. As referenced by several of the respondents, the MobiSAM application should in fact be useful to the Municipality in achieving their own imperatives:

Local government has a particular role to play in creating accessible pathways between themselves and structures of civil society which identify needs, develop and communicate programmes for meeting them, and monitor performance. (Emdon 1998: 205)

This is clear scope for future research: as an integral part of the 'feedback loop' of the project, local government understanding and interpretation of the project would be highly instructive (see Larsson 2010, Davidson 2010).

Secondly, is the question of how the MobiSAM project will operate journalistically: the operational aspect of how to take complex public issues, and put it on the page. The public journalism envisaged in the MobiSAM partnership aims to give the public an entry point, to inform, to engage, and to maximise impact: key questions around *How to make important news interesting* (Parks 2006). Imagining how this would work could only be conjectured in this thesis, due to the initial stage of the project (see *Section 3.3 Translation and 'storification': public journalism in practice*).

Finally, are the related issues of the citizen participation and what the impact of the MobiSAM project will be. As SM and PD acknowledged, there is a big assumption being made by the project strategy that the community will participate by using the MobiSAM

application. The media practitioners also all mentioned the citizen buy-in aspect: “What kind of a difference is it going to make if I bother to do this?” (GM interview 23/07/2012). As a public affairs reporter, MR was constantly faced with this challenge from ordinary citizens: “What are you going to do to help us, you’re just going to write it down and take it back, and then it’s going to be published, but are we really going to see a change?” (MR interview 28/07/2012).

One of the shortcomings of my research was that I was not able to draw and articulate a precise theory of change on the part of the project participants. This is partly due to the pilot phase the project was in, but also to the complexity of the challenges they were trying to intervene into. It cannot be said that any South African project or newspaper has a fully thought-out action plan on how not to just report but bring about real change in the staggering social, political and economic challenges faced by local government.

However, MC expressed a hope for the ‘multiplying’ role of *Grocott’s Mail*, in that they would be publishing whatever action was being taken in a specific MobiSAM-monitored project to a broader geographical area (MC interview 23/07/2012). By publishing these actions, people in other areas know about it, see how the municipality was approached, and whether it is achieving results. In this way, they are indirectly encouraged to follow up on their own area’s service delivery projects that are not being realised. This resonates with the public journalism approach, and the media’s role in making links between similar challenges in the greater region.

Interestingly, MC was the only one to explicitly describe the community itself as the “major player” in the MobiSAM project. As a Grahamstown local born and bred, MC could immediately think of service delivery projects he saw every day that were incomplete, such as a stretch of road in Extension 9 that has been under construction for over two years. He stated that if the community knew more about it, they would act, and in fact the reason that it is taking this long is “because the community is not pushing the municipality to *account* as to why it’s taking this long” (MC interview 23/07/2012). This speaks eloquently to the importance of making these communication links that the MobiSAM partnership is aiming for.

In summary, the linking of social capital encompassed by the MobiSAM partnership, between the worlds of community journalism and accountability monitoring, the communities involved within Grahamstown, and the interaction with Makana municipal government at the end point all holds rich ground for further research, to fully understand how a project like this could work.

Conclusion

This thesis critically examined the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership, in relation to its value as model resonating with normative theories of the role of the media in South African democratic society. By studying the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership with local media, particularly *Grocott's Mail* newspaper, in order to interrogate the normative role of the media in this effort to forge links between social accountability monitors, citizens and local government around public issues in Grahamstown, in line with the development objectives of the post-apartheid South African state, certain key insights come to light.

By examining the contextual constraints in *Chapter One*, a holistic sense of the dire challenges faced by Eastern Cape municipalities were discussed. Independently funded organisations like MobiSAM could play the role of socio-political force as “worsening social conditions, unfulfilled rights and a state with not enough capacity to deliver imply more analysis, advocacy and policy work” from NGOs in the Eastern Cape (Hesjedal 2011: 114):

Information about how governments spend money and manage programs and what these programs deliver in services to people is a key ingredient of accountability ... The more influences donors can exert on strengthening citizens' rights to know and government's obligation to release timely, complete, and accurate information about government operations ... Letting the sun shine on government operations is a powerful antidote to corruption. (Shah 2007: 250)

The broadcasting power of community media such as *Grocott's Mail* helps to bring sunlight to the public problems in service delivery provision that the MobiSAM project focuses on.

In addition, the type of public journalism reporting envisaged in the MobiSAM partnership can be an asset to the media organisation involved, as it echoes the liberation community reporting of the apartheid past, which “enabled [community media] to carve out a distinctive space – to become vitally relevant to their audiences by dealing with the issues that people were really concerned about, in a way people could relate to” (Davidson 2010: 47).

The organisational challenges of implementing the ideals of the MobiSAM partnership within a community newspaper, calls for a

need to pay attention to the internal politics and dynamics of news organisations, as well as to the economics of news production and distribution – particularly in a time when these organisations are facing unprecedented financial pressures [...]

The adoption of practices aligned to the principles of public journalism takes time and resources, and in the case described above, the impetus and support had to come from outside in order to create the time and space for the journalists, producers and editors involved to embark upon the process of experimentation and discovery. (Davidson 2010: 46, 47)

Thus, while the MobiSAM partnership required time, thought and perseverance to come about, the benefit to both parties in furthering their aims was clear.

As discussed in the *Areas of Further Research*, future interrogation is needed to measure the success of the MobiSAM partnership and the MobiSAM project. However, even in its initial pilot phase, this partnership expresses some powerful ideas and understandings on the role of journalism in South African democratic society.

Appendix A

31 May 2012

Dr xxx xxx
Associate Professor
Computer Science Department
Rhodes University
Grahamstown, Eastern Cape
6140

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Dear Dr xxx,

You are hereby asked to participate in a research study conducted by Romi Reinecke from the School of Journalism and Media Studies of Rhodes University. The study is a Masters thesis which explores the role of the media in citizen participation towards holding local government accountable in service delivery, through a case study of the MobiSAM project.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This purpose of the study is to examine the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership with local media, particularly *Grocott's Mail* newspaper, in order to interrogate the normative role of the media in this effort to forge links between social accountability monitors, citizens and local government around public economics issues in Grahamstown.

2. PROCEDURES

If you volunteer to participate in this study, I would ask you to:

- (a) allow me to examine relevant documents pertaining to the project and the partnership between MobiSAM and *Grocott's Mail*,
- (b) participate in a session of in-depth interviewing by me as a key participant in the MobiSAM partnership,
- (c) possibly allow me to observe project meetings or important interactions between key participants of the project

These interviews will take place on a day and at a time that suits you, and can take place either in your own office or work space (if this can be a time where there will be no interruptions) or in a seminar room at the Africa Media Matrix. They should not take longer than 60 minutes, with a possible option of rescheduling a second appointment if we run out of time. The interviews will ask you for some personal information (your professional background, experience and reason for involvement in the MobiSAM project) and some information on your understanding on the role of the media in the MobiSAM partnership. These interviews and your responses will be audio recorded and transcribed for analysis.

A full list of your rights as a research participant is attached, which will allow you to provide informed consent to participate in this research study if you so choose.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

The goal of my research is to examine the nature and purpose of the MobiSAM partnership in order to understand the role of the media within this attempt to create real, systemic change around civic participation and enforcement of accountability in service delivery at the local government level in Grahamstown. The aim of this study is to examine, and make explicit, the underlying philosophical understandings and normative models of the media of both the accountability monitors and the journalists in forging the links involved in the MobiSAM project. More specifically:

- a) How do the accountability monitoring experts perceive the role of the media in public service accountability? Why do they see the partnership of the local media as key to the success of their project and furthering their aims of citizen empowerment, collective awareness and the enforcement of local government accountability?
- b) In their turn, why have the media practitioners signed on to the project, agreeing that its objectives fit within their own imperatives as community reporters in Grahamstown?
- c) This articulation of their motivations and imperatives (meaning-making) will be critically examined in relation to the everyday context and underlying 'structures' of the reality in which the project finds itself. Broadly, these are the possible disconnects between the news processes and political economy of the media practitioners, the structures and processes of local government in the South African context and the theoretical relationship between new media and democracy involved in MobiSAM.
- d) The research findings will be given to both parties after its completion, to inform their process and partnership into the future.

4. PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION

Participants will not receive payment for participation in the study. Light refreshments will be provided during the interviews.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will be treated with respect and will be disclosed only with your permission. While you have the right to confidentiality where appropriate, it will not be possible to grant the research participants full anonymity in a case study involving a small project team in a small town. I will remain sensitive to this, and you have the right to non-disclosure of information or non-participation in responding to questions. However, I do not foresee any of the questions involved in the interview schedule to be sensitive or "located beyond the discursive range of the socially acceptable or the politically correct" (Schroder *et. al* 2003: 153).

If participants should choose to do so, they are welcome to listen to the audio recording of their responses to the interviews and view the transcriptions made of them.

The results of the study will be documented in a thesis to be submitted in partial fulfillment of a Masters degree at Rhodes University, and a summarized form may be submitted for publication in an academic journal.

6. PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

You can choose whether to participate in this study or not. If you do volunteer to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer and still remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which warrant doing so.

7. IDENTIFICATION OF RESEARCHER AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO SUPERVISION

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact my supervisor, Roderick Amner at 046 603 7123 or r.amner@ru.ac.za or his departmental head, Dr Larry Strelitz at 046 603 7105 or l.strelitz@ru.ac.za

Yours Sincerely,
Romi Reinecke
Masters Student, School of Journalism and Media Studies, Rhodes University
E-mail: g07r3649@ru.ac.za
Mobile: 084 *** **1

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

The information above was described to me by Romi Reinecke. I was given the opportunity to ask questions and these questions were answered to my satisfaction.

I hereby consent voluntarily to participate in this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant

Signature of Participant

Date

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

I declare that I explained the information given in this document to _____ [*name of the participant*]. [*He/she*] was encouraged and given ample time to ask me any questions.

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix B

Professional information

- 1) How did you get here, tell me a bit about your background and how you came to be working in this field?

(Your professional background, experience and reason for involvement in the MobiSAM project. Mobility Research Group: ICT4D, C4D, M4D)

The MobiSAM project

- 2) Why did you initiate the MobiSAM project?

(What were you hoping to achieve, your goals? Deep background: perception of the state of democracy in contemporary South Africa, e.g. the state of local government, delivery? What do you make of the high levels of social protest? (positive/negative) How should democracy work? (Deliberative, participatory, direct forms?)

- 3) What was your strategy?

(Has there been any shifting or changes between initial idea/ ambition and today's project?)

- 4) Who are all the 'players'/participants in the MobiSAM project?

(How do the various participants interact with each other?)

The role of the media

- 5) How did you envisage the media to play a role in the project?

(Monitorial, facilitative, radical or collaborative? Investigative, public, development, citizen, participatory journalism?)

- 6) Can you explain your past interactions with "the media" in your professional (or personal) capacity?

(Mobility Research Group projects, press statements, letters to the editor?)

- 7) A broader question, what do you think the role of the media is in South African society?

(Its role in democracy, its role in development, its responsibility towards citizens. The role of the media in accountability specifically, in service delivery in the South African context)

- 8) What do you think about the relationship between local government and local media?

(Its role in democracy, its role in development, its responsibility towards citizens. The role of the media in accountability specifically, in service delivery in the South African context. How should it be achieved, through an 'adversarial' or a constructive, 'collaborative' relationship? Should the media mobilise public opinion, catalyse deliberation, encourage political identity formation, work to strengthen civil society/social movements?)

Grocott's Mail

- 9) Why did you approach Grocott's Mail newspaper?

(What were your perceptions of Grocott's as a community newspaper before you had this project in mind? Perhaps ask: what were your impressions of their values, agenda, from their coverage and content? Did you consider approaching Radio Grahamstown? What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of these two media institutions in your view?)

Interview Schedule: PD

June 5, 2012

- 10) What have been the challenges you have faced creating this partnership with the local media in the MobiSAM project?

(Difficulties in forging MOU, the 'political economy' aspect of working with a small, under-pressure newspaper group, differences in understanding and collaborating with another 'world' outside of the resources (both time and funding) of academia/NGO sphere)

- 11) What have you learnt in this process?

New media and democracy

- 12) I have a few technical questions in imagining how the application will look to the end user. How does someone wanting to use MobiSAM access and register with the application? Explain to me the costs involved in using the application? Do you have a ballpark figure of how many people will be using this application, how many would you like to, how many could the application support? (What if people from other geographical locations want to get involved and help monitor their neighbours' service delivery projects in the hope that it will improve service delivery and accountability when it's their turn to receive eg. toilets in their area?) What languages will the application be available in?

(What potential challenges do you think the project might face in getting the full and enthusiastic participation of local citizens in this project? e.g. scepticism, apathy, rejection of the 'rational' political bias in the MobiSAM methodology)

- 13) As Debbie mentioned in an earlier meeting, you are looking at follow-up advocacy options with PSAM at the completion stage. I know it's still at an early discussion stage, but can you tell me about some of your ideas?

(What is the nature and scope of the civic/community action you're hoping to inspire with this project?)

- 14) With collating and broadcasting this MobiSAM data to citizens, there is the potential for this information to be used in a variety of ways, what are your thoughts on that?

(Mobile phones allow citizens to transgress rules of "good citizenship" and institutional political practices. Mobilisation of protests, demonstration, other forms of activism. This may not be the strategy that MobiSAM or the Ford Foundation are hoping to encourage. South African political history, as a form of political engagement that reflects continued exclusions and marginalisation?)

- 15) Finally, do you have any questions for me? As my first interview respondent, would you mind giving me feedback as an interviewer? (Could I have been clearer, do the logistics of my interviewing need work eg. recording equipment etc?)

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